An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Stepping Stones
13GY0354

Tierneevin N.S
Gort
County Galway

Date of Inspection: 18th December 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Stepping Stones Tierneevin is a private service which has been in operation since 2012 and located on the grounds of Tierneevin National School in a prefabricated building. The service provides a sessional pre-school for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme and an after-school session for school-going children. The service previously operated as a sole practitioner and has recently expanded with the addition of a second practitioner in the pre-school room. On the day of inspection, the manager/practitioner and the second practitioner were present with eight children. 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.
- A warm atmosphere welcomes children and parents to the setting. Relaxing music is played in the background and practitioners greet each child and parent, taking time to listen to their stories and news.
- Practitioners know the families well and demonstrate knowledge of children and their home life.
- The daily routine is shared with children and parents: A visual timetable is displayed and used effectively to support the children and a notice board for parents features a detailed routine of the daily activities.
- Verbal reminders and songs are sometimes used to signify an upcoming transition within the daily routine.
- Children are encouraged to put their own lunches in the fridge and put on their coats for going outside. A jobs rota is displayed on the fridge for different children to have a 'helper' at different times every day: these jobs include handing out the bags at lunch time.
- The daily routine is flexible and can change as children express their interests on what it is that they would like to do. A few children became restless during the table-top and seated activities at times during the day after they had been engaged for quite a while.
- Snack time is a very calm, social occasion where the practitioners and children sit together to eat and converse.
- A folder containing images of the children's older siblings from the connected primary school and class photographs of the past pupils of the service are displayed on the wall. The photographs support conversation between children about their family members and friends who are attending the local school and who they see frequently in the school yard.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the practitioners give clear consistent messages during times of transition within the daily routine. A verbal reminder that tidy up time is approaching, or time to go outside is approaching along with the use of the timer will support children to effectively manage their time and be aware and prepared for change.
- It is advised that practitioners review and monitor the daily routine to ensure there is a balance of experiences that provide opportunity for the children to engage in active movement in between the periods of sitting for story time, lunch time and table-top activities.

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.
- Planning for the programme of activities is informed by *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and is organised on a long, medium and short-term basis.
- Practitioners reflect on the responses of individual children after planned group-learning experiences by documenting anecdotal notes using children's initials to identify tailored individual

support going forward. A key person system is currently being established to support the strengthening of key relationships with practitioners so that meaningful information is captured on each child's developing personality, dispositions, knowledge and skills.

- The practitioners use very deliberate and appropriate strategies to foster high-quality interactions with children and between children. These include skilful questioning, active listening, prompting and encouraging the children to think and to problem solve. An example of this occurred when children were using connecting magnets at a table and conflict occurred over the amount of magnets each child had. The practitioner supported children effectively by scaffolding discussion among them and prompting children to reach their own solution.
- Children have regular access to the outdoor area that is shared with the connected primary school. The herb garden is a recent addition to the pre-school where children have opportunity for planting and bedding, tunnels and wooden stumps. Resources are brought outside to support children's outdoor play opportunities.
- A range of resources is available for children in the indoor learning environment to support different types of play. These include dress up materials, large boxes with equipment for floor play, table-top jigsaws, games, art materials and sensory exploration equipment. As there is limited space available, the children require assistance when accessing materials that require space in order to set up their play.
- Language and literacy is supported in a variety of ways as the children come together in a large group context to explore speech and sound games led by the second practitioner. Visual displays, mark-making utensils, labels and dual language books support literacy development through play.

Actions advised

- It is advised that practitioners begin to document the spontaneous emerging interests and needs of the children during their free play, child- initiated learning experiences. These observations can be used to inform changes to the learning environment, addition of resources or for the planning of learning experiences in the short term along with the reflective notes captured after planned group learning activities.
- It is advised that practitioners review the arrangement of the furniture, the interest areas and the storage of materials in order to maximise play space and accessibility for children to all equipment in the learning environment.

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 confidence in expressing their feelings, thoughts and intentions. Children effectively express themselves when choosing to do a different activity to the group and when asking for resources to be taken out so they can use them.
- Children show competence and capacity to effectively take on leadership roles and lead their peers. An example of this occurred when one child completed their lunch quicker than the others and he was supported by the practitioner to lead the other children in a game using shapes and picture cards while the children finish eating. This brought a relaxed social atmosphere to the meal time.
- Children show respect as they listen to each other and practitioners. A culture of dialogue and collaboration was evident between children as they negotiated, shared ideas, comforted each other and played together.
- Children show clear understanding of how to resolve conflict and solve their own problems by stating that they are a team that works together.
- Children demonstrate capabilities in communicating effectively in two languages where children have English as an additional language. Books, labels and displays in Polish support children to have their home language recognised and naturally embedded in the practice of the setting.

Action advised

- It is advised that practitioners display children's recent achievements, art work and group-learning experiences to stimulate opportunities for recall and reflection and discussion between children and with practitioners.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of the management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The manager has a clear vision for the service and has worked to share their ethos for learning with parents and families. A self-review process of the curriculum is currently underway using the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* as a support tool since the second staff member has joined the team.
- A dedication to reflective practice is evident across the management structure with informal reflective practices occurring everyday on how practice is supporting children. A team meeting is conducted weekly to review practice and plan for the week ahead.
- The manager provides support and supervision for the second practitioner who is currently becoming familiar with the content of Aistear and Síolta. The manager is supporting the second practitioner to develop their skills on observing and documenting children's learning by adding responsibility for documenting children's observations over time.
- An information handbook is available to all parents outlining the curriculum philosophy of the service, information on Aistear and Síolta and the importance of learning through play. The manager has recently completed the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) Programme and has developed a reflective portfolio on the practice in the service. This portfolio is available for parents to view.
- The service has a strong connection with the local primary school, opportunities are organised during the year where the service and the junior classes in the primary school come together for celebrations and special events such as at Halloween and Christmas.
- Transitions between the pre-school and primary school are commendable through the facilitation of a formal meeting between the teacher and the practitioner where strengths from learning observations are discussed and information on the child is shared.
- Letters are shared at the start and during the year to inform parents of events that will happen and which of these will be shared with the school. Twice a year, the manager arranges a formal meeting with parents to discuss children's learning and development as well as informal discussions that happen regularly at drop off and collection times.
- An online private forum is used to share photographs with parents throughout the year of the children engaged in different learning experiences. This forum is regularly used by parents and practitioners.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is excellent.

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	**Very good**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Excellent**

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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