An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Shining Stars Academy
Coneyboro
Athy
County Kildare

15KE0353

Date of Inspection: 06 June 2017

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Shining Stars Childcare facility is located in the town of Athy and has been in operation under its current ownership since 2015. It provides three sessions for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Eleven children were present on the day of inspection together with three practitioners. The owner and manager were present for 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 very good.
- The atmosphere at the setting is friendly and warm with children and families greeted kindly upon arrival. Relationships between the practitioners, children and families are respectful and responsive.
- A daily routine and an effective key worker system are in place. Children are aware of the routines of the day. A visual aid board supports children with additional needs in connecting with the routine. The children are involved in their own roll call, counting themselves in. This fosters their independence.
- The practitioners very effectively encourage good behaviour amongst the children. A choice board based on red for poor choices and green for positive choices displays photographs of behaviours expected and behaviours that are not encouraged. Photographs of how to be a good friend are also on display. Commendably, the children as a group have devised the service rules.
- The practitioners encourage the children to make choices and decide the order of activities as a group. This supports their sense of team.
- The children move easily between activities. Verbal cues and wind-down strategies are very effectively used in this regard.
- Snack time is used as an opportunity for open-ended, friendly and relaxed conversations. Healthy eating is promoted. A helper system is in place for the children to give out place mats and for cleaning up after lunch.
- The practitioners very effectively nurture the children's sense of identity and belonging in a variety of ways. For example, there are photographs of children and their birthdays on display; the children create their own individual placemats; and the service celebrates the children's diverse cultures. Some children are teaching the practitioners and peers words in their home language. Children's faces are displayed on the maps of the countries their families have come from. The children have also created their own family wall which includes photographs and drawings of themselves and their handprints.
- Very good opportunities are provided to bring together families, children and practitioners in the setting. Parents are invited into the service to share their talents, skills and cultures. Recent visits include that of a farmer with baby animals and quail eggs, a member of the defence forces, and a paramedic. The tasting of food from different cultures has also taken place. Families and extended families are invited to graduation, to a Christmas party, an Easter egg hunt and a Halloween event.

Action advised

- Building on the very good strategies already in place, it is suggested that links with the community such as photographs and displays of the local area and community roles be provided to extend children's sense of identity and belonging.

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.
- Provision in the setting is informed by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.*
- Planning is very effectively organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis. Children's strengths, interests, needs and dispositions are used to inform the planned curriculum. Each week a group meeting is held with the children to discuss the plans for the following week. This is commendable practice in the context of developing the children's decision-making skills.
- A variety of assessment methods is used regularly to build a rich and informative picture of the children's learning and development. Assessment approaches include regular observations that inform plans for the next steps in the children's learning, and the compilation of individual learning portfolios and photographs of the children engaged in activities. The information derived from the observations of the children is shared regularly with parents.
- The indoor environment has been recently renovated and provides extensive opportunities for the children to engage in different learning experiences. An art area, construction area, nature area, some Montessori resources, a kitchen with real items and a role play area are in place. The role-play area is adapted regularly based on children's emergent interests and practitioners' ideas. At the time of the inspection, the children with their practitioners had set up a rainforest using an old army tent and a sensory rain forest box. In the accessible and very well-resourced library area, a book, 'Facts about the rainforest' had been created with the children to consolidate their learning experiences. The children have also created a picture book on 'how to be kind to each other'. The environment is print rich throughout with a wide variety of literacy and numeracy resources available. Books are rotated purposefully and regularly.
- The inviting outdoor environment includes ample space to play and has different surfaces such as grass, bark, sand and clay to support sensory development. It includes a raised area with a slide and tunnel, tyres for swinging on, varied ball play opportunities such as football and basketball, numerous ride-ons, a mud-pit and opportunities of mark making. Tree stumps are placed strategically for children to walk on, thereby promoting their balance and co-ordination.
- There is a very effective balance between child-directed and adult-directed activities.
- Interactions are very supportive of the children's learning. Rich child-child conversations were observed at a food tasting exercise as children explored where coconuts come. The practitioners scaffold and build upon the children's language; for example, they alerted the children to the fact that 'potassium is found in bananas' and explored the concepts of sweet and sour by comparing fruits such as a pineapple and coconut. A 'buddy' system whereby children recognise and celebrate the achievements of other specific children is in place. On the day of inspection, some children regularly looked to the practitioners to resolve minor differences that arose between them.
- The practitioners are particularly responsive to children with additional needs. For example, a visual aid board to support communications is in place and the service works in partnership with outside agencies to support those children. Practitioners also work closely with parents of children with additional needs using a daily communication journal.

