An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Brightsparks Pre-school
09CC0081

Community Hall
Riverstick
County Cork

Date of Inspection: 24 January 2017

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Brightsparks Pre-school is a privately owned, sessional setting, situated in the community centre of the village of Riverstick. On the day of the inspection, seventeen children were present, together with two practitioners and one student. Both practitioners attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, the setting chose to accept the report without response.

AREA 1

QUALITY OF CONTEXT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of the context to support the children's learning and development is good.
- A caring ethos is prevalent, where practitioners have a positive regard for the children and their families.
- Practitioners currently focus their praise and encouragement on children's achievements during solitary activities. Typically, these are limited to completing a puzzle or a construction, or completing their 'homework'.
- Meal time is utilised as a social occasion where the children sit, chat and eat together. This promotes well-being and a healthy lifestyle. The social aspect of meal times could be enhanced by the practitioners joining in.
- At present the morning play time is divided into two sections during which different materials and activities are offered. This is not conducive to meaningful, engaging child-initiated/led play. Children need to have choice, autonomy and agency over their activities.
- During free-play time, practitioners use a range of good interaction strategies. Effective strategies include asking open-ended questions to facilitate a broad range of learning experiences. Trusting this process and extending it is advised.

Actions advised

- The current focus of praise and encouragement is too outcome oriented. There needs to be a shift away from the current emphasis on solitary, academic achievement rewarded through a 'star system'. This should be replaced by acknowledgement and encouragement of personal and social skills. Personal and social skills should be encouraged through social interaction, problem solving, negotiating and communicating. These skills are integral to daily life and are best learnt by children through interactive free play. The value of interactive play needs to be recognised, acknowledged and further developed.
- Practitioners are advised to explore conflict resolution strategies which give the children self-help tools to resolve their own conflicts and problems over time.
- Practitioners are encouraged to join the meal time and sit and eat together with the children. This will afford more time and space for small-group conversations and social interaction in a relaxed atmosphere.
- A change of the daily routine is advised. Construction play, imaginative play and role play should be offered in parallel to table-top activities. Small world play, painting, drawing and junk-art should be introduced as well as practitioner-initiated/led activities such as arts and craft, and baking, cooking and making playdough. These different play options should be combined with practitioner-initiated/led activity. This will give the children more choice and agency over their learning and development. Planning and engaging in this form of meaningful free-play will take time to organise, as free access to all the materials, toys and equipment is essential.

AREA 2

QUALITY OF PROCESSES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of the processes to support the children's learning and development is good.
- A broad-based, short-term and long-term curriculum is utilised to support children's learning and development. This is loosely informed by *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.

- A variety of assessment approaches is used to gather information about children's learning and development. These observations need to be strengths-based and used to inform the next steps in the child's learning. This must be made visible in curriculum planning. The *Aistear* learning record templates are a very valuable tool for assessing children's interests, dispositions, abilities, knowledge and strengths. The observations recorded on these templates should be used to further children's learning and development.
- The indoor environment is well maintained and safe. It supports children's desire for exploration to some extent. The play value of this environment needs to be expanded.

Actions advised

- Curriculum planning needs to reflect children's interests, dispositions, abilities, knowledge, values and strengths. This planning should be based on the information gathered through observation. The 'Assessment and planning' pillar of the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* should be used to inform these observations. Practitioners are advised to record the observations on the *Aistear* learning record templates.
- Practitioners are advised to engage with the 'Environment' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.* A rich environment should be provided, which offers a broad variety of play, such as physical play, construction play, language play, and creative play, imaginative and socio-dramatic play. Adding a junk-art area with open-ended, versatile, sense-rich, manipulative materials should be considered. These materials could include blank paper of different sizes, coloured card, felt pieces, wool, scissors, glue, crayons, paint and playdough. This will inspire creativity, individual expression, imagination and autonomy. The practitioners are advised to create a cosy library area. This could display a range of ten to twenty high quality books at a time. These should relate to the current theme and interest of the children and should be rotated regularly. The practitioners are also advised to add a messy play area. There should be plenty of sand and/or water in this area with buckets, shovels, diggers, funnels, sieves and 'treasure'. The 'treasure' could include conkers, seashells, pine cones, stones, and/or pieces of wood.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children are generally motivated and interested; they demonstrate some enjoyment during activities. Some children are still quite uncertain however. They stand around undecided, needing adult guidance to find their way into play. Rather than always giving solitary play options such as puzzles in these instances, the practitioners need to encourage children to join and play with each other.
- Some children display initiative and self-reliance. They demonstrate positive learning dispositions such as resilience, persistence and resourcefulness. These children should be encouraged to engage in free play with the more shy and uncertain children. This will allow the children to learn from each other. The core task of enabling children learn from each other is the hallmark of the skilful practitioner.
- There is scope for the children to express their feelings, thoughts, ideas and creativity more extensively. Towards this end, opportunities for mark -making, making art and role play should be extended.
- Some lovely, rich play episodes with most of the children involved, developed through the free-play period. These are valuable and teachable moments.

Actions advised

- It is advised that both practitioners get involved in facilitating and, when necessary, guiding interactive play exploration. This will provide space and time for children to develop their verbal and non-verbal communication skills. These skills should include giving and receiving information, planning together, negotiating, problem-solving, asking questions and making requests. Refusing, reflecting, judging, imagining and recreating roles will clarify children's thinking, ideas and feelings.
- Adult planned and initiated arts and craft activities should be offered as free-choice activity. These should be offered in parallel to free play, as all children may not be interested. These activities need to provide choice, agency, creativity and allow for individual expression.

- Practitioners are advised to use songs, nursery rhymes, finger games and whole-body movement games throughout the day. There should be interactive engagement in story exploration of one high quality story over a period of time. This will support language development and foster a love of literature.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Management and staff reflect on and review their practice regularly in order to improve the children's learning experiences and outcomes. This reflection is undertaken during daily informal chats and individual review. A daily diary is kept to document, share and act upon the outcomes of those informal meetings.
- Practitioners are availing of some continuous professional development (CPD). Engaging with the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* would benefit practice. When the learning outcomes of recent CPD courses have been embedded into practice, a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting will need to be re-established,.
- Each practitioner is provided with opportunities to take a leadership role in promoting quality learning. There is apparent clarity around the roles and responsibilities of each practitioner with regard to the educational activities.
- There are highly effective formal and informal opportunities in place to exchange information with parents and families. These include a very informative, inclusive parental handbook, a monthly newsletter and information evenings.
- Transitions into and from the setting are managed very effectively and sensitively. This supports children's learning and development. Families come to visit and spend time in the setting at several occasions before the new school year begins. The teachers and the principal of the local primary school visit the children at playschool.

Actions advised

- Regular formal team meetings are advised. The outcomes of the team meetings, need to be documented, so they can be utilised by all the practitioners in order to improve learning experiences for the children.
- In-depth engagement with all sections of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is advised.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	**Good**
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	**Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Good**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Very Good**

Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.
Very good	Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.
Fair	Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.
Poor	Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.

Published October 2017