An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Precious Times Playschool
09CC0073

Suaimhneas
Upper Bellmount
Crookstown
County Cork

Date of Inspection: 31st January 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Precious Times Playschool is a privately run, rural, sessional pre-school. Two practitioners provide early-years education for a maximum of twenty-two children each morning. On the morning of the inspection seventeen children were present. Both practitioners 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, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting can 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 good.
- A very caring ethos and a warm atmosphere are evident in the setting. The practitioners have a sensitive and positive regard for the children and their families.
- It is apparent that the practitioners know all the children and their families well. They show respect for the uniqueness of each child and foster caring relationships between all children attending the setting.
- Recognition, praise and encouragement are typical features of the communication between the practitioners and the children. Currently praise and encouragement are too outcome and achievement focused. For example, children tend to be praised mostly for completing number or letter work. Praise is not behaviour specific and is often restricted to 'good boy' or 'good girl'.
- The daily routine is meant to achieve good balance between long periods of child-initiated/led free-play time and shorter practitioner initiated/led activities. Physically active times are also meant to be varied with only short periods of passive concentration. Currently this does not happen in practice and needs to be followed through more consistently.
- Snack time is seen as a social occasion. This needs to be further developed to promote well-being and a healthy lifestyle.
- The children are supported to manage their own hygiene needs. Currently the practitioners tend to do a lot of personal care and life tasks for the children.
- One of the practitioners tidies up after the free-play time, while the children participate in the morning circle. This tidy-up time is a missed opportunity for learning and development.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to change the focus of their praise and encouragement to acknowledge and support individual and specific behaviours. There needs to be greater emphasis on positive social interaction and learning dispositions. Negotiating, turn taking, verbalising, persistence, resilience and self-confidence are all habits which need to be cultivated and promoted to a greater extent.
- Practitioners are advised to change the intended daily routine to provide for longer periods of uninterrupted free-play time, facilitated both indoors and outdoors. The children are to be allowed follow their own interests, lines of enquiry and dispositions. These activities should be both child initiated/led and practitioner framed. Practitioner-framed activities might include experiments and art and craft activities. These should be offered as a free choice to the children during these times. Activities which are more practitioner initiated/led, such as circle time, news, singing and nursery rhymes need to be shorter.
- It is advised that the children be allowed choose their own place to sit during lunch time. The practitioners could sit, eat and chat with the children during this time. Small-group conversations in a relaxed atmosphere are highly conducive to language acquisition. Well-being and a healthy lifestyle can also be promoted effectively in this way.
- Children need to be encouraged and supported to become more self-competent around their personal care needs. Life skills such as hanging up coats, opening lunch boxes, changing clothes and getting dressed to go outside need to be developed on an individual basis.
- Transition times, such as tidy-up time should be used to exploit positive learning experiences for the children. Tidying up toys, materials and resources autonomously, provide a broad variety of rich learning and development opportunities for children. These include the pre-mathematical skills of sorting, pairing, matching, organising and sequencing. Allowing children take responsibility for

tidying up also helps develop their self-competence, self-reliance and pride in achieving order and closure after playing.

