An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION - FOCUSED INSPECTION

REPORT

Service Name	Stepping Stones
Service Address	Easkey Sligo County Sligo
DCYA number	14SO0115

Date of Inspection: 08-05-2018

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agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

WHAT IS AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION-FOCUSED INSPECTION?

The Early Years Education-focused Inspection (EYEI) model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to education provision in a pre-school service participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. These inspections affirm good practice and advise actions, where appropriate, to aid the further development of education provision in the service.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of the context to support children's learning and development
2. Quality of processes to support children's learning and development
3. Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
4. Quality of management and leadership for learning

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the service's provision in each area.

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Date of inspection	08-02-2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with service manager • Meeting with practitioners • Observation of interactions during one pre-school session	 • Interaction with children • Review of relevant documents • Post-inspection feedback with the service manager and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SERVICE

Stepping Stones, established in 2014, is a private, sessional pre-school. It is operating in a former primary school building located in the rural village of Easkey, County Sligo. The pre-school offers one morning session to children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection there were sixteen children, one leader/owner and two assistants present. The owner and the two assistants 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 very good.
- The atmosphere is warm, caring and friendly. Respectful and sensitive exchanges occur between the practitioners, the children and their parents upon arrival.
- There is a daily routine in place which promotes a variety of experiences for the children. Although the routine allows for some physical activity, the current organisation of the experiences creates an unintended period of sedentary learning for the children.
- Snack time is a relaxed, social experience where pleasant interactions occur between the practitioners, the children and their peers. Practitioners position themselves strategically to engage in naturally flowing and meaningful conversations with the children.
- The transition from snack-time to story-time is effectively managed. The children self-select from books in the library, remaining engaged until all children join the area for large-group story-time. Other transitions such as the transition to snack and when washing hands were less effective in sustaining the children's engagement, creating periods of waiting for the subsequent activities to occur.
- A key person system is in operation whereby the children are assigned an identified practitioner who undertakes regular observation of their learning and development. This approach supports close relationships between the children and the key practitioners and adds to the emotional security that the children are developing in the setting.
- Practitioners are encouraging of the children's efforts and they motivate them in their learning using affirming commentary. Conflict resolution is supported by prompting the children to reflect and to independently problem-solve possible solutions.
- The children's sense of identity is nurtured strongly. A photographic display of each child's family tree, displays of the children's creations and individual learner journals promote the children's sense of belonging within the pre-school.
- Parents have numerous opportunities to come into the setting to share in events with their children such as at Halloween, Christmas, Easter and for the annual graduation event. Invitations are extended to the children's parents and siblings to accompany the children on outings or to experience the visit of a mobile farm to the pre-school.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners review the organisation of the activities in the daily routine to provide for more regular physically active learning experiences for children throughout the session.

- It is advised that practitioners minimise the waiting times experienced by the children and promote their purposeful engagement during the various transitions within the routine.

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.
- There is a broad-based curriculum in place informed by *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Plans are structured on a long, medium and short-term basis. Planning highlights some of the children's recorded interests.
- Practitioners complete observation records frequently and outline future plans for progressing the children's learning. As yet, these are not visibly connected to the learning experiences.
- Each child has an individual learner journal in which some observations and paintings are collated. Parents are made aware that they can view these journals at any time with the children regularly instigating parents' viewings when showing them a piece of individual work. The children's creations are also displayed in the entrance hallway and within the pre-school room for the children and parents to observe.
- Practitioners provide some opportunities for the children to develop independent competencies for example, when selecting activities at free play, when getting their lunch at snack-time and when encouraged to put on their coats.
- Practitioners encourage and motivate the children in a respectful and sensitive manner using strategies such as modelling and scaffolding to support their learning. Practitioners are responsive to the children's requests and interact playfully with the children when invited to participate in group and paired play situations.
- The indoor environment is well-defined with various areas of play provided. These include an area for mark-making, table-top activities for fine motor development, a book corner and a home corner. During the inspection, the outdoor area was accessed towards the end of the session. The children had access to an authentically resourced mud kitchen, a see-saw and a soft play area for vehicles. Although multi-sensory experiences were offered in the outdoor kitchen, children did not have access to a range of these experiences during free-play.
- Practitioners model mathematical language naturally during play and encourage extended vocabulary during role-play, songs and story-time. Practitioners support the children to make connections between their previous and new learning during large group discussions.

