An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Little Angels Pre-school
13TN0107

Scoil Angela
Ursuline Convent Primary School
Thurles
County Tipperary

Date of Inspection: 7 March 2017

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Angels Pre-school is a sessional service managed by two co-owners in the town of Thurles. It is located in Scoil Angela, Ursuline Primary School. The pre-school operates in one classroom and has access to a second classroom for small-group work. The number of children attending the service has significantly increased in recent years. This service provides for children from a variety of cultural backgrounds, a number of whom speak English as an additional language. On the day of inspection, twenty-three children, three practitioners and an assistant under the Access and Inclusion Model [AIM] were present. 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.
- A caring ethos and an extremely warm and friendly atmosphere are evident.
- The daily routine is organised by the practitioners to provide the children with a predictable yet flexible schedule of events. The practitioners divide the whole group in two for small-group work in the adjoining second room. During the inspection one group moved into the second room before lunch and the second group moved after lunch for an art activity and playdough. The groupings are decided each day in consultation with the children.
- A key person approach is in place for one child who has additional needs. Not all children have a key person assigned to them.
- The relationships between practitioners and children are secure, respectful and responsive.
- The practitioners reinforce the children's positive behaviour through their modelling of respectful language, visual representation of appropriate behaviour, and recognition of the children's efforts and achievements.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is commendably nurtured, as evidenced through practitioners using familiar words in the child's home language, photographs of the children on display, a project that celebrates each child's uniqueness, displays of images of different ethnic hair styles, and trips outside the pre-school to build the children's awareness of the community in which they live.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to develop the key person approach for all children attending the pre-school. The small-group work would be enhanced by a practitioner working with a consistent group of children, while continuing to respect the children's choice in relation to engagement in activities. A visual representation of each key person and the name and photograph of the children in her key group would help in this regard.

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.
- The play-based emergent curriculum in operation in this setting is well developed by the practitioners and is informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.
- The highly effective short-term planning takes account of the children's varying spontaneous interests, cultural backgrounds, strengths, needs and previous learning. The long-term and medium-term planning require further refinement. Currently, the medium-term plan focuses in the main on practitioner-initiated seasonal activities.
- Careful attention is given to planning for the development of children's dispositions, values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding. In this regard, the practitioners effectively use guide sheets developed by Better Start.
- The practitioners complete developmental checklists in respect of the children. They also compile learning stories in journals for the children and note their emergent interests, using these to inform the next steps in the children's learning. In addition, group learning stories are compiled and displayed for the children and their families to share and celebrate.

- The bright, spacious indoor learning environment provides the children with developmentally appropriate play materials and resources that stimulate, support and extend their learning and development. The distinct interest areas such as a doctor's surgery, shop, hair salon, home area, sand area, and art area provide enriching experiences to develop the children's creativity, imagination and to build their identity as successful learners.
- The setting has access to a shared outdoor space within the school grounds; this is regularly used by the children.
- The practitioners facilitate learning by encouraging the children to take the lead and to share the lead in their learning through play. They skilfully promote and extend the children's thinking through a balance of open-ended questions and comments in conversations.
- The children's language and early literacy development are very well facilitated through the regular reading of stories, the performance of songs and rhymes and the use of simple Irish language phrases. The children's home language is valued and affirmed by the practitioners.
- The children are provided with activities and materials that promote mathematical understanding in a meaningful way through play. The practitioners effectively model mathematical language during their interactions with the children and with each other.
- The practitioners pay specific attention to the learning of children with additional needs and those who have English as an additional language. They have made links with external agencies to optimise supports for children. Those agencies include the North Tipperary Early Intervention Services and Better Start.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to develop a curriculum statement to outline in broad terms what the setting intends to do to support children's learning and development on a long-term basis. The 'Curriculum foundations' section of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is useful in this regard. The medium-term planning can be further developed to incorporate themes that arise from the children's lives and the questions and inquires that arise in their play.

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 independence in their learning. They competently make decisions; communicating their play choices through planning with practitioners and their peers. The children can reflect on and discuss the experiences documented in their learning journal.
- The children display enjoyment and engagement in their learning experiences. For example, they were actively involved in the story time observed, offering their ideas, opinions and thoughts.
- The children use their evolving oral language skills to describe their interests and personal experiences as illustrated, for example, when they shared their knowledge about their pets.
- Good efforts are being made to develop the children's understanding of how different languages can be used by people. Respect for and an appreciation of each child's home language is actively fostered.
- The children are developing an understanding of the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. They are using their social skills to interact and collaborate with their peers, as evident during role play in the hair salon area where they took turns, negotiated and co-operated.
- The children competently explore and investigate in the learning environment using their fine and gross motor skills.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to display samples of the children's home languages alongside the English samples in the environmental print.
- To build on the children's reflection on their learning experiences using their journals, the practitioners are advised to extend the opportunities for children to recall and discuss their learning experiences. This will support the children in considering and examining their choices and actions will also help them to build on what they have learned. For example, while sitting in a comfortable area at the end of the session, the children could be supported to share their stories about their play experiences that day.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- A strong sense of professionalism and teamwork is evident. The practitioners meet on a weekly basis to organise the curriculum. The managers are completing a degree in early childhood education; they are effectively using the knowledge they are gaining to develop their service.
- The practitioners approach planning, review and improvement in a reflective way, considering the impact on the learning environment and educational activities in the setting. A recent review of the art area resulted in an improvement plan to reposition and add resources.
- Through a handbook, parents are informed about the key policies and procedures of the setting. Parents are invited into the setting to see the day-to-day experiences of the children. Information can be translated for parents as necessary.
- Highly effective partnership with parents is fostered. The practitioners share information about the children's experiences with their parents on a daily basis and the learning stories are shared regularly. Practitioners are very respectful of families' cultural beliefs.
- The transition for children from home into the pre-school is sensitively managed. Children can bring in familiar objects from home, parents can stay with their child to support settling in, and parents are invited to share information about their child.
- Very good relationships are established with the adjoining primary school. That connection helps to promote continuity of experiences and progression in the children's learning. The children are invited to take a tour of the school and discussions about starting in primary school are facilitated by the practitioners.

Action advised

- Practitioners are advised to further develop the regular review of broader areas of practice with reference to *Síolta*, and the views of staff, children and their parents. The resources available in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will help in this regard.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very 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	**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.

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