An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Clever Kidz Pre-school and Montessori
13DY0535

Donaghmede House
Newbrook Road
Donaghmede
Dublin 13

Date of Inspection: 28 February 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Clever Kidz Pre-school and Montessori is a privately-owned service located in a house that offers a range of community services. It has been in operation since 2011 and provides a learning programme predominantly informed by the Montessori Method of education. Aspects of provision are also informed by other play-based methodologies. On the day of the inspection, the owner/sole practitioner and ten pre-school children were in attendance. The owner/sole practitioner 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 very good.
- The parents and children are warmly greeted by the practitioner as they arrive in the morning. She spends time chatting to the parents and the children.
- Once in the room, the children demonstrate confidence in putting their lunches in the fridge, hanging up their coats and then joining their friends at the prepared activities.
- The daily routine is on display but is too high for the children to access. The routine includes time allocated to a work cycle using Montessori materials and includes some provision for free play.
- Transitions within the setting are sensitively signalled by the practitioner asking the children if they are ready to move on to the next activity, such as when they were playing with the playdough.
- Secure and supportive relationships have been developed between the practitioner and the children. The practitioner knows each child well and offers respectful praise and encouragement throughout the session, using phrases such as: 'Is there something I can show you? Oh, you nearly have it, well done.'
- The practitioner encourages the children to be kind and to help each other. This was observed on the day of the inspection when one child came to help another child who was frustrated as she tried to complete an activity. The practitioner said, 'Don't be cross, she's being kind and helping you.'
- The uniqueness of each child is demonstrated in the birthday display and the comments made by the children on the chart with comments such as 'I feel happy when.'
- Parents visit the setting for the end-of-year celebration, the Christmas play and the annual sports day. In previous years, parents came to share information about their professions such as a nurse and fireman and the practitioner hopes to reintroduce this practise during the year.
- The local Garda has come to visit the setting and the children take regular walks around the local area to visit the fire station and the library as part of the programme of activities which builds children's awareness of their local community and their sense of belonging to it. On the day of the inspection, there was no visual display in the setting to celebrate the diversity of children and families in the community represented.

Actions advised

- The practitioner is advised to ensure the visibility of the daily routine by placing it at child height. The addition of photographs illustrating the children engaged in daily activities will help them understand the daily sequence of events.
- It is advised that the diversity of the families in the local community be reflected visually through displays and resources in the setting. This will support the children's awareness of family diversity and encourage a more inclusive environment.

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.
- Planning in the setting is theme-based and linked to the seasons. The weekly planned topics mirror the themes of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.* At the time of the inspection, the plans did not record the individual children's emergent interests.

- Different approaches are regularly used by the practitioner to record the children's learning and development such as developmental checklists and time sample observations. These observation records do not identity the next steps for the children's learning and do not log the children's use and mastery of the various Montessori exercises.
- The practitioner compiles a selection of the children's art work into a folder that is sent home at the end of the year.
- The indoor learning environment is compact and well-maintained. The Montessori materials are well displayed and accessible to the children. The children access a large grassy area for outdoor play on a regular basis.
- A range of resources to support the children's engagement in some types of play such as construction, small-world play and dress-up clothes is not accessible to the children due to the size of the room.
- On the day of the inspection, some of the children became disengaged in the play activities and struggled to engage with other children and the materials effectively. During free play, it was noted that the practitioner did not interact with the children other than to offer resources or to respond to questions. Her interactions during the other activities were characterised by calm, warm, positive tones. During these activities, she consistently used questions and prompts to help the children to think about what they we're doing by posing questions such as, 'Do you want to try again? Are you happy with that?'
- A good selection of books to suit the children's interests is available in a designated area that has soft cushions. During the inspection, children were observed sitting on their own or in pairs reading books. The practitioner engages and encourages the children's participation in the storytelling activity by using facial expressions and asking questions such as, 'Let's see what he needs. Oh, what does he need next? What will help him stay dry?'
- On the day of the inspection, an emphasis on adult-led, large-group activities for prolonged periods of time was observed. The children sat at the table and took part in group art and craft activities and table-top activities.
- The children's pre-emergent literacy and numeracy is promoted through the planned monthly introduction of letters, shapes and numbers. The children are offered templates and dot-to-dot activities regularly to embed their knowledge and to practice their pre-writing skills. The overuse of template-based activities limits the opportunities and time available for children's to express their creativity through open-ended art activities.