Actions advised

- It is advised that planning become more emergent and enquiry-based, guided by recorded future plans and practitioners' spontaneous observations of the children's interests. This will support appropriate progression in the children's learning.
- It is advised that practitioners promote further opportunities for the children to develop independent competencies and self-help skills.
- Practitioners are advised to provide a range of accessible, multi-sensory and open-ended learning experiences during the session to further extend the children's creativity, exploration and thinking skills.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- Children demonstrate enjoyment in their learning as they playfully interact during the memory-game, in story-time and when playing in the outdoor mud-kitchen.
- Children display dispositions such as self-confidence and imagination when engaging in peer discussions about their perceptions of 'college'. Children are acquiring the skill of persistence when participating in fine-motor activities such as making jigsaw puzzles during free-play.
- Children organise their own play experiences during free-play opportunities within the routine. Two children demonstrated particular interest and curiosity within the sensorial experiences on offer in

the mud kitchen. There were minimal opportunities for open-ended and investigative activities within the daily experiences

- Children are developing strong friendships and are developing the ability to co-operate, turn-take and collaborate during play.
- Children experience lots of success and take pride in sharing their creations and achievements with their peers and the practitioners.
- Children have the opportunity to look through their journals during the session. The observations contained within the journals are very similar in nature and do not represent a unique and holistic picture of the children's learning journeys.
- Children show an appreciation of their uniqueness and demonstrate a sense of belonging within the pre-school. They confidently describe personal experiences to the practitioners and to their peers. They are developing an awareness of community roles through visits from the Garda for Road Safety Day, the fire brigade and the mobile library.
- Children demonstrate developing communication skills when posing inquisitive questions to the practitioners about their backgrounds and when sharing their knowledge about the role of people in the community such as the doctor, plumber and electrician. Some children demonstrate a great interest in number and show an awareness of their competencies when counting using the wall display with their peers.
- Children have the opportunity to explore the Irish language when counting, naming parts of the body and in other activities during the session.
- Children are developing an awareness of nature and the natural environment through outdoor play, visits from the local farmer and his lambs and when the 'Farmyard in your schoolyard' visits the pre-school with a variety of animals.

Actions advised

- Children would benefit from further opportunities, both indoor and outdoor, for exploration, investigation and problem-solving to promote sustained engagement in play.
- Children would benefit from organised opportunities with their key-person to reflect on and discuss the learning contained within their individual journals. Recording unique information with regard to each child's dispositions, learning needs, interests and experiences would enhance this experience.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- There is a strong ethos of professionalism, collaboration and partnership in the setting whereby practitioners are keenly aware of their roles and responsibilities.
- Practitioners engage in weekly planning meetings to facilitate an organised approach to the daily activities on offer and to informally evaluate practice. They are committed to engaging in frequent continuing professional development. They have participated in *Aistear/Síolta* training and in *Supporting Resilience in Children* to support the delivery of quality learning experiences.
- The owner/leader is dedicated to promoting high-quality provision for children. To achieve this, she has previously welcomed mentoring support from the local County Childcare Committee in relation to the review of numeracy and literacy activities within the pre-school.
- Parents are welcomed to contact the setting at any time, with the majority of parents requesting a formal meeting in the final term to discuss the transition to primary school. Further informal and formal communication with parents throughout the year would be beneficial.
- Parents are made aware of the policies and procedures within the information booklet provided upon registration in the pre-school.
- Transitions into the setting are supported through an annual open day and visits to the pre-school prior to the children attending at the beginning of the term. Settling in is facilitated using a phased approach if required, to promote the children's comfort and security during this period.
- The practitioners have developed professional relationships with local primary schools. Communication occurs in relation to annual open days and with regard to the children transitioning to school. Practitioners complete an '*All about me'* booklet for each child, sharing information with regard to their learning with primary teachers to support the transition process.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners' weekly meetings include consistent and organised evaluation of practice. The *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* could be utilised to reflect on improvements and to support the documentation of relevant action plans. Collaborating with parents during review processes will further enhance this work.
- It is advised that additional measures to support consistent communication with parents be adopted. This will enhance a collaborative approach to the sharing of information with regard to the children's learning and overall development.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good given the strong commitment of the manager and staff to the children in their care.

Summary of Overall Inspection

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	**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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