An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Tower View Montessori
14FL0499

The Square
Lusk
County Dublin

Date of Inspection: 25th October 2017

CONTEXT OF SETTING

Towerview Montessori established in 2014, is a private, jointly-owned, early-years setting which operates in Lusk, County Dublin. It offers a morning only pre-school session as part of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, there were twenty-one children, the two co-owners/practitioners and an early-year practitioner present.
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 very good.
- There is a very friendly and caring atmosphere within the setting. The practitioners use arrival and home times to greet children, their parents and carers in a warmly manner.
- The well-established daily routine promotes an appropriate balance of child-initiated and adult-initiated activities that enable the children to independently choose and organise their learning.
- The majority of changes in the daily routine are signalled by the practitioners' use of verbal reminders and visual prompts which allow the children to finish up what they are doing. On a small number of occasions, the lead into activities was drawn out and the children had to wait unduly for the activity to start.
- Snack time is used effectively as a time for the children to engage in social conversations with their peers and the practitioners who sit alongside them. It is also used a key time to promote healthy eating as noted from the lunches the children brought in from home along with the setting's engagement in the Healthy Ireland Smart Start Programme.
- The relationships between the practitioners and the children are very responsive. This is reflected in the key worker approach that has been successfully established the setting. Each practitioner has responsibility for creating a close relationship with a designated group of children and their families. This role also includes the key worker observing the children and ascertaining their emergent interests.
- The practitioners are very respectful in the encouragement they offer children towards working together which is reflected in the strong friendships that exist amongst a number of the children.
- There is a commendable use of imagery throughout the setting which nurtures a very positive sense of the children as individuals. It is clearly visible that diversity is recognised and valued within this learning environment as observed through the children's everyday conversations with each other and the practitioners about differences.
- The practitioners provide a number of opportunities which allow the children to develop an appreciation of members of their local community. These include visits from a number of current and past parents such as members of the local Fire Brigade, the Guards a park ranger, a nurse and a pilot.

Action advised

- It is advised that all changes in the daily routine be pre-signalled to the children and that sufficient time is allocated so they can finish what they are doing before the next activity commences. The practitioners are also advised to use playful activities such as songs and rhymes at transition times

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.

- *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* informs the blend of the Montessori Method of education and the play-based curriculum which is in place. The practitioners use long-term, medium-term and short-term planning to support the children's active and independent learning.
- The practitioners use a variety of appropriate assessment methods such as an *Aistear* Learner Record, anecdotal observations, the children's artwork and photographs to gather information on the children's learning. They incorporate findings from this valuable information when planning for the next stage in the children's learning.
- Very enriching interactions occur between the practitioners and the children. The practitioners use effective strategies such as very good use of prompts and open-ended questions along with thought- provoking explanations to extend and deepen the children's learning and understanding.
- The indoor and outdoor learning environments are extremely well laid out with defined and prepared learning areas which support the children's participation in the blended curriculum. There is an appropriate supply of Montessori and play materials available and accessible for the children. These are used purposefully so the children can develop the skills to independently engage in a wide variety of play experiences including creative, construction, language and socio-dramatic play.
- The practitioners place a high value of the benefits of play to the children's learning and development. Ample opportunities are provided so that the children can participate and engage in meaningful and purposeful playful experiences, on their own, in pairs, in small groups and in partnership with the practitioners.
- The practitioners are to be commended in the way they effectively foster the children's emergent language and literacy skills. They have created and developed a variety of story and song boards and props which the children use with purpose to explore and engage in book play. These props are linked to the curriculum such as the props for the story 'Room for a Broom' and the current theme Halloween.
- The practitioners promote the children's emergent mathematical thinking in the everyday conversations which take place, such as the discussions that involve quantity, height and mass. There is limited use of open-ended resources to support the children's early mathematical thinking.
- There is sufficient differentiation in provision to meet the varying needs of the children and to ensure that the learning environment is adequately inclusive. The practitioners accommodate the pace and focus of the children as noted through the appropriate support the children received throughout the session.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to source additional open-ended materials and everyday resources to support and extend the children's understanding of and engagement in early mathematical thinking.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- The children demonstrate high levels of fun, enjoyment and interest in the activities which they participate in. They were motivated and actively engaged throughout the session observed.
- The children display initiative and self-reliance in the decisions they make during their play. This is reflected in the positive learning dispositions which they are developing such as persistence and resilience.
- The children demonstrate an impressive ability to play cooperatively in pairs and in small groups. This happened during the inspection on a number of occasions, including their building of the rockets using the junk materials and when a few of the children constructed a track for the small cars together.
- The children regularly experience success and achievement during the activities they participate in. They are developing into competent and confident learners as reflected when a few children showed a practitioner what they had constructed with the Lego. Their achievements are also reflected in their individual learning journals.
- The majority of the children are developing appropriate personal and social skills such as turn-taking, negotiating and social responsibility as seen in their play and their participation at tidy-up time and their 'child jobs' at snack time.

