An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Little Smarties
09DL0117

Station Street
Pettigo
County Donegal

Date of Inspection: 23rd October 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Smarties is a community based pre-school and after-school service located in the rural village of Pettigo, County Donegal. It provides one morning pre-school session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The pedagogical approach implemented in the setting is play-based and is underpinned by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. On the day of the inspection, the manager/leader, two practitioners and twelve children were present. The leader and one assistant attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. 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 excellent.
- There is a very warm, personable and respectful atmosphere within the setting. This is instantly created by the welcoming exchanges between the practitioners, the children and their families upon arrival.
- The morning handover indicates that parents and families are held in extremely positive regard and the well-designed welcome area provides a large, aesthetically pleasing space for natural conversations to flow.
- The daily routine supports the children's physical and social development very effectively. Frequent outdoor experiences and opportunities for playful peer exchanges promote the children's well-being throughout the session.
- Children are viewed as active participants in their learning with opportunities provided for them to assume responsibility through specified helper roles. These are visually displayed for ease of recognition.
- Snack time promotes a pleasurable, social and relaxed experience during which the children confidently discuss their experiences and family backgrounds with peers and the practitioners who are effectively positioned to support interactions.
- Transitions are smoothly organised. Effective strategies such as verbal cues, discussions and singing are used to purposefully engage the children as they move from one activity to the next.
- A key-person approach has been established in the setting to supportively foster secure relationships and nurturing interactions between practitioners and their key group of children.
- Commendable efforts are being made to promote the children's identity and belonging. Personalised images of the children and their creations are displayed to a wonderful extent throughout the building on coat hooks, on self-registration charts and on the display of *"When we learn we grow"*.
- The welcome area celebrates the children's identity further by displaying a stack of building blocks that have been individualised with each child's photograph. A display labelled "*Guess who it is?*" utilises photographs of the children's various body features to promote curiosity from the parents and children as they match and build the blocks. .
- The setting is extremely well integrated in the local community. For example, the local guard recently set up a checkpoint in the children's outdoor carwash area and regular opportunities are provided for the children to see the local postman and the librarian. There is continual parental engagement in the setting. A recent experience shared with the children involved a parent bringing a cup won by the local football team.

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.

- There is a broad-based curriculum in place informed by *Aistear*. Plans are structured on a long and short-term basis with some of the children's interests noted to inform weekly activities. There is scope to highlight provision made to meet the children's observed learning needs.
- Planning meetings are held regularly to review the activities provided and to evaluate them in terms of their effectiveness in supporting children's learning and their sustained interest.
- There is a variety of approaches used to support assessment including; developmental observations, learner records, action plans and observation records. Practitioners identify the next steps in the children's learning within the recorded observations.
- Practitioners view the children as highly competent learners. They develop their self-help skills through motivational encouragement and promoting their active involvement in the daily routine.
- The indoor and outdoor learning environments are very well-designed and inviting, providing children with a wide variety of play experiences each day, including construction, role-play and multi-sensory experiences in both play environments.
- The outdoor area is continually evolving with recent developments noted in the sensory garden and planting area. Further plans are in place for the provision of a mud-kitchen and an outside den.
- The children's physical fitness is promoted in the large outdoor environment. During this inspection, the children accessed the local forest for a long walk to view the signs of autumn.
- Emergent language is fostered through the use of story using puppets, rhymes and props to support engagement. Practitioners have established a system of 'book helpers'. These children are responsible for the daily upkeep of the book area.
- Practitioners utilise graphs to record the children's likes and dislikes, which supports literacy awareness and mathematical thinking. There were some missed opportunities to further such mathematical concepts and language during interactive conversations held between the practitioners and the children.
- Highly commendable efforts are being made to develop an inclusive approach within the pre-school. Of particular note are the creative resources developed to support the children and families with English as an additional language.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners develop the planning process so that short-term planning is more reflective of the children's emerging interests and learning needs. This will create tailored learning experiences connected to the recorded observations of the children's learning and development.
- Practitioners are advised to develop their use of extended vocabulary and mathematical language during interactions with the children.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- Children demonstrate sustained engagement and enjoyment in their learning throughout the session as they playfully interact in their preferred areas of play.
- Some children display confident dispositions and the ability to persevere with activities during play. They are creative and have the ability to make independent decisions about their learning, which allows them to experience success and achievement.
- Children's creations are stored in their personal drawers and their individual observations are contained within the practitioner's folder. There are missed opportunities to maximise the use of the children's individual scrapbooks in terms of commencing their compilation in September and by making them accessible to the children to support them in becoming aware of their ongoing learning achievements.
- Children encounter high-quality literacy experiences. During inspection they enthusiastically experienced a duo performance as one practitioner told the story of the 'Three Little Pigs', whilst another supported this through a dramatic interpretation using props.
- Children are beginning to reflect on their play at the end of the day, sharing their likes and play preferences with the practitioners and their peers.
- Children can express their ideas through role-play, creative activities and are developing an awareness of symbols, pictures and print within the literacy-rich environment.

- Strong friendships are forming as some children mindfully care for one another during play experiences. The majority of children are developing an awareness of the rules of play with some children needing extra support, relying heavily on the practitioners' guidance during minor conflicts.
- Children are making sense of the world through active, hands-on experiences in the local forest and the variety of experiences provided in the outdoor area. They are developing an appreciation of nature by identifying insects, planting in the outdoor area and experiencing the sensory garden.

Actions advised

- To further enhance the children's awareness of their developing capabilities and achievements throughout the year, they would benefit from regular access to their individual scrapbooks and discussions about the information contained within them.
- It is advised that the children need further strategies to support them in dealing with minor conflict independently. This will create a problem-solving approach to conflict resolution and extend the development of social skills such as turn-taking and co-operation in play.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- Practitioners engage in regular, ongoing practice review at specified meetings in which they create focused action plans. They have created a 'Toolkit Folder' in which they utilise the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to evaluate practice and improve outcomes for the children.
- There is a strong ethos of teamwork and dedication among practitioners which creates a smoothly organised session. Practitioners are very aware of their roles and responsibilities.
- The manager/leader has a vision to provide a high-quality service which is realised amongst all practitioners within the pre-school.
- Practitioners are committed to continuing professional development and continually engage in training to update and evaluate practice.
- Practitioners communicate effectively with parents. Newsletters are distributed fortnightly and frequent updates are posted on social media with regard to what the children are experiencing within the pre-school setting.
- Parents receive continual updates with regard to their children's learning. Learning stories are sent home for parents to view and a formal meeting is organised for each family within the final term. Significant efforts are made to communicate with parents and children for whom English is an additional language.
- Transitions into the setting are supported through the organisation of an open day for the parents and children to view the setting. Information to support the child in the settling-in phase is also obtained from parents.
- A strong relationship is established between the pre-school and the local primary school. The junior infant teacher visits the pre-school and children attend two events each year in the primary school. The practitioners send a summary of each child's learning with parental permission, to the primary school to support continuity of learning experiences during the transition process.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The leader and practitioners are strongly committed to the ongoing development of quality provision in the setting. The capacity to implement the actions advised is very good.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	**Excellent**
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	**Excellent**

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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