An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Muire gan Smál
09KY0044

Presentation Primary School
Castleisland
County Kerry

Date of inspection: 7 October 2016

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Muire gan Smál is a community-based pre-school and after-school service that operates in a modified classroom in Presentation Primary School, Castleisland, Co Kerry. The manager, a lead practitioner and a community employment (CE) assistant facilitated the programme of activities for the thirteen children who were present on the day of inspection. 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 excellent.
- There is a very warm, welcoming atmosphere evident where children demonstrate great confidence in interacting with each other, with the practitioners and with visitors.
- The practitioners are very responsive and attentive to the children's needs and they provide them with regular affirmation and encouragement. This is done very gently and calmly by the practitioners. For example, on the inspection day when the children were going outside, the practitioner explained the rule of walking quietly through the school and then gave children the opportunity to share some reasons why they needed to walk quietly. When the group of children arrived outside the practitioners very respectfully affirmed them for following the rule; some received a high five or a 'well done' for walking quietly, others just a gentle touch or a smile as they ran off.
- The practitioners show sensitivity and a genuine warmth for the children; they engage in lots of natural spontaneous conversations where relevant, meaningful aspects of their lives are shared together.
- The children are given many opportunities to choose and pursue their own learning activities and interests.
- With great sensitivity and understanding, the practitioners support the children to self-regulate and to explore possible solutions to difficulties that arise. For example, when one child found other children's imaginative play disruptive of his play space where he was engaging with blocks, a practitioner acknowledged his difficulty and then very skilfully guided him towards coming up with a solution that might protect his blocks from getting knocked over. The child put a small row of chairs on the mat to create a barrier and then continued to play with the blocks.
- Transitions within the daily routine are skilfully and sensitively managed. The children are always alerted to the next activity and are awarded ample time to finish a previous activity before moving to the next one. The calm pace and tone used by the practitioners during transitions along with their use of strategies such as a timer, a rattle, gentle prompts and reminders help greatly in this regard.
- Opportunities are provided which bring together children, families and practitioners throughout the year at various celebrations and organised events.
- There are many fine examples of connections with the local community such as culture week, trips to the library and input and access to a community garden.

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.
- The programme of activities provided for the children is clearly underpinned by the principles of *Aistear; The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the Montessori approach. A child-initiated approach to learning within a well-prepared environment, supported and guided by attentive skilled practitioners are significant features of this setting.
- The practitioners have very well-written detailed plans linked to *Aistear* which are organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis. The development of an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum has commenced.

- Play is valued and promoted as the central medium of learning in this setting. The indoor space facilitates a variety of play including socio-dramatic, constructive and creative play, and children are given time to initiate play themes on their own, in pairs and in small groups.
- Children are given regular opportunity to use the adjacent outdoor area. This area has sand and water trays, a garden with grass, trees and places to hide, and a large tarmacadam yard in which children can develop their gross motor skills.
- A broad range of songs and rhymes in which children actively participate is used very well to develop early literacy and numeracy skills. The rich variety of mathematical and numeracy resources available in the setting are easily accessible and used purposefully by the children.

Action advised

- To further develop planning practices that reflect an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum, practitioners are advised to use the short-term planning template and the learning record template provided in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.* The planning of experiences and activities that are based on the children's current and emergent interests will result in activities that sustain the children's interest and motivation and are more relevant and meaningful to them.

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 very involved in their learning activities; they energetically avail of the many opportunities to participate in playful learning activities. They have great freedom to climb, run, imagine, be curious and creative, and to engage and connect with each other or be on their own. They enthusiastically follow their play interests indoors and outdoors.
- The children are very well in naming their feelings and understanding the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour. They are very good communicators and express their feelings, ideas and needs to other children and to the practitioner in a very appropriate way. Their respect and care for one another is striking.
- The children display very positive learning dispositions such as independence, self-control, a capacity for fun, perseverance in the face of challenge, and a willingness to try different ways of solving problems.
- Overall, the children are developing a positive understanding of their own identity and show some understanding of themselves as competent, capable learners.
- The children confidently initiate play with others; they co-operate with one another when playing.

Action advised

- The children need more opportunities to see themselves as capable and competent learners. In this regard, the development of individual learning journals created with the children is advised. The tip sheet, 'Documenting children's learning and development,' in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* provides relevant guidance and suggestions.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- Transitions into the service are managed in a way that ensures the children have some continuation and incremental progression in their learning at home and in the setting. A key worker system is used where each child has a key adult who takes time to get to know them and their families very well. The current enrolment form enables families to share information about their children's likes and dislikes, their strengths and interests, what and who they like to play with, the names of their immediate family and pets, and what comforts them when they get upset.
- This service has engaged in a number of initiatives that have impacted positively on the quality of practice including the *Buntús* programme, the three-step High/Scope model to help foster and promote children's self-regulation and problem solving skills, Busy Breaks and a Read with Me initiative which encourages families to read with their children at home.
- All staff members regularly engage in continuous professional development.

- There is great clarity about the various roles within the programme of activities in the setting and a very strong sense of collaborative team work among the staff team is evident. The manager is an excellent role model for the staff; she fosters a culture of reflection and demonstrates a great commitment to ongoing development of the quality of educational provision in the pre-school.
- The setting recognises parents as the child's first educator. All parents receive a comprehensive handbook about the pre-school and the manager and staff have developed practical strategies to involve families in the work of the setting, for example, through their shared notice board and individual text messages about the children's learning and development. Parents are also involved in culture week in the setting and other events and outings during the year.
- The setting has developed excellent links with the adjacent primary school in order to support children in their transition from pre-school to primary school.

Action advised

- To build on the very good practices that support ongoing improvement, it is advised that the manager and the practitioners use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to focus on further developing their practice with regard to sharing information with parents about their children's achievements and progression in learning.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the manager and practitioners to implement the actions advised above is very good as demonstrated in their constructive engagement in professional dialogue at the post-inspection feedback meeting and their commitment to ensuring the quality of provision for children's learning and development.

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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The report acknowledges what was identified with the inspector and the practitioners on the day. We feel it provides a true insight into the inspection day. The staff in the service are happy with the findings of the report.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to address the actions advised in the inspection report

Area 1
In the setting, the staff have introduced the use of action songs and sound mechanisms to engage the children in tidy-up time and transitional times. Children are now more involved in the routine by having little jobs in preparation for snack time and afterwards at clean-up time; this aims to encourage involvement and independence.

Area 2
Boxes of different sizes and shaped containers have been placed under both the sand and water trays; these are accessible to the children.

Area 3
A visual wall chart has been introduced showing the routine for each day. The activities on the chart are decided by the children in the mornings; this is flexible to support the children's interests and this is leading to more opportunities for shared discussion and participation by the children.

Area 4
Staff are undertaking training on the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to further develop and enhance their practice.