An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

REPORT

The Abbey Play-School
09WW0006

2 The Close
Blessington
County Wicklow

Date of inspection: 16 May 2016

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

The Abbey Play-School was established in 2007 and is located in Blessington town, Co Wicklow. The setting is a privately managed setting led by its owner and three other practitioners. It offers a morning session for fifteen children in total, all of whom participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. 10 children and 2 practitioners were present in the pre-school room on the day of the inspection. The setting adopts a play-based emergent curriculum approach to children's learning and development. The setting was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report, and the response submitted on behalf of the setting will be found in the appendix of this report.

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 excellent.
- A warm, authentic and welcoming atmosphere in which children and families are respected is generated. The practitioners acknowledge, encourage and listen attentively to each child and they maintain a positive tone of voice with the children throughout the morning.
- Transitions between activities take place in a smooth and seamless manner; children move from one activity to the next without long waiting times or troublesome behaviours. Practitioners use a variety of strategies such as concrete visual props (for example, sand timers), auditory cues like songs and rhymes, and verbal reminders to prepare and encourage children for the next activity. Variations in the transitions are also made to accommodate individual children's needs. For example, it was noted that one child required a specific piece of music to support his transition to a particular task and the practitioners ensured that the necessary music was provided. Children are also aware of the individual transition needs of their peers.
- Children's identity and belonging are consistently celebrated and nurtured in the numerous strategies and interactions during the session. Children's lives and voices are evident in the many visual representations on display. These include the children's drawings and comments on their pets, likes, and dislikes, drawings illustrating their friendships, family photographs, and displays depicting family occasions and visits by families and others to the setting. The events of individual children's lives are also incorporated into the daily planned activities such as making cards for a sick parent and Polish flags to acknowledge a specific sporting event. The importance of building a sense of community among children themselves is promoted through activities such as children camping together in the garden of the setting and depictions of 'the Royal Ball', an event developed by the children over time.
- Routines and procedures are very clear. Children's independence is intentionally and successfully promoted in the numerous opportunities provided to enhance their self-help skills. These include play, opportunities for the children to manage their own hygiene needs, and opportunities for the children to contribute to and engage in social interactions with their peers at tidy-up time and snack time.

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.
- Curriculum planning is very effective. It is derived from observation of children's emergent interests and learning dispositions and is linked to the aims and goals of *Aistear*, *the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Current interests include science and numeracy and incorporate topics such as, what materials float and sink, the sequence of steps in baking pizzas, and early literacy exploration, for example, 'how to spell daddy' and other words of key significance to the children. Non-contact time is allocated to practitioners to plan on a short-term, medium-term and long-term basis and to record the children's learning and achievements.
- High quality assessment practices are evident. Information arising from the assessment of the children's learning is recorded by practitioners using learning record templates, photographs and

individual children's portfolios which document children's comments on their work and provide insight into their thinking and learning progression.

- The indoor and outdoor environments are very attractive, inviting, well designed and well maintained. Learning areas provide opportunity for both active and quiet activity and are clearly delineated. Children can access a wide range of equipment and materials indoors with ease. The outdoor area has some materials which promote different play types such as nature exploration, planting, digging, climbing, and water and sand play.
- Interactions of a very high standard are used to support children's confidence and competencies. Practitioners anticipate situations to support and extend children's interactions and learning experiences. They follow the children's cues by asking questions that motivate and spark the children's curiosity such as, 'I wonder why it floats?', 'If we take the water out what do you think will happen?'
- Practitioners model appropriate positive social behaviour and use opportunities to further support children to manage their own emotions and resolve peer conflicts.

Action advised

- The addition of more open-ended, real and sensory materials in the outdoor area is advised in order to extend the current range of children's play themes and interests.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent
- Children demonstrate enjoyment, motivation and perseverance in their learning and were observed actively making numerous play choices throughout the session.
- Children appreciate their home language and understand how different languages are used in different situations. For example, during free play one child expressed his dual language identity in the following terms, 'My dad says French and my mom says Slovakian, but only at home'.
- Children collaborate and share their interests and ideas with their peers.
- Children maintain very high levels of social engagement, listening and comprehension. They display excellent capacity to reflect on interactions with their peers. At circle time children sustain conversations with each other across a range of topics such as speaking Irish, yoga, fathers, and the effects of nettle stings.
- Children have an excellent awareness of the natural environment and a range of topics of a scientific and geographical nature. For example, they describe the recycling process in a very concrete and confident way.
- Children demonstrate an excellent ability to concentrate on and enjoy books and they freely choose from a wide range of topics of interest to them including body parts, animals, telling the time, and recycling fun.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The service is extremely well organised, runs smoothly and is very well managed. There is a very strong commitment to engaging with parents with many examples of, and opportunities for parental engagement and feedback. Parental feedback and views are used to inform the ongoing improvement of the quality of provision in the setting.
- An ethos of professionalism, team work, cooperation and partnership is visible. Practitioners demonstrate enjoyment and passion in their work. Roles and responsibilities are very effectively shared between staff.
- The emphasis placed on ensuring that inclusive practices are implemented to support the integration of children with additional or specific needs in all aspects of the programme is highly commended. Practitioners follow through judiciously with strategies recommended by parents and

other professionals and they contribute to individual meetings and intervention plans where relevant

- Strengths-based information on children's learning and progression is shared between the setting and the local primary schools. Two-way communication is regularly promoted between the primary schools and the play-school. For example, a letter from a local primary school principal was read to and discussed with the children at circle time.
- Practitioners regularly avail of opportunities for continuous professional development. They make commendable efforts to connect their new learning to their practice in the setting.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the practitioners and manager in this setting to take the actions advised above is excellent, as evidenced by their openness to new ideas and advice and their high level of critical engagement during the post-inspection feedback meeting.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	**Excellent**
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	**Very Good**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Excellent**
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.

APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to address the actions advised in the inspection

Thank you for your visit to The Abbey Preschool and the advice given. We are in the process of redesigning our outdoor area. At the moment it is a great area for the children to play, but we plan to make it even better!

After the post meeting with the inspector, we decided to add another sensory dimension to our outdoor play area. As the children are now back in pre-school after the summer break, we feel that we should involve them in the designing of the garden, as it is their space, and their voices should be included and heard.

To conclude “thank you” again, we were delighted with our report, as we feel all concerned are happy and content in the Abbey Preschool.

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