An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Burtown Montessori Pre-school
Burtown
Athy
County Kildare
15KE0341

Date of Inspection: 02 May 2017

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS
INSPECTORATE

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Burtown Montessori Pre-school is located in Burtown and has been in operation since 2015. It provides one morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Eighteen children were present in the ECCE room inspected together with two owner/ practitioners and one assistant practitioner. The two owner/practitioners follow principles of the Montessori approach to early childhood education.
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.
- The atmosphere at the setting is friendly and warm with children and families greeted kindly upon arrival. The practitioners use even tones with the children.
- It is evident that the practitioners have routines in place and that the children are aware of those routines. However, the routines are not documented or displayed for the children or their parents to see.
- The children are encouraged to self-manage and to be responsible and independent. They put away their own coats and schoolbags and tidy up after themselves. Each child puts his/her own work in his/her own individually labelled drawer.
- The children have free movement within the room to engage with their Montessori materials.
- The practitioners use snack time as an opportunity for open-ended, friendly and relaxed conversations between themselves and the children. They promote healthy eating in their discussions with the children.
- The practitioners nurture the children's sense of identity and belonging through the taking and displaying of photographs, though a birthday display and through individual and group conversations with children. Currently there is no visual representation of families at the service for children to see and discuss.
- The practitioners provide some opportunities, which bring together families, children and practitioners, most notably Christmas events and graduation celebrations. Parents are invited to attend the pre-school tour and family events, for example, the recent birth of pups and a baby lamb were shared at the service. These events are photographed for children in their folders to provide them with a means of celebrating, recalling and discussing their experiences.
- Some links between the setting and the local community have been made through, for example, a recent road safety awareness project and a visit by *an Garda* to the service. The practitioners are interested in developing such community links further.

Action advised

- It is advised that visual representations of the children's families and community be displayed to support the children's sense of identity and belonging as members of families and groups.
- It is advised that the daily routine be documented visually for children and that it be made available to parents.

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.

- Provision in the setting is broadly informed by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.*
- Weekly plans are in place. These are thematic in nature but are not directly informed by *Aistear*. Children's interests inform planning in a broad way.
- A variety of assessment methods is used to build a picture of the children's learning experiences. Each child has an individual folder where his/her learning experiences are documented. Parents have access to their child's learning journal at the end of the pre-school year. The practitioners carry out observations of the children with regard to the children's use of the Montessori equipment. They also observe and note what the children can do with reference to the themes of *Aistear*. While the information arising from the practitioners' observations indicates the next stage of learning for the children, this information does not directly inform the practical planning for the next steps in the children's learning. Currently observations are not shared with parents providing them with opportunities to be involved in their child's learning.
- The indoor environment provides for a wide range of Montessori experiences such as practical life, sensorial learning, and mathematical, language and culture exercises. The book area is fully accessible, well-resourced and books are rotated.
- The outdoor environment comprises a grassed area and a soft-surface area. Resources include seesaws, ride-ons, opportunities for ball play and a playhouse. Children regularly use the outdoor play area. Alternative physical activities are provided for children on days when the outdoor area is not available.
- Some activities, such as children's outdoor experiences, are child-directed. A number of curriculum activities are decided by the practitioners; this impacts on the extent to which children can make choices during those activities.
- The practitioners are supportive of the children's interactions and provide the children with good individual attention around engagement with their Montessori materials. Conversations are extended by practitioners. For example, rich child-child conversations about the previous weekend's activities were observed on the morning of the inspection.

Action advised

- To further support the development of an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum, the practitioners are advised to utilise the tip sheets and templates in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide,* especially those provided in the section, 'Planning and Assessing using *Aistear's* Themes'. It is further advised that information gathered about children's learning be used to inform planning in a more systematic and practical way so that the curriculum provided is responsive to the children's emergent interests and their learning dispositions.
- It is advised that documentation of children's individual learning be shared with parents purposefully regularly so that parents are involved as fully as possible them as partners in their child's learning in the service.
- It is advised that more opportunities be provided for children to make choices and decisions in relation to their play activities with a view to increasing their autonomy and sense of agency.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children present as happy, content and motivated. They enjoyed an outdoor group story activity and mobile darts on the day of inspection. The children have engaged in project work such as that on the theme of road safety.
- The children show much enthusiasm for outdoor play, as evidenced in how they collaborated in a ball game on the day of the inspection. They have also been enabled to have a sense of ownership over the outdoor area; they have painted their handprints on the wall and grown flowers outside.
- The children interact well with each other and they engage with their Montessori materials with ease individually, in pairs, as a small group and as a large group.
- The children self-regulate throughout the morning and understand the rules of the service. They take turns and play co-operatively.
- The children display significant respect for all of the resources available to them and for their environment.

- There is an over-emphasis on the use of templates in the course of the children's activities. The children engaged in template-based artwork on the day of the inspection. Some of the children's artwork is on display and some of this is sent home regularly, with children deciding what they would like to bring home and what they wish to keep for their folders. Children's comments are displayed on their artwork. Template-based pre-writing sheets are also given to the children for them to complete.
  The children demonstrate good gross motor and fine motor skills through engagement with their Montessori materials.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to provide the children with more opportunities for engaging in open-ended process art and free mark making experiences (as distinct from template art activities or the completing of pre-writing worksheets).
- There is scope for development of the outdoor play area to provide for additional opportunities for children to explore, be creative and use their imaginations. Practitioners are encouraged to refer to the 'Outdoor environment' section of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* for further ideas on how to develop the outdoor play area.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is fair.
- The practitioners were observed working as a team and sharing roles throughout the morning.
- Formal staff meetings are held weekly to discuss planning and to review practice and daily meetings of the practitioners take place. The outcomes of those meetings are not documented.
- The service is currently reviewing its policies and procedures. *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* is not being used by the service to inform that review.
- The service is aware of its local County Childcare Committee and is a member of different voluntary organisations that support children's development and learning. The practitioners have not engaged in professional development for some time; it is timely for practitioners to engage with further training to support quality practice at the setting.
- Transition year students are welcomed at the service.
- An open-door policy is in place at the service. All parents are welcome to drop in at any time. Policies and procedures are available to parents. At the time of the inspection, a mission statement for the service had not been formulated.
- Communication with parents in relation to their individual child's learning occurs informally through daily conversations. Practitioners use social media and texts to communicate group learning to parents and to update them about events and activities at the service. An open-day to introduce the setting to families and children takes place yearly.
- Supports for children as they move from the pre-school to primary school largely consist of conversations between the practitioners and the children about starting primary school. Connections between the pre-school and the local primary school have not been established.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to provide more vision to parents of their own children's learning and of group learning and activities at the setting. It is further advised that parents be involved in the review processes of the service. The section, 'Building partnerships with parents' in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* offers useful guidance services working with parents.
- It is advised that future reviews of practice in the setting be documented and be fully informed by *Síolta.* Use of the evaluation tools in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* would also support the practitioners in evaluating practice and provision at the setting. The documenting of staff meetings is further advised.
- It is advised that links with the local primary school be developed to support children starting school. The development of a transitions policy documenting the transitioning practices to be put in place is further advised**.**

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is good. The service shows a good commitment to continuous improvement of practice.

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	**Fair**

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.

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