An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Keane Minds Montessori
09DS0037

Earlsfort Residents Centre
Earlsfort Road
Lucan
County Dublin

Date of Inspection: 9 February 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Keane Minds Montessori is situated in a housing estate in Lucan, County Dublin. It operates from a community hall which is shared with other resident groups. It has been in operation since 2001. It provides one morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of inspection, nineteen children were present. Also present were the owner/manager who is the lead practitioner and the deputy manager/Montessori practitioner. 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 atmosphere at the setting is characterised by warm, kind and caring interactions between staff, children and parents. Relationships between the practitioners and the children are secure and respectful.
- A daily routine supporting children's learning and development is in place which children and parents are aware of.
- Transitioning strategies are used to support children to transition easily between activities. Strategies used include a visual helper system, verbal reminders and wind-down strategies.
- Practitioners reinforce and model positive behaviour and encourage children to resolve their own differences.
- Children have freedom to negotiate their environment and be active agents in their play.
- At snack time, the children engage in conversations with each other and are responsible for their own lunch supporting the development of their self-management skills. Though practitioners do not sit with the children at lunchtime, they do engage in some conversations with them.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is nurtured and celebrated though opportunities which bring together children, families and practitioners at the setting. These include events at Halloween, Christmas, Easter, graduation and a yearly school trip. The practitioners demonstrate respect for the uniqueness of each child through listening and affirming them. A wall board includes photographs of children engaging in activities and photographs of families.
- The setting has made some links with the local community through its use of the local community hall and engaging in events such as Pyjama Day.

Action advised

- To further promote snack time as a social occasion, it is advised that the practitioners sit with the children and use this time as an opportunity to promote positive health and well-being and extend children's conversations.

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 informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the Montessori pedagogy. The principles and themes of *Aistear* are used to inform and guide curriculum planning. Planning is thematic, project based and not yet fully emergent-based or enquiry led in using children's emerging interests and dispositions to drive curriculum. The practitioners have engaged in recent training to adapt their curriculum to one that is more enquiry-led from children's perspectives. Planning is organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis.
- Varied assessment strategies are in place. These include learning story observations and monthly observations documenting the children's use of the Montessori equipment. The observations noted by practitioner are used to support the next stage of learning for children. Observations of children's learning are shared with parents at the end of the year.

- The indoor environment is set up every day accommodating the multi-use of the room. Children are free to choose from a good range of Montessori materials and can engage in Montessori activities on floor mats or at the table. Montessori resources include materials to allow the children engage in a range of practical life activities such as pouring and spooning and some sensorial materials. Sensory materials such as sand, water, paint, opportunities for messy play were not available on the day of inspection.
- Resources are also provided to support the development of children's language, early mathematics, and their awareness of culture and the environment. Some play materials are also available such as a basketball hoop, balls, nets, table top toys. A wide range of puzzles and books is in place together with soft seating. Labelling of resources is evident.
- An outdoor area is not available for children to use regularly as it is not secure. Practitioners have put in place alternative daily indoor physical activities such as dance and drama. They also have engaged in Buntús programme training, a physical activity programme though the Irish Sports Council and report that they use these resources with the children regularly. Building on the indoor outdoor connections, a nature table indoors is in place with leaves, stone, cones, shells and interest items. The children also engage in activities to connect indoors and outdoors such as a science project observing the life cycle of butterflies.
- There is a good balance between adult-directed and child-directed activities with both adults and children taking the lead.
- **I**nteractions between practitioners and children follow children's lead and there is a good emphasis on the promotion of children's language and on the development of positive peer relationships.
- Children's emergent mathematical skills are developed in an effective way through opportunities for sorting, matching, stacking and ordering with an appropriate amount of challenge for children.

Actions advised

- To build on the good practices established in relation to engaging with training, it is advised that practitioners give consideration to using information about children's emerging interests, questions and experiences to better inform plans and practices.
- Practitioners are advised to provide for a greater variety of multisensory experiences for children. This could include rice, sand, water, paint, providing opportunities for messy play.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- Children demonstrate enjoyment in their experiences at the setting. They are developing independence and confidence through their engagement with their Montessori materials.
- At circle time, the children listened to a story as a group, engaged in discussions about the weather and the days of the week together with discussing issues of interest to them such as a planned trip to Australia. These discussions support their social and emotional development.
- Specific strategies or visual connections are not in place to support children in naming and in discussing their feelings.
- Children are fully aware of the rules of the service, take turns and tidy up. They are responsible for putting away their own chairs before they go home.
- The children engage in a variety of musical experiences including listening to classical music. They are learning suitable mathematical language through their engagement in rhymes and songs.
- Children demonstrate an emergent understanding of the meaning and use of numbers and symbols through their engagement with their Montessori materials.
- Through beading and threading and manipulative experiences, children are developing their fine and gross motor skills.
- Children have access to paper and writing materials for part of the day and a sample of a group drawing activity is on display for them.

Actions advised

- Building on the circle time conversations, it is advised that specific strategies be developed to support children naming and talking about their feelings. Visuals and props supporting this development would be further beneficial for children's well-being.

- It is advised that writing materials be made available for children as much as possible to support the development of emergent writing, mark making and creative expression. It is further advised that their process art be available to them to revisit and provide documentation for them of their own learning.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Significant organisation is evident in the arranging of an environment that requires it to be set up and taken apart each day.
- The practitioners work well together as a team, engaging in collaboration and showing support for each other.
- Both practitioners reflect on practice and informal meetings take place on a daily basis to evaluate the impact of practices on children's learning and development. At the time of inspection, these were not documented.
- The practitioners in the service engage in regular and continuous professional development and both practitioners are in the process of in upskilling to degree level in Early Childhood Education.
- The practitioners liaise with their County Childcare Committee and have very recently engaged in an introductory course on the *Aistear, Síolta* Practice Guide.
- Communication is fostered between parents and families in various ways. Policies and procedures are available to parents and a Parent Handbook is in place. An induction meeting is held for new parents. A setting website and a noticeboard is also used to communicate with parents. An open -door policy where parents are continually welcomed into the service is in place.
- Students such as those engaging in early-years training programmes and in transition year are welcome at the setting to do work placements.
- Information is shared between the pre-school and the local primary school with the permission of parents. A project on starting school takes place in the last term.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the recent training in relation to using the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* be implemented to guide future reviews of practice. It is further advised that such reviews include parental input and be documented.
- To further develop good practices, it is advised that observations of children's learning be shared regularly with their parents.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

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

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	**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.

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