An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Little Rascals
09MN0029

Ballymacforban
Monaghan
County Monaghan

Date of inspection: 12 October 2016

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Rascals is a private service offering full day care, after-school care for school-aged children and a morning sessional pre-school programme. The service was established in 1996 and is located in the rural townland of Ballymacforban, just outside Monaghan town. The pre-school early-years practitioner has been in post for just over one year. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme runs from 9.30 to 12.30 each morning and on the day of inspection the early-years practitioner and six 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 very good.
- There is a very welcoming and friendly atmosphere in the service. Relationships are responsive and warm. Parents and children are greeted individually on arrival and time is given to conversation.
- Children seek out and receive appropriate physical comfort and emotional reassurance when needed throughout the session.
- Very good supports for peer relationships were observed, such as explaining the intention behind children's actions, highlighting positive aspects of children's personalities to each other and linking children to each other in play.
- Very effective, gentle and consistent guidance is given to the children around positive behaviour.
- Each child is recognised as an individual and the practitioner sensitively highlights similarities and difference among the children, such as play interests and eye colour.
- A routine is in place and displayed for the practitioner. There is scope to offer a more balanced routine which would provide more effective support for the children's learning and development.

Actions advised

- In order to optimise support for the children's learning and development, it is advised that the daily routine be reviewed with a view to ensuring that a substantial, uninterrupted free-play period is provided each day. It is advised that the routine be displayed for children and families.
- In order to further support the children's developing sense of identity and belonging, it is advised that images of the children, their families and the local community be displayed and made freely available in the room.

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.
- In the past year, the practitioner has begun to integrate play-based approaches, linked to *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, into the service's long-standing Montessori curriculum.
- The curriculum is planned on medium-term and short-term templates where themes, specific activities and resources are identified. The children's emerging interests are not currently incorporated into the curriculum planning process.
- Samples of children's work and photographs are collected throughout the year and placed in a book for each child.
- Objective and detailed observations are recorded in relation to each child's learning as a learning story and links are made with *Aistear.* These are often shared with parents.

- The practitioner effectively uses a variety of interaction strategies to support the children's differing learning needs, such as playful engagement, acknowledging and supporting children's interests and gently challenging exploration and thinking.
- The indoor learning environment is large, bright and well-maintained. There is provision for some types of play such as, Montessori equipment, construction, puzzles, books and socio-dramatic. This could be further enhanced by provision for multi-sensory and creative play.
- The outdoor learning environment is large, has many natural features and offers a variety of play opportunities to support the children's physical development and engagement with the nature.
- Good support for early mathematical thinking and language was observed throughout the session and particularly during Montessori work time.
- Many supports for the children's language and literacy development are good, such as one-to-one conversations and a well-resourced reading area. Other strategies, such as formal phonics and pencil skills teaching times, are not matched to the children's current developmental levels.

Actions advised

- As part of the continuing development of the planning process it is advised that children's emerging interests be incorporated into curriculum planning.
- In order to provide a full range of play and learning opportunities in the indoor learning environment, it is advised that sensory and creative materials be made available such as, sand, water, play dough, art and mark-making materials. Introducing real props to the socio-dramatic play area and supporting children to engage in role play will further support their learning.
- It is advised that careful consideration be given to ensuring that strategies and activities used to support the children's communication, language and early literacy development are developmentally appropriate. A re-focusing on support for the children's oral language development is advised.

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 are well-settled in the service and were actively engaged in play and activities throughout most of the session observed. They display enjoyment and it is evident that they have fun in their play and interactions.
- The children are making active choices and decisions about what, where and who to play with.
- Many children are accurately using early mathematical language and exploring early mathematical concepts through playful engagement with materials.
- The children are developing skills to play in pairs, small groups and engage in full group activities.
- Many instances of children displaying independence and self-care skills were observed.
- The children often experience a sense of achievement in their activities and regularly and confidently call attention to what they have achieved and completed.
- The children's language development is good and all children would benefit from continued support for their oral language development.
- The children are developing some fine motor skills through the use of Montessori equipment and small manipulative materials. An increased range of resources and activities would further support the development of, hand and finger strength, dexterity and a wider range of manipulation skills.

Actions advised

- In order to provide developmentally appropriate support for the children's communication, language and early literacy development, it is advised that the teaching of phonics be reviewed and that consideration be given to promoting oral language through conversations, discussions and socio-dramatic play.
- It is advised that materials to support the children's fine motor, manipulative and creative development such as art, play dough, clay and mark-making materials be made available and accessible in the playroom.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- A strong ethos of teamwork and collaboration is evident in the service and the staff team articulate a strong commitment to delivering quality learning experiences for the children.
- The staff team review and share information informally at present and there is scope to enhance the review, evaluation and quality improvement processes.
- The service is a member of a professional body and is linked to professional support agencies, such as Monaghan County Childcare Committee.
- Information is shared informally with parents at the start and end of the pre-school session. Learning story observations, which are recorded for each child are given to parents throughout the year. A file is created for each child with samples of art work and photographs and this is given to parents at the year-end.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the staff team begin to meet to reflect on and review practice, policies and procedures in the service in order to improve learning experiences and outcomes for children.
- The service is advised to consider incorporating the children's learning stories into their individual files and to share this full record of learning and progression regularly with parents, inviting them to add feedback, information and comments.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The owner/manager and the early-years practitioner demonstrate a commitment to quality improvement and a very good capacity to implement the actions advised outlined in the report.

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	**Very good**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**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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Appendix

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The content of the report provided for easy reading. It is well formatted in explaining the strengths, positive approaches and styles currently used to care and educate the children in our service. This validates the work we currently do and is motivating for moving forward. The report provides actions on how we can work on improving and enhancing the quality of care and education we provide.

Everything written in the report was brought to our attention and discussed on the day of inspection. Changes have been made in adherence to the recommendations given for moving forward. We are committed to following through with the advised actions. We will also work together to reflect on practice and identify how to continuously promote quality care and education.

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 daily routine has been revised to allow for more free play .An example of our daily routine is now displayed on our wall but can vary to allow for changing interests and needs of the children.

Our short term planner includes the emergent interests of the children, ideas for this are gleaned from observations, discussions and verbal requests from the children. To support children's numeracy and literacy development we now predominantly focus using rhyme books, songs and stories. We ensure we have mark making materials such as a notepad and pen in all interest areas. We have introduced more story stacks and support communication and language skills during circle time and socio-dramatic play.

A family wall has been introduced at children's level. Photos are added regularly and are discussed both spontaneously and during circle time. Pictures of people in the community have also been added to interest areas of the room and can spark communication, discussion and group activities. Photographs of the children taking part in activities and play are now displayed around the room for children to view and identify their learning and interests. Children's learning portfolios are now given to the children to take home during term time. This has not only helped to build on our partnership with parents but promotes further discussion and expansion on activities as the children revisit and review their learning experience with their families.

The room has been rearranged with the addition of a sand and water tray, some more soft furnishings to the book area, real life and recyclable material to the home corner. A mark making area has been added to ensure playdough, paint, paper and art craft materials are available to the children at all times.

Although management and staff still have regular informal discussions on ways to enhance the quality of care and education and overcome challenges. We also plan and carry out a staff meeting every two months to formally discuss objectives and needs of the service.