An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Little Deers
Setting address	Ardnaculla Ennistymon County Clare V95HRC3
TUSLA registration number	TU2015CE001
DCEDIY number	17CE0232
Date of inspection	06-02-2024
Date of issue of report	17-05-2024

What is an Early Years Education Inspection?

The Early Years Education Inspection model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to the education of children aged birth to six years in early learning and care settings. The inspections will affirm good practice and provide advice to support internal quality development processes that optimise children's education experiences and outcomes.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

- Quality of the context to support children's learning and development
- Quality of processes to support children's learning and development
- Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
- Quality of management and leadership for learning

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the setting's provision in each area.

Early Years Education Inspection

Date of inspection	06-02-2024

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the setting manager
- Review of setting documentation and records relating to the children's learning and development
- Review of the education resources and facilities
- Observations of interactions during a number of sessions in all learning rooms
- Interaction with babies and young children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting manager

Context of setting

Little Deers is a community-based setting located in Ennistymon, County Clare. The setting was established in 2018 and provides early learning and care to babies, toddlers and young children. On the day of the inspection thirty-nine children, eight early years educators, and the manager 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 can 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 was very good.
- There was a very calm, welcoming and affirming atmosphere in the setting. The educators warmly greeted the children and their families on arrival. The parents and the educators engaged in conversations regarding the children's wellbeing during this time.
- The children settled in quickly and enthusiastically engaged in freely chosen play. Very positive and secure relationships were evident between the educators and the children.
- The key-person approach was used to generate links with the families. Some of the educators used this approach to help support planning and assessment processes.
- Routines that were well-paced and provided for a variety of learning experiences were evident in all rooms. Commendably, during care and learning routines, the educators nurtured the babies and the young children's security and used language which supported the children to understand the sequence of the routines.
- Singing, gestures and verbal interactions were successfully used in all rooms to signal times of transition and change.
- Mealtimes were relaxed and viewed as social occasions. The babies' and young children's individual needs around sleeping and care were fully accommodated. For example the children were comforted and soothed to sleep with the use of personal comfort items and background music.
- The early years educators supported the babies and young children to regulate their emotions and feelings. Recognition, affirmative feedback and encouragement were regular features of the educators' responses to the children.
- Approaches were in place to recognise and celebrate all of the children's sense of identity and belonging in the setting. These included celebrating the uniqueness of each child through meaningful conversations, signs, and the use of individual, family and group visual displays.
- The children's understanding of cultural diversity and the wider world was supported through interactions, toys and the celebration of cultural festivities. Preschool children had opportunities to learn about their local community through local walks. There were visual displays in the learning environment of Freddie, the setting mascot, during his adventures with the children to places of interest in the local community.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to further develop the key-person approach. The tip sheet Using a Key-Person Approach from the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* could assist with this action.

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 was very good.
- A play-based curriculum, informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, was in place. A broad-based approach to planning was evident which incorporated short-term, medium-term and long-term plans. The weekly plans, primarily thematic in nature, were flexible to allow for babies, toddlers and young children's emerging interests to be supported. Plans had yet to be purposefully organised to promote the progression to the next steps in the children's learning and development.
- The educators used anecdotal notes, learner record observations, photographs, and samples of the children's creative representations, to record the babies' and the young children's learning in their learning journals. Daily sheets were used to document and share the babies' and toddlers' care routines, along with their learning and development, with their parents.
- The educators were attuned to the verbal and non-verbal cues of the children. They used a variety of interaction strategies. This helped to motivate the children and promoted peer relationships by encouraging the children to support one another during activities.
- The indoor learning environments had well-organised defined interest areas. There was provision for a variety of play experiences in all learning rooms, including dramatic play, role play, sensory play and small world play. The educators had created print-rich environments that effectively promoted the children's engagement in literacy and numeracy activities.
- There was an inclusive approach adopted which recognised and accommodated diversity in the style, pace and focus of the children's individual learning and development. Positive links had been made with external agencies to support all of the children.

