An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Maine Valley Childcare Services
09KY0069

Castlemaine Community Centre,
Tralee Road,
Castlemaine,
County Kerry.

Date of inspection: 08 November 2016

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Maine Valley Childcare Service is a community managed sessional and afterschool service located in Castlemaine Community Centre in County Kerry. It provides a morning only Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the morning of the inspection eleven children and three practitioners were present, one of whom is a community employment worker. The current supervisor was not available on the day of the inspection. 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
- There is a very warm, welcoming and caring atmosphere in the setting. Parents and children are greeted individually on arrival and there is time for friendly, spontaneous exchanges between the parents, the practitioners and the children.
- The practitioners are very sensitive and attuned to the various needs of the children. They know the children very well and effectively foster caring and respectful relationships through a key person approach.
- Praise, kindness and encouragement are typical features of the practitioners' responses to the children. For example, a child who was upset because his friend was not in was encouraged by a practitioner to open his lunchbox and sit next to another child and this had a very calming effect on the upset child. The practitioners meaningfully praised children as they assisted in tidying up and preparing for new activities.
- The children are active agents in choosing and organising their own learning activities within a well-prepared and resourced learning environment.
- Social interaction and healthy eating are encouraged and promoted during snack time.
- Children's developing sense of identity and belonging is supported through photographs of the children, including a large birthday chart, displayed in the room.

Actions advised

- To further support children's developing sense of identity and belonging, the creation of displays that depict their family life and life in the community is advised. This will help to foster more discussion with and amongst the children about their lived experiences outside of the service.
- The practitioners are advised to slow things down when changing from one activity to the next in order to ensure that all the children are ready for the change. It is important that children have adequate time to grasp and assimilate what is going to happen next. The 'Transitions' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* provides useful guidance on this point.

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.
- A thematic approach to curriculum planning currently exists. Plans are set out as a yearly cycle with broad topics covered every four to eight weeks. There is scope for developing a more emergent, enquiry-based curriculum.
- Free-play opportunities are available for forty-five minutes during the three-hour programme. During that free-play time, children explore materials and engage enthusiastically in self-initiated play themes. The materials are presented in a very orderly way and boxes are appropriately labelled. There is no provision for outdoor play. A large hall is available to the service four mornings per week.

- The practitioners respond very appropriately and sensitively to the children's needs and it is evident that they know the children very well. Many kind, pleasant exchanges were observed between the practitioners and the children over the course of the inspection.
- Children's emergent language skills are fostered through a language-rich environment. The practitioners encourage children to share their thoughts and ideas during circle-time and story time.
- An appropriate range of books is available to the children. How the books are displayed and presented is currently under review.
- Mark-making opportunities are effectively supported through the provision of two large blackboards in the room with a good range of writing materials.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to increase the time available to the children to engage in free play. Having the water, sand, playdough and painting available to the children during this time will optimise their play experiences.
- Curriculum planning needs to take greater account of the children's current and emerging interests, learning dispositions, knowledge and skills. To support the development of a more emergent, enquiry-based curriculum, practitioners are advised to take account of the guidance in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* in relation to planning and assessment. The identification of the children's interests and linking of these to the learning experiences and activities planned for them is important.
- The practitioners are advised to use the environment audit in the the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to review the layout of the room and ensure that its potential for supporting a variety of types of play can be maximised.
- Children would benefit greatly from playing more frequently in the large hall available to the service. In this regard, use of the hall to facilitate the children's engagement in energetic large movement play such as running, jumping, climbing, rolling and cycling is advised in order to support the development of their gross motor skills and spatial awareness.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- Children demonstrate enjoyment and engagement in their learning. The majority of the children present as motivated, confident in their own abilities, and interested in their play and learning activities.
- The children were observed taking turns, co-operating, and communicating effectively with one another and they also interacted positively with the practitioners.
- Overall, the children display a good capacity to ask questions, to respond to others, and to persist with tasks.
- Children experience achievement and success through the experiences and activities offered in the setting.
- Children name their feelings and clearly understand the setting's code of behaviour. They express their feelings, ideas and needs to other children and to the practitioners appropriately and are mannerly and caring towards one another.
- The children are gaining a good awareness of their local community and the roles different people have in that community.
- The children demonstrate a keen interest in taking responsibility for the environment and their own personal and hygiene needs.

Actions advised

- The children need more opportunities to recall and reflect on their activities and all the things they are learning to do. This can be achieved by building in a daily time for the children to recall the highlights of their day's activities and through the development of individual learning journals in collaboration with the children. The tip sheet, 'Documenting children's learning and development,' in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* provides relevant guidance in this regard.

- To support children in being creative, the practitioners are advised to provide more opportunities for the children to freely represent their ideas and understanding of the world through drama, movement, retelling stories, using clay and drawing. Increased emphasis on creative self-expression through art and mark-making (as distinct from work on templates) will be important for the development of the overall learning experiences of the children in this setting.
- To further develop the children's sense of responsibility for the environment, the practitioners are advised to develop a visual pictorial responsibility chart or jobs chart in consultation with the children.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is fair.
- There is some clarity about the various roles within the programme of activities in the setting but little evidence of an ethos of collaborative teamwork or partnership between staff and management.
- The setting recognises parents as the child's first educator. All parents receive, both formally and informally, information about the pre-school, the programme of activities, and their children's progress. There is a bulletin board for parents and healthy eating is promoted. Every year parents are invited to share their occupation or hobby with the children. A 'Come play with me' project where parents are invited to come into the service to play with the children is planned.
- The practitioners recognise the importance of supporting children in their transition to primary school and there are links between the setting and one primary school in the area.
- Commendable attention is given to establishing and maintaining practical connections with the local community. The children are brought to the post office regularly and the postman visits the service. The mobile library visits regularly and projects involving the elderly within the centre are often shared with the children.

Actions advised

- Management and practitioners are advised to have regular staff meetings to review the curriculum, and the organisational structures of the setting. Use of the resources in the 'Professional Practice' section of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will support such a review process.
- Consideration should be given to eliciting the views of parents and children about the activities in the setting. Practitioners are also advised to proactively consult with and involve the parents in discussion about their children's learning and development. The 'Partnership with Parents' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* offers useful guidance in this regard.
- To nurture an ethos of professionalism, teamwork, collaboration and partnership, management are advised to support the practitioners to share their views, to take a leadership role in promoting quality learning activities, and to be involved in the development and implementation of the curriculum.
- Management are advised to prioritise discussions with the building committee regarding the provision of a defined outdoor space in which the children can play.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

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	**Very Good**
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	**Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Good**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Fair**

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.

Published March 2017