- The children have opportunities to share their feelings and thoughts through the use of sensorial materials and socio- dramatic play. They have limited opportunities to reflect on and share their learning with other children and the practitioners.
- The children have plenty of opportunities to express themselves creatively as they engage in mark-making and storytelling activities. They also have access to a wide variety of materials which enable them to participate freely in creative art activities. This enhances their freedom of expression and supports their pre-writing skills.
- The children are provided with opportunities to engage, explore and experiment in the pre-school environment. Along with these opportunities, their very good capacity to respond to thought provoking questions assists them to make sense of their world as they interact with their peers and the practitioners.

Action advised

- The practitioners are advised to provide additional opportunities to allow the children to share their learning and experiences with others. This could take place as part of small-group discussions facilitated by their key worker.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- There is a very strong ethos of teamwork, partnership and collaboration amongst the co-owners and the practitioner. There are informal daily reviews. Weekly, the co-owners/practitioners meet to review the week's activities and to plan for the coming week. At the start of the pre-school year medium and long-term planning meetings takes place between the co-owners/practitioners.
- A commendable sense of professionalism is evident as reflected in the high value and commitment placed on continuous professional development. The co-owners/practitioners and practitioner have participated in ongoing training on topics relevant to early- years settings, including; Healthy Ireland Smart Start, *Aistear*, Well-Being Soothing and Support.
- There is clarity around the responsibilities and roles of the practitioners. Each practitioner demonstrated awareness of their role contributed to the smooth and well organised session observed.
- There are very positive strategies in place which foster communication between the practitioners and the parents. An information booklet on the setting which includes the policies and procedures is presented to parents when their child commences the setting. There is limited information within the booklet regarding the curriculum on offer. Regular newsletters are sent to parents via e-mail.
- During the month of August, an information evening is held for parents when the practitioners outline the curriculum on offer, practical information and what happens during the pre-school year.
- Prior to the children commencing in the setting, they are invited to attend an open day with their parents to meet the owners/practitioners, other children and their parents.
- There are established links between the co-owners and the principal of a local primary school. Meetings are facilitated between the co-owners/practitioners and the principal if required to discuss individual children's learning needs and requirements.

Action advised

- It is advised that additional information on the blended curriculum which is in place and *Aistear* be included in the parents' Information booklet. This will ensure that parents are informed of the curriculum used and how it supports their children's learning and development.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is excellent as demonstrated by those present at the feedback meeting and their commitment to improving the children's learning experiences.

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	**Very 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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

We have taken on board all the recommendations form the inspector.

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

Area1

As advised we now give the children a sign to let them know that an activity is coming to an end so that they have the time to complete it and they don't feel rushed. We will also use more songs at transition times as on the day we just sang our clean up song and our song for washing hands.

Area2

In addition to our Montessori maths material we are now introducing more every day resources to coincide with our monthly and seasonal themes. We have put a weighing scales, measuring tapes and rulers around the classroom for the children to use.

Area3

We have taken on board the advice for smaller group discussions and reflection and it is now part of our daily routine.

Area4

We have now included our Long Term Curriculum Plan in our Parents Handbook as advised.