An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

St Oliver's Pre-school
09KY0115

St Oliver's National School
Ballycasheen
Killarney
County Kerry

Date of Inspection: 22 November 2016

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

St Oliver's Pre-school is a community pre-school located in St Oliver's National School. On the morning of the inspection there were seventeen children present in the room in which the inspection was conducted. For the vast majority of those children, English is an additional language. Three 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, 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 good.
- A caring ethos is evident. The practitioners have a positive regard for the children and their families. Recognition, praise and encouragement are regular features of the practitioners' responses to the children.
- Caring and respectful child-child relationships are fostered effectively.
- The children are competent in managing their own personal hygiene and care needs.
- Transitions between activities show good engagement by the children and are supportive of positive learning experiences for them.
- Respect for and recognition of the uniqueness of each child is evident in the displays as well as in the interactions. This was illustrated, for example, in the meaningful conversations about constructions that the children had made.
- Snack time is utilised as a social occasion.
- The daily routine currently offers a good balance between physically active, child-initiated/led activities and practitioner-initiate/led concentration times.
- Some of the practitioner-initiated/led circle time is quite long and not suited to the attention span of pre-school children.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are encouraged to sit, eat and converse with the children during meal time. These informal, small-group times in a relaxed atmosphere during a meal together provide opportunities for children and practitioners to listen and to communicate, a very important factor in the language development of pre-school children. Everyday food items such as carrots, apples, bananas, and sandwiches provide a variety of conversation topics and can be used for language acquisition and expansion, in a simple yet effective way, when they are repeated daily.
- In order to offer more agency and autonomy to the children in choosing and developing their learning activities, the whole indoor environment needs to be available during the morning indoor free-play time. This will provide opportunities for the children to engage in a wider variety of play such as socio-dramatic play, construction play, role play, and table-top activities such as jigsaws, drawing, matching, working with the Montessori materials, and arts and crafts. Extending free-play time and amalgamating it with the activities now offered during large-group time will facilitate the giving of more choice and agency to the children.
- As the attention span of pre-school age children is on average no more than fifteen minutes, practitioner-initiated/led activities need to be interesting and interwoven with some whole-body movement elements. Singling out individual children to make contributions during practitioner-initiated/led activities is more suited to school-age children, while whole-group activities are more suitable for pre-school children.

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, loosely informed by *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework,* is implemented.
- Children's varying, emergent interests are recognised and partly utilised to extend their learning and development. Several assessment approaches are used to gather information about children's learning experiences, their development and their achievements. The information gathered through these approaches is documented in various ways in the setting. The process of gathering information about the children's dispositions, skills, interests and overall development needs to be more systematic and the information needs to be documented in a methodical way. This information can then be used to inform short-term curriculum planning in an individual, meaningful way. It can further be shared with parents in a spirit of mutual respect and transparency, thereby enabling parents to be involved as partners in their child's learning and development.
- It is evident that the children are viewed as competent, confident learners and are recognised as active agents in their learning.
- The practitioners know the children very well; they generally engage and motivate them in a very respectful and caring way. In conflict situations, a calmer and more respectful approach in which children are more actively involved in resolving their differences would be more effective.
- The indoor environment is well structured and resources are used effectively to stimulate and support children's learning and development. The children can go for lovely walks around the school campus to the little woodland area and to feed the chickens. The play value of the courtyard, which is used some days for outdoor play, needs to be improved by adding a permanent sand play area with loose versatile materials for imaginative play, role play and construction play. Organising waterproof clothing and boots to be kept at the pre-school would enable year-round daily outdoor play which is essential for children's health and well-being.
- Play is used as the main medium for learning in the setting and the practitioners skilfully facilitate play.
- Children regularly enjoy and share a variety of rhymes and songs and have access to high quality books. Storytime needs to be used more efficiently by letting the children explore the story, looking at the pictures, making predictions, and using their own words to tell what they see. This is particularly important for language acquisition. Working with one high quality story for a week or more, where it is explored for a few days and then acted out or played as puppet show, will deepen children's understanding and learning. Extending this through art and craft activities linked to the story will further benefit development. In general, the use of props, visuals, pictures, actions, whole-body movement games, role-play and puppet show will aid language acquisition and literacy development.

