An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION

REPORT

Service Name	The Learning Tree Childcare
Service Address	Fr McGrath Centre St Joseph's Road County Kilkenny
DCYA number	09KK0071

Date of Inspection: 19-04-2018

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agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

WHAT IS AN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION INSPECTION?

The Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) model is used to provide evaluative information, advice and support in relation to education provision in a pre-school setting 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 setting.

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 setting's provision in each area.

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Date of inspection	19/04/18
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with Assistant Manager • Observation of interactions and activities during the pre-school session • Interaction with children	 • Review of relevant documents • Post- inspection feedback meeting with managers and practitioners

CONTEXT OF SETTING

The Learning Tree childcare is a community early years' service, that was established in 2004. It is located in the Fr McGrath Family Resource Centre in County Kilkenny. It provides families with full-day, part-time and sessional care and education. There are three Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programmes in operation, two in the morning and one in the afternoon. Sixteen children along with three practitioners were present during the afternoon ECCE session 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 good.
- A welcoming atmosphere is evident in the service. There is an open door policy in place. On arrival the parents and children are greeted in a friendly manner.
- Relationships are positive and kind; and practitioners are sensitive to the needs of children and their families.
- The documented routine provides opportunities for the children, to actively engage in a range of activities. Attention is required, to ensure, that the arrival of the afternoon children into the full group is more organised. It was noted that the changeover of part-time staff and the circle-time activity, did allow for the children to settle into the established group in a relaxed manner.
- Behaviour issues and minor upsets are dealt with sensitively. The practitioners use of conflict resolution and behaviour management techniques to solve minor issues and encourage positive behaviour, are commendable.
- Snack time is a social occasion, where the children and their key worker sit and openly chat with one another.
- Most children transition between activities with ease. Verbal alerts, and the practitioner's involvement in tidying up are used to indicate the end of activities. There is scope for the practitioners to build on the children's independent skills in tidying up.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging are fostered through invitations to parents, to attend the children's end of year graduation ceremony and Christmas activities. Their uniqueness is displayed in the environment in photographs, a birthday chart and through the children's art work. There is some potential for the practitioners to build on the children's knowledge and links with the local community. At the time of inspection, a local nature walk and photographs of the local community were used to support their awareness in this area.

Actions advised

- It is advised that the timing of circle time be reviewed. This is to allow children joining the group to settle-in with greater ease. This will further ensure that the daily routine provides valuable learning experiences for all children and that their transition from home is smooth.
- It is advised that the practitioners encourage and support the children to tidy up during and after activities. This will support the children's independence and self-help skills.
- The practitioners are advised to develop strategies to progress the children's awareness of the local community. This will further support the children's sense of identity and belonging. For

example, consideration could be given to inviting local professional people in to share their experiences.

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.
- *Aistear; the Early Childhood Frame Work* and the High/Scope pedagogy approach inform the emergent play-based curriculum, which is implemented in the service.
- Short-term weekly planning to support the children's learning and development is effectively devised by key-workers. The practitioners report that the information gathered on the children's interest are used to inform the weekly planning. These links were not clear in the planning charts viewed. Anecdotal observation, High/scopes Key Development Indicators and scrapbooks are effectively used to record learning and development
- The indoor learning environment is divided into defined interest areas. The real-life resources available in the areas are commendable, particularly in the construction area. Real builders tape, cones and work signs along with large wooden blocks were available to the children. The children have daily access to the playground attached to the resource centre. Equipment available effectively supports their gross motor skills. As this is a public playground there are limits to extending its use beyond gross motor activities.
- Play is viewed as central to the children's learning and development. There is a good balance between practitioner-led and child-led activities. The children independently moved between areas of interest and lead learning. During this time, it was noted that a small number of children wandered from one activity to another and became disengaged.
- Interactions are inclusive and positive. From time-to-time the practitioners effectively sit and engage with the children at their level. There were missed opportunities noted during the inspection, where the practitioners did not playfully interact with children to stimulate their engagement in pretend play or socio-dramatic activities. Supporting interactions between children is extended beyond the pre-school room. This was evident, in the joint project 'making flower boxes', which was facilitated between the afterschool and the preschool children.
- The practitioners effectively foster the children's early language, numeracy and literacy skills through story, songs, and rhymes and by providing age appropriate mark making equipment.