Actions advised

- The practitioner is advised to use the resources in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support her in the development of a learning programme that includes the individual children's emergent interests.
- It is advised that the practitioner identify the next steps required for children's learning in observations undertaken and record children's use and progression in their use of the Montessori materials.
- The practitioner is advised to reduce the use of template-based activities and pre-writing skills in order to provide the children with more opportunities for free mark-making and self-initiated creative activities.
- The practitioner is advised to facilitate the children's learning through the designated free play by following and supporting the children's needs and interests. Sitting with and beside the children and joining in in the children's play will assist in this regard.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- The children demonstrate enjoyment and engagement in their self-selected play activities as well as the adult-led activities. They show confidence and resourcefulness in their self-initiated play experiences. For example, during the free play observed some children shared their ideas and adapted their play with the dolls houses to include the construction blocks and cars in order to extend their houses.
- It is evident that the children have developed close relationships with their peers and strong friendships have developed. They play cooperatively together in pairs and small groups.

- The children have been involved in the design of their class rules that are on display. On the day of the inspection, some children were observed successfully negotiating turn-taking and sharing of the equipment, such as when one child said to another, 'We can both play with it'.
- The children take an active part in the tidying up at the end of each activity. Children enjoy taking responsibility for specific jobs assigned by the practitioner such as tidying up after the art activity and handing out the plates for snack time.
- The children are developing a positive sense of self and are eager and confident to converse and engage with visitors. The children are keen to discuss their families and siblings.
- Examples of the children's art work and template-based activities are on display. This builds the children's awareness of their ability and achievements. On the day of the inspection, the children discussed with the practitioner and the visitor their pictures before placing them in their personal folder. Some children describe their free art to the practitioner who records their words on the picture.
- The children are developing very good early mathematical language such as recognising and using numbers. They were observed discussing how many cars they had and how many cakes they had drawn.

Actions advised

- The addition of small group or paired activities and a reduction in whole-group activities is advised. This will support the children's choices and appreciation of themselves as confident, independent learners.
- To build on the systems in place to develop children's independence, the practitioner is advised to devise and display a child-helper routine with specific jobs. This will help children to understand when their turn is coming and what job they will be doing.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- The practitioner avails of mentoring and support from Early Childhood Ireland and Dublin City Childcare to assist her in her professional work.
- The practitioner has a strong vision for her service that includes the wish that the children will feel socially confident and competent when they leave the setting. She has begun the process of moving away from a more structured learning experience and has introduced more play-based activities to the daily routine.
- The practitioner is committed to her ongoing professional development and has recently completed a training course in early childhood care and education at level 6 and a first aid course. The training has impacted on her role as an early-years educator by helping her to identify the additional supports required to make changes to her practice that will benefit the children.
- The practitioner shares information on the children's learning and achievements with the parents informally at arrival and collection times. The parents are given an information booklet on the policies and procedures of the setting when the child starts in September. Folders containing the children's art work and template-based activities are sent home every month.
- The parents are invited with their child to the setting before they start pre-school and are actively encouraged to stay with their child until the child feels confident to let their parent leave.
- The practitioner discusses with the children their move to primary school. At the time of the inspection, the practitioner has not developed any links with local primary schools.

Actions advised

- The practitioner is advised to avail of the templates in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support her in her professional self-reflection and review of practice. This will assist in affirming and supporting quality practice.
- The practitioner is advised to begin the process of developing links with the local primary schools in order to support the children's smooth transition from pre-school to primary school. The use of the 'Supporting Transitions' document in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will assist the practitioner in this process.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The owner/sole practitioner engaged professionally and positively in the post-inspection feedback meeting and the capacity to implement the actions advised above is good.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

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

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