Action advised

- Building on the very good strategies already in place, it is suggested that adults wait before stepping in to resolve the minor differences that occur naturally from time to time between children. Practitioners are advised to encourage the children to resolve their differences themselves. It is further advised that the choice board illustrating good behaviour choices be presented more simply to the children so that it can more easily be accessed and understood by all.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children demonstrate great enjoyment in their learning. They particularly enjoyed playing football and digging outdoors. On the day of the inspection, a group of children enjoyed dying pasta and creating different patterns with it, thereby supporting their colour recognition. Some children creatively used baby wipes to create butterflies. The children also very confidently and creatively

recreated the recent renovation works they observed happening at their service in their play. In so doing, they collaboratively used the wealth of building props provided in their construction area such as paint brushes, measuring tapes, a spirit level and hard hats.

- The children are supported to be aware of their feelings, through a range of props such as books about feelings, and a mirror which is used to stimulate discussion and support emotional well-being. Again furthering their own sense of self-esteem and identity, the children have been involved in cutting out photographs and articles from magazines that are meaningful to them; those photographs are then displayed for them. For example, one child had chosen a photograph of a queen for display as it reminded her of her granny.
- The children make decisions about their own learning. They manipulate open-ended materials such as sticks, stones, and pebbles in their play. In their rainforest role play, they became explorers and navigators.
- The children communicate and express themselves competently in different ways. They have created their own picture books about different experiences at their setting; these are available to them in the library area, thereby giving them an opportunity to continuously reflect on previous learning experiences. The children engage in regular yoga with a range of musical resources such as drums and tambourines. Their communicative capacity is again reflected in their recent group drawing of their view of the galaxy and their comments which are carefully scribed by the practitioners on the images.
- The children have continuous access to visual representations of their own learning. Their learning portfolios are on display for them with their photographs to facilitate this and the children look at their own portfolios regularly. Some of the children's process art and drawings have been laminated for them with their comments and are on display around the room.
- The children show respect for their environment and resources. They tidy up willingly and are affirmed by the practitioners for doing so.
- The children are afforded time to recall and reflect on their learning experiences before going home and are very effectively supported to discuss their plans for the next day.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Very good organisational systems are in place to support the smooth running of the service. These include regular support and supervision meetings, management support, and team building exercises.
- The reflective practitioners work as a team and discuss practice informally daily. Documented staff meetings are held monthly to discuss planning and reviews of practice.
- The service engages with the local County Childcare Committee and is a member of different voluntary organisations that support children's development and learning. Through the local County Childcare Committee, management and practitioners at the service liaise with other childcare services to support best practice and to share ideas.
- Practitioners at the service engage in regular continuous professional development. At the time of the inspection, a staff member was engaging in the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme. All staff at the service have availed of training in *Aistear* and *Síolta*.
- Systems for communicating with parents are very good. Parents are welcome to drop into the service at any time. A comprehensive handbook is provided for parents. Very good efforts are made to communicate with parents and families whose first language is not English. For example, the welcome information pack is available in the home language of individual parents.
- Information about the children's learning is shared very effectively with parents. A key worker system is in place whereby one practitioner is assigned to a small group of children; this enables the practitioners to get to know the children very well and to become familiar in an in-depth way with their learning and development. Termly newsletters and social media are also used to communicate the learning activities of the children. In addition, a whiteboard display for parents is located outside each classroom; group learning stories are displayed on this. Parent-practitioner meetings are held twice a year. Information derived from the observation of the children and

children's individual learning stories are shared regularly with parents. Informally, practitioners connect with parents on a daily basis about their child.

- Parents are very involved in supporting the work of the service. They provide resources such as the music items for outdoors. They are involved in review of provision in the service. This takes place through a purposeful comments and complaints policy and through a yearly survey seeking their views about their children's experiences. A parents' area in the hallway provides seating, a parents' notice board, and magazines about a range of childhood topics together with links to community events.
- Children are supported to transition into the setting from home through a phased settling-in period. Each parent completes a detailed questionnaire about their child to support staff to get to know each individual child prior to starting. An open evening is held with new parents. The children are supported to transition to primary school through purposeful conversations and strategies such as the inclusion of local school uniforms in the dress-up area.

Action advised

- It is advised that links with local primary schools be developed to support children starting school. The development of a transitions policy documenting the very good strategies currently in place to support children transitioning into and out of the service is further advised.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good. The practitioners show a very good commitment to the continuous improvement of practice at the service.

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	**Very good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Excellent**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Very 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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