A Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Elmwood Pre-school
09LK0031

Gerald Griffin National School,
Loughill.
County Limerick.

Date of Inspection: 25 November 2016

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Elmwood Pre-school is located in a classroom of Gerald Griffin National School in Loughill, County Limerick. It operates under the management of the primary school principal and board of management. It offers a morning only Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection two practitioners and eight children were present. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting will be found in the appendix of this report.

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.
- There is a very caring and welcoming atmosphere in the service. The practitioners know the children and their families very well. On the morning of the inspection, parents and children were warmly welcomed and while the parents signed their children in, the children quickly dispersed to various areas in the room.
- The routine and procedures promote children's physical, social and emotional security. The children present as securely attached and they know the routine very well.
- The programme of activities provides some degree of agency to the children in choosing and organising their own learning activities.
- Times of transition are managed effectively using visual and verbal prompts.
- The practitioners are very caring and attentive to the children and many genuine reciprocal natural conversations were initiated by the children and the practitioners during the inspection. Praise and encouragement are regular features of the practitioners' responses to the children. The practitioners effectively motivate the children to keep going and convey to the children a real sense that they are listened to and are important. This was demonstrated numerous times over the inspection, through body language and warm verbal acknowledgments.

Actions advised

- The facilitation of a system that allows the children to self-register on arrival is advised. This will offer the children more agency and a sense of belonging to the group. Some further advice on this is available in the 'Transitions' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.*
- Young children learn best when they have choices about materials and learning activities. In this regard, more opportunities need to be provided to the children to actively engage in choosing their own learning and development activities.
- The practitioners are advised to adopt a key person approach. More information on this is available in the 'Curriculum foundations' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice* Guide.
- To further support children's developing sense of identity and belonging, the practitioners are advised to have more visual representations of the local community and the children's families and lived experiences available through wall displays and/or photograph albums.

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 thematic approach to planning currently exists where pre-determined themes are chosen monthly and transferred into weekly plans. For example, learning about animal classification was the theme for November. The planned themes are explored through stories and art projects.
- There is scope for more creativity, children's choice, and play in the pedagogical approaches used in this setting. Whole-group teaching sessions were observed on the morning of the inspection where the practitioners guided the children in learning discrete academic

information and skills about numbers, letters, pencil grip, shapes, colouring between the lines, days of the week, months of the year and seasons.

- Observations and assessments take place through descriptive stories about the children's learning and through a developmental checklist. Some of these show children's improvement in pro-social behaviours or gross motor skills. There is an over-emphasis on recording how children can or cannot hold a pencil, obey two-step commands, complete puzzles, join dots or colour between the lines.
- On the morning of the inspection the children had time to engage in self-chosen playful learning experiences on arrival for thirty minutes and for twenty minutes towards the end of the programme.
- The indoor environment is well-resourced to effectively support children to problem solve, negotiate, use their imagination, create and socialise. Among the materials and resources available and accessible during play time are: a large sand box, building blocks, small-world play, a cooker and shop, lots of manipulatives such as nuts and bolts, transport vehicles to create and dismantle, board games, puzzles and lots of table-top materials.
- The children have regular access to an outdoor environment and a large hall; this effectively supports large active movement, fun and interactions.
- The practitioners know the children very well and are kind, caring and attentive to the children's needs. Some positive and effective interaction and teaching strategies were evident such as demonstrating how to roll up the mats correctly, prompting and guiding the children to stay on task when sorting and classifying materials at clean up time, and engaging in some natural spontaneous conversations on arrival and at lunch time.
- The practitioners effectively use story time to connect, explore and deepen children's understanding of concepts and topics that interest them. On the morning of the inspection the children demonstrated a keen interest in the rhyme, repetition, anticipation and recalling of their experiences similar to the storyline in the story.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to extend the play time and the variety of the types of play the children can engage in. The 'Play' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* provides excellent guidance in this regard.
- The current emphasis on a view of school readiness that is concerned with teaching and memorisation of discrete academic skills needs to be minimised. There is a need to develop a broader curriculum focus which is informed by *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum* Framework and which supports the development of children's learning dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding. Use of the self-evaluation tools, templates and resources in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, especially those within the 'Curriculum foundations' and 'Planning and assessing' sections, will help in this regard.
- Practitioners are advised to exploit the various assessment approaches recommended in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*. Assessments need to provide a broader evaluation of children's achievements and progression in learning, taking due account of their individual learning dispositions, skills, knowledge, attitudes, understandings and their values.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is fair.
- Some children display positive learning dispositions such as initiating play themes, showing a keen interest in completing puzzles, staying on task, being resilient, persevering with tasks, and communicating their ideas and thoughts with others respectfully and appropriately.
- The children demonstrated their developing ability to share, take turns, engage in natural spontaneous conversations and listen to each other. Several examples of children adapting and changing how they used materials relating to their self-chosen imaginative play themes were noted. Children joined together and engaged in some rich play with small dolls, beds and a shopping trolley; they listened to each other, imitated each other's play behaviours and adapted and developed their game as it progressed.
- When directed to count together, recite the days of the week and months of the year, sing the collection of songs for the Christmas concert, and complete their writing and colouring

