An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Little Rascals
16WH0152

Church Road
Rochfortbridge
County Westmeath

Date of Inspection: 8th September 2017

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Rascals is a privately owned setting located opposite the local primary school in Rochfortbridge. It was established in 1997 and the manager of the service at the time of the inspection had taken on the role of manager within the previous year. The service provides a full day-care, two pre-school sessions and an after-school service. The inspection took place in the larger of the two pre-school rooms where there were twenty one children and two practitioners present. It is worth noting that, at the time of the inspection, while the majority of the children were in their second year of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, a small number of children were new to the service. 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 fair.
- There is a caring and warm atmosphere. The children and parents arrive at the setting and put their coats and bags into their assigned cubbyholes. The children say goodbye to their parents and happily join their peers.
- On the day of inspection, insufficient opportunities were provided for the children to choose and organise their learning and development activities. The children were expected to sit for lengthy periods of time, resulting in many of the children becoming disengaged and restless.
- Practitioners are respectful in their engagement with the children. Owing to the large number of children and the variety of ages and abilities within the group, the children would benefit from having a key person assigned to them.
- Snack time is a relaxed occasion where children talk amongst themselves.
- Some efforts have been made to support and nurture the children's sense of identity and belonging in the setting. Connections have been established with the local community, with regular visits from members of the community to the setting. On the day of the inspection, a local member of *an Gardaí* visited the service as part of a road safety week.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the structure of the daily routine be adapted to provide additional opportunities for the children to be actively involved in their play. A balance between active and sedentary activities is needed. It is also important that the children have greater opportunities to choose and organise their own learning and development experiences.
- It is advised that a key-person approach be introduced and embedded in practice. The tip sheet, 'Using a key person approach' in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is a useful resource in this regard.
- Practitioners are advised to utilise snack time as a social occasion and an opportunity to promote well-being and a healthy lifestyle. To this end, practitioners could sit with the children and engage in natural conversations that support and extend the children's communication skills.

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 fair.
- Curriculum planning takes account of various themes and seasonal activities. While a consistent approach to monthly curriculum planning is evident, that approach does not adequately incorporate the children's emerging interests. There are some links to the aims and goals of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.
- Observations of what each child knows and can do are carried out and are documented on a termly basis. Those documented observations are not shared with the children or their families.

- There are some defined learning spaces in the indoor environment. These provide opportunities for the children to engage in a variety of types of play including socio-dramatic play, construction play and small-world play. The positioning of the tables in the environment dominates the learning space, impacting on the quality of play experiences for children to be creative, curious and imaginative.
- The outdoor environment supports the development of the children's gross motor skills. It includes large tyres which provide appropriate challenge and risk-rich play.
- Specific attention is paid to the learning and development of children with additional needs. Practitioners frequently communicate with parents and health professionals to optimise support for these children.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to revisit *Aistear* to deepen their knowledge and understanding of what is required to implement an emergent curriculum that reflects the children's learning needs and interests.
- It is advised that a learning journal, reflecting the breadth of the children's learning activities and creations, be created for each child in collaboration with him/her. The journals could then be used to support the planning and implementation of an emergent curriculum.
- The practitioners are advised to review the indoor environment with a view to structuring it in a way that more effectively stimulates and supports children's learning. Furthermore, the children would benefit from being provided with a greater variety of multi-sensory learning experiences. To that end, the practitioners are advised to provide the children with access to water, sand and paint.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is fair.
- Some children experience success during their learning activities. This was illustrated as a child independently put on her own slippers. To mark this occasion, a practitioner initiated a 'High Five' while also giving praise and encouragement to the child for her actions.
- On the day of the inspection, regular conflicts arose amongst the children, with many of them becoming upset. The children need greater guidance and support from the practitioners in relation to developing the personal and social skills that will enable them to respond appropriately in different situations.
- Materials for creative art are not readily accessible to the children. There is scope for significantly developing opportunities for the children to express their feelings, thoughts, ideas and creativity through various media.
- Many of the children demonstrate enjoyment as they explore sound, rhythm and repetition through songs and rhymes.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners provide increased opportunities for the children to recall and reflect on their learning. This will help the children to experience success and to appreciate their changing and developing abilities.
- The practitioners are advised to create a culture where positive pro-social behaviours are supported, celebrated and acknowledged. The children need clear boundaries and limits in relation to acceptable behaviour.
- It is advised that creative materials be made freely accessible to the children. A broader use of open-ended art resources is advised in order to support the children's creativity, imagination and ability to express themselves in a variety of ways.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.

- Management and practitioners meet termly to reflect on and review their practice, policies and procedures.
- The views of parents are sought through the use of termly parent surveys. The survey findings are used to inform the practitioners' plans for provision in the service.
- The setting is a member of Early Childhood Ireland and avails of regular support from the Westmeath County Childcare Committee.
- Opportunities are made available to practitioners to take on a leadership of learning role in the setting. Management assist the practitioners in this regard and encourage the practitioners to evaluate policies and procedures.
- Information about the children's learning is informally shared with parents before and after the pre-school session. Parents also receive letters about activities that have taken place and events that are forthcoming. A stronger focus on children's learning and development is needed in the documentation that is shared between home and setting in order to support parents and families to be proactively involved as partners in the children's learning and development.
- Links have been established with the local primary school. The practitioners occasionally bring the children on walks to the school to prepare them for the transition to primary school. The primary school principal has visited the setting in the past in order to get to know the children and to enable them to recognise him.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to provide parents with regular information about their child's learning, development, and progress, including information about the child's evolving interests and learning dispositions.
- Management and practitioners are advised to revisit the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide*. In particular, exploration of the 'Curriculum Foundations' section is advised in order to support curriculum development and improvement in the setting.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The manager and both practitioners attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. Each of these professionals demonstrated an openness to feedback and a commitment to quality improvement. The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is good.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	**Fair**
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	**Fair**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Fair**
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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