An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

REPORT

Happy Days Montessori
09LS0006

Clough Hall
Clough, Ballacolla
County Laois

Date of inspection: 15th September 2016

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Happy Days Montessori is a private sessional pre-school service that is in operation for seventeen years. It is located in the local hall in the heart of the village of Clough, Ballacolla, Co. Laois. The service offers the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. On the day of inspection, eleven children and two practitioners were present in the setting. 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 very good.
- There is a caring and welcoming atmosphere along with a positive energy evident in the setting.
- Practitioners display sensitivity to the needs of children and families during the settling-in phase. The daily routine is modified appropriately to meet these needs.
- Some of the transitions, from one part of the daily routine to the next, include waiting times for children with little active engagement. The lunch time routine resulted in children sitting on their seats waiting for their bag on the day of the inspection
- Children have many opportunities to choose and organise their learning and development activities.
- Children's developing sense of identity and belonging is nurtured through the use of photographs on coat hooks, name labels on chairs and also through a child self-registration sheet.
- The setting is integrated with the local community. They take part in local events such as charity cake sale and Tidy Town planting. Children have opportunities to visit the local pumpkin patch located in the village.

Action advised

- It is advised that practitioners consider doing a song, rhyme or movement activity with children if they have to wait during transition times.

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 very good.
- An emergent curriculum, informed by *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* is organised into monthly themes and weekly plans.
- Practitioners use learning portfolios, photographs, observations, skills checklists and samples of mark-making to build a rich picture of children's learning. They use this information purposefully to inform the next steps in children's learning experiences. This information is shared with both the children and their parents.
- The indoor learning environment comprises of two areas: one large hall area and one room. Both areas are divided into distinct accessible interest areas and offer a wide variety of play experiences, including creative play, construction play, socio-dramatic play, and physical play.
- The outdoor learning environment offers children sensory rich play experiences. Children can follow their own interests to take appropriate risks, problem solve and explore the natural world on a regular basis.
- There is an appropriate balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated learning and development activities. Practitioners actively engage with children during play, extending their ideas through open-ended questioning and co-constructing knowledge.
- Children have many hands-on, playful opportunities to explore quantity, size, shape, length, number, letters, sounds and different texts. They have access to a wide variety of high-quality books and writing materials.

- Currently, the setting is also using number and letter workbooks to introduce concepts of literacy and numeracy in an over-formalised way. The weekly activities relating to letters, number, shape and colour are too detached from playful meaningful learning contexts for most children at their current stage of development.

Action advised

- Practitioners are advised to review the practice of using templates and workbooks that present learning in an overly formal manner for pre-school children. It is advisable to focus on meaningful experiences for children that support age-appropriate understanding of early literacy and numeracy concepts.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- Children demonstrate enjoyment and interest in their learning activities.
- Most children are capable of making decisions about their learning. They display initiative, self-confidence and independence.
- Children have few opportunities to communicate their decisions about their learning and reflect on their actions and learning experiences.
- Children experience success during learning activities. They show increasing confidence and co-ordination over their gross and fine motor skills. This is illustrated in the experiences children have to balance on beams and access mark-making materials.
- Children are able to describe their interests, opinions, feelings and personal experiences. They described with detail many aspects of rural life.
- Children interact with practitioners and peers by listening, discussing, questioning and taking turns in conversations.
- Children inquisitively explore and experiment in the natural environment. Children were observed searching for 'pookie' snails, asking questions about the compost drum and experimenting with water and hoses.

Action advised

- It is advised that children be provided with regular opportunities to describe their learning intentions and reflect on their experiences and achievements.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of the management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The staff team regularly reflect on and review their practice in order to improve learning experiences and outcomes for children. The *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* informs this review process. To date, review outcomes and the improvements in the quality of the educational provision have not been documented and shared with parents.
- The owner/manager strives for high standards and provides a clear vision for the educational provision.
- Practitioners avail of opportunities to attend professional development courses and events.
- Through the sharing of a parent's handbook, daily conversations with parents and carers, and sharing of learning stories, parents and families are informed about the educational approach within the setting and children's learning and development. Practitioners provide regular opportunities for parents to receive information on their child's progress.
- The setting has a settling policy which encourages parents to share information to effectively support children transitioning into the service.
- The setting has developed a positive relationship with the local primary school to ensure continuity and progression in learning for children. This has resulted in the setting's involvement in school

activities, such as the annual egg hunt and attending the Christmas play. A visit to the school is organised in advance of children starting junior infants.

Action advised

- Practitioners are advised to continue to share the outcomes of future reviews of practice with the parent community in order to highlight and celebrate the quality improvements which benefit children and their families.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The owner/manager and assistant demonstrate a very good capacity to implement the actions advised.

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	**Very Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Very 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.

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Part A: Comment on the content of the report

We here at Happy Days Montessori School are dedicated to providing a high standard of childcare and education and we welcome the early years inspection in our school. We are always open to new suggestions and advice that will improve the quality of our service. As outlined, we have taken on board the actions advised since our inspection and will continue to improve our practice in line with inspection reports and the advice given from the department of education and skills.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to address the actions advised in the inspection

Area 1: We will revise our transitions practices to build in regular opportunities for the children to sing and take part in movement activities during transition times. These songs/rhymes will be those that have been already completed in the setting. This will give the children the opportunity to practice and re-enforce their previous learning experiences.

Area 2: It is our intention to review our planning and preparation in using workbooks and templates. As advised, we plan to begin the school year with a focus on providing meaningful experiences for the children when learning the concepts of early numeracy and literacy. In doing this, the children begin to develop the necessary skills to begin working on templates/workbooks at a later stage in the school year.

Area 3: In my future practice, the children will be encouraged and given the opportunity to describe their learning intentions and reflect on their experiences and achievements in school.

Area 4: We will continue to share the outcomes of future practice with parents and carers as advised on this area of our setting. Going forward, this will be done using both formal and informal methods.

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