templates, most of the children joined in happily and were very amenable to participating in these activities. However, some children needed a lot of persuasion and encouragement to stay involved in some of the adult-directed activities.

- The majority of the children demonstrate a keen interest in exploring books. They enthusiastically engaged with the group story on the day of the inspection, anticipating what would happen next, asking questions, sharing their own experiences, and repeating familiar phrases.

Actions advised

- The children need opportunity to express their voice, to exercise choice and, where possible, to influence the programme of activities. The self-evaluation tools in the 'Curriculum foundations' section of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* provide a useful starting point in this regard.
- To support and maximise children's learning through exploration and questioning, the practitioners are advised to add real objects and natural materials that arouse the children's curiosity and provoke and extend their thinking as well as 'I wonder' forms of questioning. Helpful ideas in relation to this are provided in *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* under the theme of 'Exploring and thinking'.
- To further the development of the children's positive sense of identity and belonging, consideration could be given to developing pictorial displays and engaging in projects and play that incorporate children's lived experiences in community life.
- To support children's developing sense of responsibility for the environment, the practitioners are advised to create a visual pictorial responsibility chart or jobs chart in consultation with the children.
- Planning needs to take greater account of individual children's interests, previous knowledge and intended learning goals as outlined in *Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.*

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is fair.
- The mission statement, curriculum policy and intended goals viewed on the morning of the inspection are very comprehensive, clear and they align with many of the goals and principles of *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*. They include important concepts such as play and learning, choice, the voice of the child, multi-sensory experiences, child-centred play-based environments and active learning.
- The management and staff have a small number of meetings during the year. These are, in the main, organised by the lead practitioner when curriculum and organisational issues need to be discussed.
- Parents and families have many informal opportunities to exchange information with the practitioners on arrival and departure. They receive letters during the year and the policies and procedures are available to them on request. Events that bring families and children together are prioritised. These include Grandparents Day, a nativity play and concert, a walk at Halloween and PJ Day. Because the pre-school is based in a primary school, the parents and children are also included in many of the family school events during the year.

Actions advised

- The management and staff are advised to have more frequent formal meetings where review of and reflection on practice are facilitated and documented with a view to supporting continuous collaborative team reflection and dialogue.
- Because of the mismatch between the stated curriculum policies and the practice observed during the inspection, consideration should be given to availing of some external support to assist in the implementation of the written goals and objectives of the setting.
- To further support the practitioners in promoting healthy eating and in helping children to name and regulate their emotions, the practitioners are advised to source external training such as

relevant programmes or workshops provided by the Healthy Ireland Smart Start Programme or the local County Childcare Committee.

- The practitioners are advised to use the resources in the 'Partnership with parents' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* in relation to developing a more regular formal communication system for sharing with parents the children's achievements and their progression in learning.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service 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	**Good**
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	**Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Fair**
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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

Thank you for your report.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection **activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

The following are the actions we have taken in order to address some of the actions advised in said report.

- The photographs of the children on the board have been lowered to the children's eye level in order to facilitate self-regulation on arrival.
- The children now have the opportunities to actively engage in their own learning and to exercise choice, where possible, in choosing their own play.
- We use a thematic approach to develop the children's learning as recommended by The Aistear Síolta Practice guide.
- Children now have visual representation of their families on a family tree that is on display in our setting.
- Our setting has developed a new daily routine which extends both our indoor and outdoor playtimes.
- The focus on school readiness has now been minimised.
- Learning journals are now provided which supports the development of children's learning. The children's achievements and progressions are recorded in their journals as outlined in the Aistear Siolta Practice Guide.
- During circle time the children get an opportunity to express their voices.
- We now have visits from people in our local community that children so often speak about e.g. postman, guard and we use this as part of our thematic approach to learning.
- We have developed the use of a pictorial responsibility chart which is now displayed at children's eye level.

- Childcare workers have more frequent and formal meetings.

- The changes that have been made in our practice are now in line with the stated curriculum policies.

- These are some of the actions we have taken so far. We plan on addressing the other actions advised on an ongoing, continuous basis.