An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

Final Report

Setting name	Stickyfingers Pre-school
Setting address	Willowtree House Ballinvredig Kinsale County Cork P17HX53
TUSLA registration number	TU2015CC393
DCEDIY number	09CC0257
Date of inspection	12-04-2024
Date of issue of report	06-11-2024

What is an Early Years Education Inspection?

The Early Years Education Inspection model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to the education of children aged birth to six years in early learning and care settings. The inspections will affirm good practice and provide advice to support internal quality development processes that optimise children's education experiences and outcomes.

How to read this report

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

- Quality of the context to support children's learning and development
- Quality of processes to support children's learning and development
- Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements
- 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 setting's provision in each area.

Early Years Education Inspection

Dates of inspection	12-04-2024

Activities conducted during the Inspection

- Pre-inspection meeting with the owner/educator
- Review of setting documentation and records relating to the children's learning and development
- Review of the education resources and facilities
- Observations of interactions during a number of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme sessions
- Interaction with children
- Interaction with early years educators
- Feedback meeting with the setting owner/educator and early years educators

Context of setting

Stickyfingers Pre-school is a rural, privately owned early years setting in County Cork. The setting provides early years care and education for toddlers and pre-school aged children. This inspection focused on two ECCE sessions. Five early years educators provided care and education for a maximum of forty-four children. The setting operates mainly outdoors with shelter rooms available for all the children. The early years setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised of the report; a response was not received from the setting.

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 was good.
- A very caring ethos was evident. The setting had created a very nurturing and welcoming atmosphere.
- Practice was clearly child-centred and underpinned by the educators' respectful engagement with the children and their families.
- The daily routine offered a broad range of activities which the children enjoyed. Arts and crafts or table-top work were offered as whole-group activities; these did not fully support the children's active agency in choosing and organising their engagement.
- Mealtimes were utilised as social occasions, where all of the children sat, ate and chatted together. The educators served food and drinks and eventually sat down with the children. This was a missed opportunity. There was scope to get the children more involved in preparing and clearing the tables around snack time.
- Tidy-up times were announced ahead of time and all of the children engaged eagerly in organising the materials and resources, following the good role model of the educators. Inactive waiting times were created before hand washing and snack time and again before going outside. The children were required to wait in a line. This approach needed to be avoided.
- All of the educators showed affection and warmth and a very positive regard for the children and their families. The key-person approach had not yet been established.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging was nurtured very effectively. The range of beautiful photographic displays of the children and their families supported them to develop an appreciation of themselves as individuals and as members of groups.

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to change the daily routine to reduce transitions and to provide more agency to the children to choose and organise their own learning and development activities. Whole-group, adult-initiated/led activities need to be kept to a minimum, as they do not consistently meet the children's needs. These activities need to be optional; the children can then choose to engage in them, or to continue to engage in their self-chosen activities.

- The educators are advised to create a relaxed, family-type mealtime atmosphere. Everybody needs to sit, eat and communicate during the whole meal time, and educators need to act as role models, by establishing good habits and by promoting language development. They are also advised to engage the children more in setting the tables and tidying up after the meal.
- The educators are advised to develop a key-person system and to ensure that the key person acts as the important link between the families and the setting.

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 was good.
- It was evident in practice that an emergent curriculum, based on the children's interests and learning dispositions was followed. The educators had started to generate some paper-based planning documents. There was also some evidence that the educators had taken initial steps to document the learning of some children using checklists and short anecdotal notes.
- The children were provided with commendable opportunities to actively explore, think and reason, and they achieved fulfilment, success and mastery during their activities.
- The educators became play partners and through their high-quality interactions they co-constructed knowledge with the children. They used meaningful interaction strategies, such as observation, active listening, prompting and encouragement and asking open-ended questions.
- The indoor and outdoor environments offered very high play value. They offered the children a vast range of opportunities to build their capacity for self-regulation and resilience through the provision of affordances for appropriate risk taking and physical activity.
- Child-initiated/led, active and interactive play, indoors and outside was utilised as the main medium through which the children were learning and developing.
- The children's language, literacy and numeracy skills were fostered in an age and developmentally appropriate manner. Some of the children's art and craft work was too outcome oriented. There was a lot of evidence of colouring-in, which was not conducive to supporting the children's physical development or their creative expression.
- The educators provided equitable opportunities for all children to engage in learning. An inclusive approach was adapted and the setting had secured support for children with additional needs through the Access and Inclusion model (AIM).

