An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

The Meadows Pre-school
12DS0318

Monksfield Meadows
Clondalkin
Dublin 22

Date of Inspection: 13th June 2017

CONTEXT OF SETTING

The Meadows Pre-school is a privately owned setting. It was established in 2012. It is located in a residential house in Clondalkin. The setting operates an open and flexible admissions policy. The setting provides a morning and afternoon Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, the morning session was inspected, where thirteen children were present together with the manager (who is the lead practitioner), and one other practitioner, who was providing substitute cover on the day. 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 can 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 good.
- The atmosphere in the setting is warm. On arrival, all of the children are welcomed by a practitioner. Children greet one another affectionately as they arrive.
- The relationships between the practitioners and the children are caring and respectful.
- The children are sometimes active agents in their learning, choosing their play materials and activities and organising the play.
- At snack time the practitioners and children sit and eat together. Some of the children would benefit from additional practitioner support in relation to interacting with their peers, and need further guidance in relation meal time norms.
- Transitions from one activity to the next over the course of the day are signposted verbally and with a bell. When necessary, additional auditory timers are used to encourage children to share materials. There is scope to further develop these strategies.
- Praise and recognition are used regularly in the practitioners' interactions with the children.
- There are some displays which support the children's sense of identity and belonging. For example, there are displays of pyjama day, outdoor playtime, and the children's own mark making and creative artwork. There are no visual representations of the wider community in the setting.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to use snack time as an opportunity to support the children to make connections with their peers through discussion and to model appropriate meal time norms and social skills.
- To further support children's developing identity and belonging, the practitioners are advised to include visual representations of the diverse cultures the children in the setting. Those cultures can also be celebrated through discussions, dress-up clothes, books, wall displays and photographs.

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 fair.
- There is scope for developing approaches to planning for the children's learning and development in the setting. A long-term and medium-term planned, play-based curriculum which is thematic and organised around seasons and the practitioners' ideas is in place. While the practitioners acknowledge children's interests verbally, there is no clear link between the programme of activities being provided for the children and those emerging interests. Currently the programme of activities mainly consists of discussion topics for circle time.
- Information about each child arising from the practitioners' observations of the children is recorded, along with photographs of the child engaged in activities, and developmental checklists. One of the challenges for the service is to make greater use of the information gathered about each child in order to inform planning for the next steps in the children's learning.

- In the majority of the interactions observed during the inspection, the practitioners did not provide adequate feedback to the children on their efforts or achievements. Further, there was scope for developing interactions with the children in a way that would scaffold and extend the children's learning. On the small number of occasions where open-ended questions and feedback were used effectively by the practitioners, they verbalised the children's statements, added some descriptive words to those statements, and supported the children in working together and solving problems collaboratively.
- While acknowledging the openness of the practitioners to engage children with diverse needs, on the day of the inspection it was observed there was scope for further development in the area of support strategies to engage children with additional needs and children for whom English is an additional language.
- While a few instances of meaningful and playful child-led learning was observed on the day of the inspection, for the majority of the day the provision was adult-led, with many interruptions from the practitioner for the child to complete specific tasks. Overall, the children did not have adequate opportunity to engage in uninterrupted purposeful play experiences.
- The indoor environment is a bright room with two defined play areas. The materials are easily accessible to the children in storage boxes on low shelves. There is potential for developing clear interest areas. While the home corner has a kitchen, it has insufficient manipulative materials and the book area has some books that are unsuitable for the developmental stage of the children.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to use the assessment information they have gathered about each child to inform their short-term and medium-term planning for the next steps in the children's learning. This will enable the curriculum to be customised in a way that is responsive to each individual child.
- The practitioners are advised to further develop their strategies for ensuring the engagement of all children in the setting. In this regard, the development of communication aids and visual prompts in the environment are important. Such prompts and aids will be of particular benefit to children for whom English is an additional language and children with speech and language difficulties.
- The practitioners are advised to develop their range of interaction strategies. In particular, they are advised to adapt their styles in response to the developmental stage of the individual child, to extend their naming of actions and objects, to provide formative feedback, and to use open-ended questions, as distinct from testing or closed questions. A review of the 'Play' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* will be beneficial in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to audit both the indoor and outdoor environment with a view to developing the range of materials and equipment. The 'Learning environment' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* is a useful resource in relation to this.
- The practitioners are advised to seek support and guidance from Better Start.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is fair.
- In general, the children appear happy and seem to enjoy their play experiences. On the day of the inspection, some examples of children organising their own activities, such as building blocks and painting, were observed. There were many instances when children referred to the practitioners for support in locating materials.
- There is often an unequal balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities for some of the children. During the session inspected, some of the children were selected by the practitioners to engage in different activities. For example, some were selected to sit at a table completing worksheets.
- Some children experienced success during the activities observed. This was evident when the children completed their paintings or built their block towers and shared their achievements with the practitioners. Other children did not experience the same levels of achievement or success.
- On the day of the inspection, some children appeared to find it difficult to take part in circle time and story time and became disengaged or disruptive. Further, the children rarely shared their thoughts or ideas with the practitioners or their peers, and during circle time only three children were asked to share their news.