Action advised

- To build on the effective planning practices already established, it is advised that the practitioners show the link between weekly short-term planning and children's individual interests.
- It is advised that the practitioners develop their approach to engaging with children during self-chosen activities. This will motivate and support the children during free play. For example, sitting with the children and engaging with them as play partners during socio dramatic and small world play would enrich the children's experience and develop their co-operative play skills.
- In light of limitations place on the use of the outdoor space as a public playground, it is advised that the practitioners consider alternative means to ensuring that children have access to a range of materials while playing outside. Assembling a prop box for outside which is linked to the weekly activities is one example.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- The children are given great autonomy over choosing and leading their own learning as they freely move between areas of interest.
- As the children engage in sensory and creative activities they demonstrate a sense of wonder and curiosity and are happy to explore materials. This was evident as they mixed paint to make new colours and when they added water to sand to make different textures. They described the feeling of paint as gooey.

- The children are given the opportunity to plan for and reflect on their learning. It was noted, that during planning and reflection activitries the children's participation was limited and children tended to be passive.
- The children's social and communication skills are emerging. Most of the children were observed to play in groups, pairs and alone. The majority of the children effectively seek assistance, request materials and question and answer in context. Most children have developed a good sense of self. This was evident, when they spoke about their families, their likes and their holidays.
- Scrapbooks compiled by the practitioners, document the children's learning and their interests from the time they begin in the service. Currently these are not freely available to the children.
- The majority of the children demonstrate good concentration skills as they engage in activities of interest. Many also made reference to areas of interest, such as, dogs and ice-cream. It was noted that the practitioner's use of closed questioning resulted in missed opportunities to further explore these themes.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to spontaneously follow interests through the use of open-ended-questioning. This will scaffold learning and encourage the children to explore their interests to a greater extent.
- It is advised that the children have access to their individual scrapbooks in order for them to make links to past and current experiences.
- The practitioners are advised to make greater use of materials, for example, props, mark making equipment and samples of children's work. This will encourage the children's active participation and open discussion during planning and review times.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- An ethos of professional engagement is evident across the whole team. The management and staff use regular team meetings to reflect on and review practice, policy and procedures. The service is planning to update their *Síolta, Quality Assurance Programme* (QAP) which they received in 2014.
- There is clarity around roles and responsibilities. An effective key worker system is in place. Keyworkers have responsibility for planning, observations, assessments and documenting learning. All practitioners had the opportunity to lead children's learning during the session.
- The service has established links for advice, support and training with the Local Child Care Committee, Early Childhood Ireland, Barnardo's and the Family Resource Network. Management and practitioners demonstrate ongoing commitment to continuous professional development, with on-site trainers for High/Scope and Child Protection training available within the setting. Currently some practitioners are engaged in High/Scope and the Leadership for Inclusion LINC training.
- The practitioners communicate effectively with parents. They share information through formal and informal meetings, a parent's handbook, children's scrapbooks, photographs, notice board, text messaging and on the website. In addition, questionnaires are also used to draw on parent's views. For example, parent's feedback on changes or amendments to policies are sought. Currently within the service there is a high number of families for whom English is not a first language. It was noted that all information shared is only communicated in English.
- The service has established an effective settling-in policy using a phased in approach. Currently this is not in operation for the pre-school aged children.
- A school readiness meeting is held for parents. Development folders are used to share information to support the children's transition to primary school. Parents are advised to share this information with schools. On occasion, the primary school contact the service to request information on individual children.

Action advised

- It is advised that the practitioners develop approaches for sharing information with parents for whom English is not a first language. This will build on the good quality practice of sharing information with parents.

- It is advised that the practitioners extend the settling in policy in place for the children in the younger groups to the preschool age children. This will build on the effective practice of transitioning children to primary school currently in operation.
- The practitioners are advised to establish more formal relationships with the local primary school.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the setting to continue to implement the actions advised above is very good.
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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	**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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