Actions advised

- The educators are advised to research assessment approaches and to implement a consistent approach to assessment. They are advised also to familiarise themselves with ways to make their curriculum plans visible, so they can be shared with the children and their families.
- The educators are advised to discontinue the emphasis which is placed on outcome-oriented art work and colouring-in exercises. Instead, they need to focus more on supporting the children's unique, individual and creative expression and the development of their upper body strength and motor skills during free colouring and painting, modelling and process-oriented art and craft work.

Area 3: Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements

- The quality of children's learning experiences and achievements was very good.
- The children arrived happy and at ease and they immediately engaged in a range of play and exploration activities in the outdoor areas. They presented as highly confident and competent and showed ownership over their environments.
- The children displayed very positive learning dispositions, such as motivation, interest, concentration and curiosity.
- During their interactive play and in particular during outdoor play, it was evident that the children's personal and social skills were developing very well. They were well able to play in pairs and small groups, showing the ability to self-regulate, take turns, co-operate and negotiate. At times, the educators tended to solve the children's problems and conflicts, instead of supporting them to find their own solutions.

- The children skilfully used verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to share their thinking and their feelings, express their ideas and negotiate roles and responsibilities. They skilfully interacted with other children and adults by listening, discussing, questioning and taking turns in conversations.
- The children eagerly availed of the vast range of opportunities, which were offered in particular in the rich outdoor environments. They used these opportunities to express their feelings, thoughts, skills, ideas and creativity.
- Commendably, the children were enabled to make sense of their world by interacting with others and spending lots of time within their natural environments, surrounded by animals, plants and the elements. This gave them knowledge, understanding and a love of the world they live in and plenty of opportunities to develop their physical skills, physical fitness and skill their risk-awareness.

Action advised

- The educators are advised to explore and implement conflict resolution steps and to use these consistently to build the children's independence in solving their own problems and conflicts.
- To support the children even more in their competence, confidence and risk-awareness, the educators are advised to carry out a regular benefit-risk-analysis with the children. This could include climbing, swinging, running, the use of tools or feeding the animals.

Area 4: Quality of management and leadership for learning

- The quality of management and leadership for learning was good.
- The owner/manager is to be commended for her vision and determination, through which she has created an amazing, rich and varied learning and development environment for the children in her care. This vision was not clearly shared and established within the whole staff team, which to some extent inhibited the establishment of a clear direction for the work of the setting.
- The owner/manager and staff members were clearly dedicated to their work and their love and care for the children was very evident. The knowledge and the varied skill sets of the staff members were not fully utilised.
- The team engaged in daily informal review chats to discuss concerns and plan ahead. The outcomes of meetings were not documented. There was no non-contact time available to the staff to reflect and plan.
- Opportunities for setting internal self-evaluation and regular reflection on the effectiveness of the setting's practices and procedures were not established.
- All educators had engaged in some further professional development, mainly in relation to the mandatory courses, such as fire safety and first aid.
- Some of the educators were more knowledgeable about current best-practice principles and evidence-based theory. This knowledge needed to be shared to a greater extent across the team.
- The setting used various strategies to ensure that the families were kept informed and engaged with the work of the setting. These included very friendly and warm daily informal chats, written information notices and the sharing of information using electronic media.
- Transitions into and from the setting were managed very well and sensitively. Family-friendly settling-in procedures were in place and some working relationships were established with the local primary schools.

Actions advised

- The owner/manager and pedagogical leaders are advised to work collaboratively and to establish appropriate systems which support the smooth organisation of educational experiences and activities in the setting. Together with all the staff members they need to create and follow a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting. To achieve this, regular reflection and planning team meetings; regular staff non-contact times; staff appraisal and supervision meetings need to be established.
- The setting is advised to seek external advisory support, such as through 'Better Start' to support their internal review and quality improvement processes. This needs to be further supported through regular team work around setting self-evaluation and in-house professional development. They are also encouraged to explore contemporary research, and to work with the online *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* and the *Insights: Quality in Early Years Education* webinar series developed by the Department of Education.

Summary of overall inspection

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	Good

Language used in Early Years Education Inspection Reports

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the setting using the language which is shown below.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

The following resources can be used by ELC settings in their quality improvement:

Aistear Síolta Practice Guide

Department of Education Insights – Quality in Early Years Education webinars

Published November 2024/ Foilsithe Samhain 2024