An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Pea Pods Childcare
10CY0107

Boreenmanna Road
Ballintemple
Cork City

Date of Inspection: 25th April 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Pea Pods Childcare is an urban setting in Cork City, privately owned and managed by three people. The setting provides full day-care, pre-school and an after-school service. Two practitioners and eighteen children were present on the morning of the inspection. A third practitioner covered the break times of the room leader and assistant. Two of the owners and one practitioner 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 fair.
- A caring ethos is evident where practitioners demonstrate warmth and sensitivity towards the children. As children arrive in the morning, practitioners are aware of their emotional needs and offer support and reassurance as needed.
- The current routine and procedures lack clarity and consistency. Neither children nor practitioners appear clear about the daily routine and as a result this creates a sense of uncertainty for the children. This was observed in practice by the way practitioners repeatedly left the room to get resources for an activity. As a consequence, some children appeared upset throughout the morning while other children lacked engagement in the learning activities made available.
- Some secure relationships are fostered between children and practitioners in the setting. Opportunities exist to strengthen the relationships with all children. The rotation of practitioners between groups throughout the week is affecting attachment negatively.
- Meal time is seen as a social occasion, with the children sitting and eating together. More focus needs to be put on the promotion of well-being and a healthy life-style.
- The children engaged well in the tidy-up time, sorting, pairing, matching and organising of the environment and the resources.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the organisation and procedures within the setting be reviewed to create and nurture a more consistently secure environment. The provision of a clear daily routine, which supports positive learning experiences for children, should be a particular priority. For example, it is important that practitioners are organised and prepared in advance of introducing a painting activity to children. Having paints, paintbrushes and paper which is easily accessible to children means less disruption to their quality of learning and supports their sense of security and belonging within the environment.
- Having consistent key practitioners working with the children every day is strongly advised.
- It is advised to review meal-times with a focus on well-being and the promotion of a healthy life-style. The food offered needs to be nutritious and sufficient for every child. It should be presented in an inviting manner, giving children autonomy in choosing a well-balanced and nourishing snack. Practitioners are advised to sit and eat with the children, to create a relaxed, family-like meal time atmosphere, conducive to small group conversation.

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.
- Planning currently focuses on themes related to seasons and festivities. It does not take account of children's varying interests or strengths and therefore does not inform the next steps in their learning experiences. This does not provide for proper continuity in their learning.
- Commercial learning journals are currently used in the setting as a form of assessment. This prescriptive form of assessment is mostly focused on group learning. There is insufficient emphasis on the individual child's dispositions, values, attitudes, knowledge or understanding.

- An appropriate balance between adult-initiated and led, and child-initiated and led learning and development activities is not currently in evidence.
- The indoor environment offers defined play areas and has great potential for play and exploration. However, the lack of preparation, care and attention to the resources results in the environment looking tired and uninviting.
- Children demonstrated enjoyment during their play. There is further scope to increase the opportunities for children to freely engage in a variety of types of play.
- Children are provided with regular opportunities to listen to and explore stories. On occasion the children were invited to become involved in the story, to share their ideas and to hypothesise about how the story might end.
- The programme of activities provides some degree of agency to the children in choosing and organising their own learning activities. There is a need for greater autonomy for children to support them in being active agents in choosing and organising their own learning and development activities.
- Open-ended questions and prompts were used throughout the day, but were frequently answered by the practitioner, not giving the children a chance to respond and think for themselves.
- Language, literacy and numeracy skills are fostered throughout the day. There is good scope to develop this practice by discontinuing the current emphasis on academic teaching methods and resources.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to carry out regular observations focusing on children's interests, strengths and learning dispositions. These observations should then be used to inform short-term planning of both small and large group activities. This will support the gathering of more comprehensive and individualised information about children's learning, which needs to be shared between home and the setting.
- It is advised that practitioners engage with the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, specifically the 'Curriculum foundation' pillar and the 'Assessment and planning' section. Strengthening practice in utilising assessment to plan emergent curriculum should be a particular priority. This will provide focus for an exploration of the values and principles, which underpin the curriculum which is provided for the children in the setting.
- The practitioners are advised to provide children with greater autonomy and independence in their learning. Children should be encouraged to actively choose and organise their learning and development. There should be a conscious move away from the current adult-led style of interaction.
- Practitioners are advised to adopt a more responsive and reciprocal approach in their work with children, by creating a more appropriate balance between speaking, listening and observing. The children's voice, their views, ideas, feelings, values and dispositions need to be acknowledge and acted upon more consistently throughout the day.
- The play value of both environments, indoors as well as outdoors needs to be evaluated and raised. The environments, materials, toys and resources need to be more effective to stimulate, support, consolidate and extend the children's learning and development. Therefore, multi-sensory resources must be provided which are accessible at child level, developmentally appropriate and inviting so as to facilitate appropriate learning experiences. The 'Environment' pillar of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is a valuable resource in this regard.
- It is advised to discontinue academic teaching practices and resources, such as 'colouring-in' sheets, template art and work books/sheets. Greater opportunities need to be provided for mark-making and supporting individual, unique, creative engagement with art and craft activities. A broad variety of songs, rhymes, finger-games, whole-body movement games and role-play should be provided. Utilising quality books linked to the themes and interests of the children, as well as the use of mathematical language and concepts linked to children's everyday lives is further advised.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.

- The children demonstrate enjoyment during some activities and are developing the ability to play in pairs and small groups. They are curious and interested in expressing their feelings, thoughts, ideas, uniqueness and creativity in a variety of ways. These include mark-making, making arts and crafts, storytelling, moving to and making music, singing and role-play.
- The children communicate their experiences, thoughts and ideas with others in a variety of ways. A lovely example of this was the fantasy story-chain, which one practitioner initiated. Some children enthusiastically joined in with and continued making up the story and developing it further.
- Some children show an understanding of and regard for the identity, rights and views of others. They are beginning to develop their personal and social skills, which enable them to respond appropriately to different situations, such as turn-taking, negotiating, co-operating and problem-solving.

Actions advised

- The daily routine needs to allow for the embedding of an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum, with the interaction strategies being refined and the play value of the environment being raised. This will allow for the children's personal, social and communication skills to be enhanced and developed.
- It is advised to provide more scope for children to make sense of their world by interacting with others and their environment through playing, investigating and questioning. The children need to be enabled to engage with, explore and experiment with their environment, using their developing physical skills to manipulate objects and materials. A well designed and organised outdoor play area will provide scope for this, as well as making children aware of the natural environment and its features, materials, animals and plants.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is fair.
- The management team meets monthly to reflect on practice and to plan. Whole team-meetings are held twice a year on an informal basis throughout the year.
- Some opportunities are provided to each practitioner in the setting to take a leadership role in promoting learning.
- Various two-way channels of communication between the setting and the families are established.

Actions advised

- More regular, formal, room internal staff meetings should be organised with one manager. These meetings should be used to review and reflect on practice and plan ahead. The outcomes of these meetings need to be documented in a purposeful manner, so they can be shared and acted upon to improve children's learning experiences and achievements.
- Management is advised to revise the ethos and mission statement of their setting and establish a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting, with regard to their ideas, believes and their view of the child. In-depth, regular engagement with all the sections of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, starting with 'Curriculum foundation' is necessary. Engaging external advisory support, such as Better Start is further advised.
- Effective strategies need to be put in place for staff and management to avail of continuous professional development.
- Practitioners are advised to consult with parents as the primary educators of their child and to regularly share information on children's learning and achievements with the families in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and transparency.

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	**Fair**
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	**Fair**
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.

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