Actions advised

- To enhance the observation and planning practice currently in operation, it is advised that the educators further develop their planning and assessment practices to include a broader range of the children's emergent interests.
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Area 3: Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children were very comfortable and happy in the setting. They demonstrated a very positive sense of wellbeing and engaged with confidence and high levels of enjoyment in their learning. They spontaneously spoke about themselves, their families and their lives as they engaged with their friends, educators and visitors.
- The children were developing personal and social skills which enabled them to respond appropriately in different situations. Friendships were forming and interactive play was observed. The children successfully played with their peers in large-group activities, took turns, and praised each other's achievements. The children demonstrated empathy and kindness for each other in all learning rooms.
- The children displayed positive learning attitudes and freely shared their preferences and ideas. They enthusiastically requested stories to be read by the educators. The educators willingly facilitated these requests.
- The children eagerly took part in socio-dramatic play scenarios. They also completed puzzles and engaged with a wide range of open-ended materials. Throughout these activities, they demonstrated well-developed vocabularies and a very good ability to reason and to question.
- On the day of the inspection all of the children enjoyed time in the covered outdoor area. This incorporated a soft matting surface where the children had opportunities to enjoy play with bubbles, sand, and ride-on toys. They also engaged in mark-making with paint, chalk, water and crayons. The manager and the educators were exploring ideas to further develop the outdoor play areas to give the children daily access to the wide range of experiences available outside.

Actions advised

- In order to further promote the children's gross-motor development and their awareness of nature and the natural world, it is advised that the management team and the educators progress their plans for the development of the outdoor space.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was very good.
- An ethos of professionalism, teamwork, collaboration and partnership was evident.
    - At the time of the inspection the manager and the educators had commenced a process of reflection on how to enhance quality practice. The manager organised and documented team meetings and provided support and supervision for individual educators. Leadership roles were shared across all rooms.
- The setting had an open door policy and communication with the parents occurred daily through informal conversations at arrival and collection times. A computer software app was used to share information, care routines and photographs.
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was encouraged and supported. At the time of the inspection team members were engaging in training to enhance quality practice. The setting had a Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) co-ordinator.
- The children's transition into the setting was very effectively managed. Parents received emails with routines, policies and an *All about Me* information sheet to complete and return. There was a staggered settling-in period, with regular communication between the educators and the parents during this time.
- Transitions within the setting, where children moved to a new room, were effectively managed by the educators. This involved a slow, staggered approach which included a discussion with the parents and the children. Strengths-based information and observations on the child's interests, likes and abilities were documented and shared between educators. Commendably, a looping system, whereby the educators moved with the babies and young children, as they transitioned to the butterfly room, had been established.
- The educators completed the *Mo Scéal* reporting templates, which the parents then shared with their child's primary school. This process ensured that information was shared on each child's learning and development to support their transition to primary school.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to use the resources from the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* to review provision and to promote a culture of self-reflection. In addition, they could review the online webinar series of Insights - Quality in Early Years Education, developed by the Department of Education Inspectorate.
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Summary of overall inspection

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 Inspection Reports

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the setting using the language which is shown below.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

The following resources can be used by ELC settings in their quality improvement:

Aistear Siolta Practice Guide

Department of Education Insights – Quality in Early Years Education webinars

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We are very pleased with the inspection report and welcome the suggestions to improve our service.

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

Key-Person Approach

- Our first approach to enhance the key-person approach is to have staff move with the children and through their time in other rooms and the outdoor space, they will become familiar with other staff.
- We will ensure that when a part-time staff member is a key-person to a child, that the other part-time staff share the same responsibility for those children, ensuring they have a safe, secure, trusting childcare practitioner to comfort them.
- When children start in the service staff will review the child's registration form to build an idea of their interests, needs and about their family unit.
- We will identify the key-person for each child and create a space and time for parents and the practitioners to speak once a month about the child's progress, interests and needs.

Observation and Planning Process.

- To enhance our observations and planning, this will be reviewed during staff meetings. They type of observations will be outlined and explained in detail as a reminder to staff. We will work incrementally in regard to the number of observations expected of the to be completed each month. For observation for babies and toddlers, we will identify areas of learning and development that can be included in their learning journals or their first time doing something i.e. speaking/calling someone's name, walking etc. We will identify how these observations can be developed through our weekly planning and how to enhance their learning and development.

Development of the Outdoor Space

- This is something we are working on and have been trying to enhance for some time and it has been dependent on funding. We have recently erected a fence in the garden to contain the play area and will be moving some fencing and gate to develop a free-flow space between the playground and the garden. We have some funds to enhance the space with more sensory and natural items in the playground and garden, including the development of the playhouse in the playground and a mud kitchen area in the playground.

Portion of Culture of Self-Reflection

- Recently we have introduced staff to importance and significance of completing professional development courses as this enhances staff learning experiences and in turn promotes and creates reflection in our own practice. As an example, risky play was identified as an area for development and consequently fed us to completing a course on risky play, which in turn encouraged to introduce more risky play within the setting. We will support continue to support staff in new learning experience.
- As we are coming to a transition period of new children starting in the service in September, we will create time and space for reflection on the past year to identify areas that have worked well and areas that need enhancement. This will be done during our staff meetings, giving staff time to reflect and think about their role. This cans also be developed through supervisions and self-evaluation tools and guidelines developed by management.