An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Súgradh Crèche
09TS0008

Greenhills
Carrick-on-Suir
County Tipperary

Date of Inspection: 3rd February 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Súgradh Crèche is a private, full-day and after-school service that has been in operation for nine years. It is located in Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary. The service offers the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme across two rooms. On the day of inspection, fifteen children and two practitioners were present in the room inspected. 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.
- There is a caring, warm and relaxed atmosphere in the setting. On the day of inspection, children and their family members/carers were greeted in a friendly manner by the practitioners.
- Recognising that children learn best when they are active agents in their learning, the practitioners enable the children to make many choices and decisions about their activities and give the children the time they need to play at different activities.
- Currently, the practitioners are reviewing the daily sequence of events with a view to removing the practitioner-initiated activities.
- Support for transitions from one activity to the next is variable. During the inspection, some effective use of rhymes to signal time for hand washing in advance of the children's snack was noted.
- There is a key worker system in place, where practitioners develop a relationship with a group of children to understand how they learn and what they need to develop. This system is contributing greatly to the fostering of secure relationships between the children and their key worker.
- Recognition, praise and encouragement of children's efforts and achievements are very evident in this setting. Practitioners consistently move from child to child making specific comments that demonstrate genuine interest in what the children are doing and encourage the children to reflect on their learning.
- Very good strategies are used by practitioners to guide and encourage children's behaviour. Positive behaviour is very effectively reinforced through discussion and through reference to illustrations of simple rules which are on display in the setting.
- Children's sense of identity and belonging is nurtured through the purposeful use of family photographs and a self-portrait project that celebrates diversity.

Action advised

- Practitioners are advised to ensure that the daily routine provides a predictable sequence of events for children with a balance between child-initiated and practitioner-initiated activities. Care is needed to ensure that the routine is structured and yet sufficiently flexible to respond to children's changing needs and emerging interests. To support children's involvement in changing smoothly from one activity to another, practitioners are advised to consider the use of a greater range of visual and/or auditory cues in advance of a new activity commencing.

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.
- The curriculum developed by practitioners is a blend of the Montessori approach to education and play-based learning and it reflects the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.
- The planning for curriculum is organised into monthly plans that are linked to the aims and learning goals of *Aistear*. At the time of inspection, a long-term plan was not in place.

- Information is gathered about each child's interests and each child's progress with the Montessori equipment. This information informs the practitioners' planning for the next steps in the children's Montessori experiences. The observation of children's learning and development during play activities has just commenced.
- The bright, spacious indoor learning environment is organised by practitioners into distinct interest areas. These areas promote independent use of a variety of play resources by small groups of children and can be flexibly and creatively adapted. The home area can be transformed into an area that reflects the theme being explored. On the day of the inspection it was being used as a wonderful 'space' area with many creative and colourful representations of outer space while at Halloween it was a 'witch and wizard's den'.
- Children have regular access to an outdoor area that facilitates suitable active play. During their time outdoors, children get to meet and play with children from other rooms.
- Practitioners are attentive to children and interact with them in a respectful way. They know the children well and respond to their interests and learning needs appropriately. For example, when children discussed rainbows, practitioners provided a book to encourage further thinking about rainbows and colours.
- A wide variety of resources and activities that provide meaningful hands-on mathematical experiences for the children are available. These are effectively supporting the children to begin to understand mathematical concepts such as number conservation, measuring, comparing quantities, and recognizing shapes and materials.
- Practitioners effectively model appropriate language and encourage an expanded use of English and Irish vocabulary. Some literacy activities are presented in an over-formalised way such as a writing activity observed which required the children to use dot-to-dot templates to create the word 'Earth'.

Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to take a whole-team approach to developing a curriculum statement that can be used to inform a long-term plan for the pre-school. In this regard, the 'Curriculum Foundations' section of the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is a useful resource.
- It is advised that, instead of spending time on the use of work-sheets for tracing lines, joining dots, colouring in and other such tasks, practitioners prioritise the development of the children's gross motor skills, creativity and confidence in order to support the children's readiness for school.
- There is some scope for extending approaches to assessment of children's learning. Specifically, practitioners are advised to include observations of the children at play in their assessment strategies; this will yield rich information about the children's learning, interests and dispositions which can be used to inform the plans for the next steps in that learning.

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 and focused engagement in their learning activities.
- Children utilise the many opportunities given to them to make decisions and choices about their activities. On arrival at the service, children were observed confidently deciding where to play and who they were going to play with.
- Children interact with other children and with the practitioners by listening and taking turns in conversations.
- Through their active involvement in a number of routines, for example, putting away their own bag and cold lunch items and participating in tidy-up time, children are taking responsibility and displaying self-reliance.
- Children understand the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour. They demonstrate a very good capacity for self-regulation as demonstrated through the child-led system of closing the book area if rough play begins in this quiet space.
- Children confidently use their developing language skills to express ideas, thoughts, and interests.
- Children engage, explore and experiment in their environment and use their developing physical skills to manipulate objects and materials. There are some opportunities for them to use sensory-rich materials such as playdough and water when engaging in Montessori pouring activities.

- Children are showing a very good understanding of how print and symbols can be used as a means of communication. For example, children were observed recognising and comparing the letters in their names in the environment displays.

Action advised
- It is advised that children be given more regular opportunities to handle and play freely with a greater range of sensory-rich materials such as sand and water.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- Management and practitioners share a strong ethos of teamwork. Through monthly whole-team meetings they are working together to improve the learning experiences and outcomes for the children. In addition, practitioners working in the pre-school room meet daily to review how the children engaged in the day's activities.
- Use of *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* to inform review of practice in the setting has recently begun.
- Very good strategies are in place for supporting staff in their role. For example, regular one-to-one meetings between managers and practitioners are facilitated.
- Effective two-way communication is fostered between practitioners and families. Information about the setting's policies and procedures is shared with parents; practitioners have daily informal conversations with parents/carers; parent-teacher meetings at which children's progress and experiences are discussed are regularly held.
- A flexible settling-in period is place where time is given to children and their parents to spend time in the service to help the children get used to their new environment. Very good links with the local primary school have been developed through the after-school service provided by the Crèche. The setting, in consultation with parents, shares information with the primary school about the children's learning and development; this supports continuity of the children's experiences and progression in their learning from pre-school to primary school.

Action advised
- Practitioners and management are advised to consolidate their approach to reviewing practice by ensuring that there is a regular, planned time for such review and that it is informed by the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is very good. The owner and practitioners are highly committed to quality improvement.

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	**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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