Actions advised

- The curriculum needs to be reviewed with a focus on following children's interests on the one hand, while also following a thematic, medium-term and short-term curriculum plan which works as an overarching guide for all the activities, on the other hand. For example, the theme of the inspection day was around birds in the winter, migration and mainly the red robin. This could have been followed by a song or rhyme about a red robin and subsequently with a story about a robin. This would make it easier for the children to understand and learn about this bird, particularly given the high percentage of children whose first language is not English. Arts and craft activities can further deepen the understanding around a particular theme while also supporting the development of other skills.
- Practitioners are advised to engage with the Assessment and Planning section of the *Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide*, as well as the Curriculum Foundation section, which provides valuable information around curriculum planning.
- Exploring conflict resolution strategies with a calm, inclusive approach is recommended.
- The courtyard used for outdoor play needs to be developed to provide more play value to the pre-school children. The environmental audit in the *Aistear/Síolta Practice Guide*, is a very useful self-evaluation tool and of assistance in planning good quality play areas.
- Daily interactive exploration of a high quality story is advised in order to aid language acquisition and literacy.

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 present as very confident and competent and show great enjoyment of and mastery in their activities. They display initiative, self-reliance and positive learning dispositions such as resilience, resourcefulness and persistence.
- The children are able to play co-operatively in pairs and in small groups and have developed essential personal and social skills, for example, the skills of turn-taking, negotiating, taking responsibility and building relationships. Those skills are enabling the children to respond appropriately to different situations.
- The daily use of whole-body movements games, nursery rhymes, high quality stories and books, puppet shows, role-play, together with plenty of provision for mark-making, such as free drawing, painting, and modelling with playdough, will foster pre-literacy and numeracy skills. Practitioners' use of mathematical language in everyday situations will further aid pre-numeracy skills. That approach can replace the use of academic teaching methods such as flash cards and letter tracing which are not beneficial to learning in the early years.
- Verbal and non-verbal communication strategies are used by the children. Different languages are used and understood by the children in order to communicate during free play, to negotiate, to problem solve, to recreate roles and to clarify thoughts and feelings.
- Through their frequent walks and visits to the hens, the children are aware of the natural environment and its features, plants and animals.
- The children are very well able to use their developing physical skills to manipulate objects and materials. This was particularly evident during the inspection when some children constructed a large train out of the chairs and a boat using rods.

Action advised

- It is advised to replace academic teaching methods with more early-years appropriate, child-centred, multi-sensory methods, where the children are active agents in their learning and development.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Management and staff regularly reflect on and review their practice in order to improve learning experiences and outcomes for children. This is done through daily informal chats, making daily notes and weekly whole-team meetings.
- The system for the smooth organisation of educational experiences and activities in the setting needs to be reviewed. The current practice of changing the assistant between the two morning sessions weekly is not constructive. The children need consistency to be enabled to establish secure relationships with their role models.
- Clear two-way channels of communication are fostered between the practitioners and the families. This is reflected in the warm and respectful informal conversations at drop-off and pick-up times, as well as through the many formal ways the setting exchanges information with the parents and families in the best interest of the children.
- Transitions into the setting at the start of the pre-school year and transitions from the setting to primary school are managed sensitively, yet effectively, to ensure continuity of experiences and progression in children's learning and development.

Action advised

- The leader needs to foster a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting and to put appropriate systems into place for the smooth organisation of the setting. This includes clarity around the roles and responsibilities of practitioners with regard to educational activities and effective strategies to support continuous professional development.

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	**Very Good**
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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