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 broad-based long-term curriculum is documented and utilised to support children's learning and development. There is no evidence that children's emerging interests, dispositions, strengths and values are utilised to form the basis of curriculum planning.
- A variety of assessment approaches is used to gather information about children's learning and development.
- The lovely, bright and airy octagonal sunroom provides an interesting, inviting and aesthetically pleasing play space for the children. The patio doors lead into a secure outdoor play area, which would afford the children the opportunity to play indoor or outdoor by choice throughout the morning. Indoors, materials, toys and resources are accessible, developmentally appropriate and provide for multi-sensory learning experiences. These include a variety of literacy and numeracy resources.
- Individual and/or parallel play is currently most prevalent. Practitioners focus more on table-top activities than on interactive free play. Children's play can often be interrupted to do table-top work.
- Children's emerging literacy and numeracy skills are fostered through the use of songs, nursery rhymes, high quality books and stories. Some didactic methods of teaching an academic curriculum are employed. These include colouring-in sheets, tracing letters and numbers, and phonics.
- Through the natural, continuous use of Irish throughout the morning, children learn to appreciate the Irish language and gain an understanding of how languages can be used with different people in various situations.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to engage with the 'Assessment and planning' pillar of the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.* This will provide guidance on working with children's interests and embedding those interests into an emergent curriculum. The main priority should be to focus on recognising when learning happens through play. This rich source of learning should then be extended by allowing children to follow their own lines of enquiry and interest.
- The outcomes of assessment need to be utilised to form the basis for individual and/or group curriculum planning. This needs to be made visible in medium and short term plans.
- Practitioners are advised to regularly consult with and inform parents about their child's learning and development. This consultation should take place in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and transparency.
- Practitioners are advised to engage with the 'Environment' and 'Play' pillars of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide.* This will help in restructuring the indoor environment. The restructuring should include designing designated play areas, such as a home corner, a construction area, a cosy library corner or a junk-art table. The play value of the outdoor environment also needs to be enhanced. Materials and resources should be provided which offer autonomous exploration and enquiry based engagement in free play. Resources might include sand with buckets and spades; water, mud or den-building materials.
- Exploratory, interactive, child-initiated/led free play needs to become the central medium for children's learning and development. Practitioners are advised to facilitate this kind of play and to use appropriate interaction strategies to support learning during these activities. These strategies might include scaffolding, asking open-ended questions and co-constructing knowledge.
- Practitioners are advised to discontinue academic teaching methods. Everyday life situations such as cooking, baking and making playdough should be used to promote learning and early mathematical skills and language. Weighing scales, measuring tapes, note paper and pens should be provided in play corners. Adding a painting easel, offering blank paper and crayons, and playdough for mark-making would also enhance the learning potential of the environment. Using whole-body movement with the songs and rhymes, doing finger games and acting out stories are also advised as these activities are most conducive to instilling an early love of literacy in children.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children are motivated and interested. They demonstrate resilience and persistence in their activities and an eagerness for playful exploration.
- The children are inquisitive and have some awareness of the natural environment and its features. They avail of the opportunities offered to them to engage with, explore and experiment in their environment. They also develop physical skills by manipulating objects and materials.
- There is some evidence that children are engaged in a range of art and craft activities.

Actions advised

- There needs to be a concerted shift in emphasis towards a more play-based approach to learning. This approach should allow children follow their own particular interests and dispositions. It should emphasise the value of interactive and exploratory play which can be capitalised on by supportive practitioner interventions. Children's resourcefulness, initiative, self-reliance, self-confidence, decision making, reflection and judgement should be allowed to flourish through play. Play remains the most appropriate context in which to develop these personal and social skills in children of this age.
- Practitioners are advised to offer a broader range of art and craft activities. These activities are valuable opportunities through which children can express themselves creatively and display their uniqueness and individuality. Interactive story exploration, puppet-shows and role-play should be considered.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- The two practitioners reflect on their practice and the effectiveness of the procedures which they have put in place. This happens through daily informal chats. These conversations are not documented. Clearer strategies around professional reflection, mentoring support and continuous professional development need to be established.
- There are some formal and informal opportunities to exchange information with parents and families. These include a parental handbook, information letters about the current curriculum plans including songs and rhymes, a notice board and daily informal chats.
- Transitions into and from the setting are handled effectively and sensitively to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in learning for the children.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the practitioners set aside some specific time every week to formally reflect on their practice and review their procedures. The outcome of these reflections needs to be documented clearly. This is so they can be shared and acted upon to improve children's learning experiences and achievements. Keeping a daily diary for this purpose should be considered.
- In-depth engagement with all areas of the online *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is advised. Continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities should be considered carefully. CPD in the area of 'emergent curriculum' and 'learning through play' should be particular priorities.
- Practitioners are also advised to engage with *Síolta* with regard to including the voice of children and their families when decisions about education are being made.

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	**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	**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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection **activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

- We have reduced the amount of 'mothering' we do for our children, we are allowing them to become more self-reliant.
- We have reduced the amount of academic work we do with our children, but we are delighted Irish language is not included in this. We are very happy to the positive reference to Irish in the Inspection Report.
- We are as much as possible letting the children sit where they wish at lunch time.
- We have improved our documentation and we are documenting and formalising meetings. We are documenting decisions and follow up paying particular attention to Aistear and Siolta.
- We are offering less direction and more choice in play too. We are observing play and documenting this. We are developing our curriculum around observations.
- We are now taking lots of photographs during sessions of children at play. We are displaying these photographs and also giving copies to the parents. We are finding these photographs great for planning, communicating with parents and support of documentation. We were advised to do above during the inspection and we are delighted with the results.