An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

The Village Montessori
trading as
Little Bunnies Pre-School
09SO0001

Ballinalack
Bunninadden
County Sligo

Date of Inspection: 15th September 2017

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

CONTEXT OF SETTING

The Village Montessori trading as Little Bunnies Pre-School is a community facility based in the local GAA Park and situated in a rural area of Ballinalack, Bunninadden, County Sligo. The service provides one morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The pedagogical approach adopted is play-based and is underpinned by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. There is huge emphasis on outdoor play within the setting. An outdoor play policy highlights this core value to parents. On the day of the inspection, the pre-school leader and four children were present. The leader attended the post-inspection meeting.
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 excellent.
- The atmosphere generated through the amiable, welcoming interactions upon arrival underpins the warmth and respect between the practitioner, the children and their families.
- Children are instantly encouraged by their carers to independently hang up their coats and bags. This ethos of self-help and autonomy is strongly fostered throughout the session.
- The daily routine provides children with opportunities to become enthusiastically involved in their freely chosen play activities. The considerate appreciation of the children's opinions within the session nurtures a deep sense of emotional security.
- Transitions are minimal and are sensitively managed, empowering the children to become involved in tidy-up and in preparation for the subsequent activities.
- Strong, respectful relationships are established between the children and their peers with the practitioner purposefully promoting peer support during play.
- The practitioner is sensitive to the needs of the children and works in collaboration with their parents. This is evident through the continual sharing of information regarding the children's learning and development.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is enriched through the appreciation of the uniqueness of each child and the significance of their family backgrounds. Organised events such as a Graduation Day, Grandparents Day and a Christmas concert enable the children and their families to share memorable experiences together.
- Children are provided with a photographic story book of each of the family events to accommodate family members who cannot attend.
- Cultural diversity is acknowledged and supported through discussion of national celebrations and festivals around the world. The family tree within the setting is an evolving tribute to the children's individual identities. Photographs are supplemented on an on-going basis on the family tree in accordance with the children's many personal experiences throughout the year.

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.
- The curriculum is organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis. It broadly outlines the planned activities with links made to *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.
- The practitioner has developed an emergent, enquiry-based curriculum which follows the children's interests and play preferences. There is scope to strengthen this process by incorporating the children's individual learning observations into the planning process.
- The children's learning and development is recorded frequently within individual portfolios. The practitioner efficiently prepares informative accounts of learning for each child with a strong emphasis on unique competencies, interests and experiences.

- Comprehensive learning stories and records of learning provide regular information to parents with regard to their child's development. Portfolios are sent home twice a year and a daily chalkboard informs the parents about their children's play and discoveries.
- The children are viewed as highly competent learners and the introduction of helper roles within the pre-school further emphasises this. The children's independence is continually encouraged through positive empowerment and motivating contributions from the practitioner.
- The practitioner is extremely responsive to the children's learning needs and interests. The dedicated arrangement of dinosaur resources and the facilitation of tailored experiences for a child who expressed this interest provided clear evidence of this.
- The provision of a variety of well-resourced and well-defined play areas in the indoor environment invites the children to play. The intentional use of natural materials along with soft tones of colour creates a relaxing environment for the children to explore and to interact with the materials.
- The outdoor environment is accessed regularly. It boasts a spacious area within the GAA grounds for the children to walk, run and explore nature. There is access to a play park on-site. The pre-school are negotiating an area for the relocation of their mud kitchen now that construction of the playing pitch is completed.
- The practitioner extends the children's thinking and enhances learning connections by facilitating discussions and prompting them to reflect on their play experiences. This is subsequently recorded onto a chalkboard in collaboration with the children for sharing with their family at collection time.
- The practitioner models an extensive range of vocabulary, including mathematical language to enhance the children's language development and their numerical concepts.

Action advised

- It is advised that planning highlights the connections made to the children's varying developmental needs, interests and previous learning experiences.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- Children are highly motivated and engage in activities that are accessible, well-resourced and that cater to their individual interests.
- The children interact co-operatively and use each other's strengths to attentively support one another through challenges that occur during play.
- Children experience success through the accessibility of and continual reflection on their individual portfolios. They have the opportunity to proudly celebrate their achievements by observing the 'I can do' summary. This commends the children's unique progressions in learning.
- The children demonstrate a concrete awareness of their unique and group identity. They indicate this through observations and comments made about their class photograph and discussions they have about forming friendships.
- The children are developing an awareness of the roles of adults within the local community. The creation of a 'group-made' book with photographs of a wide variety of professionals supports this. This useful resource utilises the children's enquiries and their contributions in completing a narrative for each photograph which supports their awareness of each community member.
- Children are extremely confident when communicating and are enabled to express themselves through role-play, problem-solving and mark-making. The abundant opportunities provided to voice their opinions and the frequent noting of their contributions empowers the children to become self-assured.
- Children are developing a growing understanding of mathematical language through play. They count candles on their playdough creations, use posters to count items and solve simple equations through discussions about absent friends.
- The children are inquisitive learners and a sense of enquiry is positively encouraged. Children have the opportunity to investigate in science experiments and to explore nature through their discoveries of natural materials in the outdoor area.
- Children are supported to broaden their understanding of the world through the use of books made within the pre-school such as "Our story of meat" and "Bringing home the turf".

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The practitioner provides an efficient, professional service. Appropriate systems are in place to support high standards within the pre-school.
- The practitioner is reflective and continually reviews practice using the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to progress improvements in the children's learning experiences. Recent Equality and Diversity training has enabled the practitioner to evaluate and reflect on the current practice within the pre-school with regard to catering for the needs of all children.
- Communication between the pre-school and the parents is actively promoted. Parents have the opportunity to receive information through the daily chalkboard, frequent emailed newsletters and social media.
- Connections are made between the pre-school and the home environment and information is continually shared. 'T-Bear', the prized pre-school bear, armed with his passport and back pack, visits each child's home during the year. The family create a story of his visit using photographs and a recorded narrative to share in the pre-school.
- Commendably, parental views as to the service provided in the pre-school are valued. These are sought through the use of a suggestion box, surveys and a parents' feedback form. Modifications of practice within the pre-school are continually shared with the parents through documented reflections within the displayed medium-term plan.
- The management committee of the service is very supportive of the pre-school. Members encourage the lead practitioner to engage in continuous professional development (CPD) to assist her with her role. CPD is hugely valued within the setting and the lead practitioner has recently availed of *Aistear* training and mentoring facilitated by the local County Childcare Committee.
- An informative child profile form utilised by the practitioner helps with the settling in period and supports transitions into the setting. An additional form seeking further parental contributions has been introduced this year entitled "My wish for you, my child". This outlines the parents' personal hopes for their child in the coming year.
- Transitions to primary school are supported through the use of photographs, including a display of the children's photograph matched to each of their local primary schools. The practitioner meets with some junior infant teachers to discuss the children's learning. She uses the '*All About Me*' books to support the sharing of key information.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is excellent. This was exemplified in the practitioner's constructive engagement in professional dialogue around the key findings of this inspection.

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.

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