- The children engage in limited free mark-making activities such as painting, while the majority of craft activities are practitioner-initiated such as completing work templates involving colouring in, matching and tracing.
- The children sometimes play together co-operatively in small groups and in pairs. Some of the children need greater support and consistent approaches to build the skills of turn-taking and negotiating. When minor conflicts occurred, they resulted in inconsistent responses from the practitioners.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to provide more opportunities for all of the children to experience success with due regard for each child's individual interests and developmental needs. A review of the activities provided and materials available to the children is important in this regard.
- The practitioners are advised to provide increased opportunities for the development of sustained uninterrupted child-initiated activities.
- The practitioners are advised to provide opportunities for children to experience practitioner supported small-group and paired play in order to encourage co-operation and collaboration, to promote problem solving, and to develop turn-taking skills. The development of consistent conflict resolution strategies such as naming and affirming feelings, discussion to resolve problems and agreeing 'rules of play' would be of benefit to the children.
- It is advised that additional opportunities for the children to reflect on and communicate their ideas, thoughts and past experiences to their peers and the practitioners be provided. This could be developed through a small-group activity.
- The practitioners are advised to enable the children to express themselves creatively through the provision of materials for free art and mark-making, moving to music, role play and storytelling.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is fair.
- The practitioners have informal monthly meetings. At the time of the inspection, the outcomes of those meetings were not documented.
- On the day of the inspection there was some evidence of team work. More guidance and role modelling of practice would be of benefit to the team.
- There is scope for developing strategies for communicating with parents. On enrolment, parents are given a handbook detailing the setting's policies and procedures. The practitioners encourage parents to visit the setting and to discuss any matters of importance or relevance to them or to their child. The setting notifies the parents of upcoming events by text message. At the end of the year the setting shares with parents the documentation collected regarding their child's learning and development.
- The setting has established links with its local County Childcare Committee.

Actions advised

- The practitioners are advised to use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to formalise their team meetings and their review process on quality in the pre-school.
- The lead practitioner is advised to develop the leadership role to promote high standards, quality provision, and clear guidance and direction for the other practitioners.
- The practitioners are advised to formally share with parents at intervals throughout the year their documented observations about the children and the children's learning journals. The eliciting of parental comments and opinions on the materials shared is also advised.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

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

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	**Good**
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	**Fair**
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	**Fair**
Quality of management and leadership for learning	**Fair**

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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

The practitioner has used the content of the report to reflect on the setting and to make positive changes which will improve the service for both children and staff. We have adopted a more play based approach rather than a play/academic mix. We have used the advice of the inspector to implement these changes and we wish to thank the Department of Education and Skills for their continued support.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection **activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

In order to further develop the identity and belonging of the children in our service we have now included a book which represents one page for each child with their family's background and cultural identity represented. This book is accessible to all of the children all of the time. Preschool leader has also taken training in Inclusion, Diversity and Equality.

We have also developed an area on one of the walls which represents our community to include familiar places e.g. doctor, community center etc. and familiar faces that the children recognize from the surrounding area.

We have adapted our curriculum to be more open ended and without fixed topics, this way we can ensure that the information gathered on individual assessments and observations can be included and used to form our emerging curriculum.

We have added to our existing visual prompts for use by children with additional needs and children for who English is not their first language.

We have reviewed the "Play" pillar and are changing the way that we respond to our children by opening our conversations further. We have audited our material and have added some items which can be used by all our age groups.

We no longer do academic style pencil work with worksheets and templates. We have adopted a more play based programme where children lead their own activities. We already have free access to arts and crafts material, dress up and role play at all times throughout the session and we are looking at other ways for mark-making.

We have formulated a more formal approach to our team meetings using Aistear, Siolta Practice Guide. This will be used three times per year to formally audit the quality of our service.

We will share the learning journals of all children with parents' mid-way through the year rather than just at the end of the year as we have done previously.