An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection
Report

Macroom Family Resource Centre
09CC0014

The Fairfield
Masseytown
Macroom
County Cork

Date of Inspection: 4th October 2016
CONTEXT OF SETTING

Macroom Family Resource Centre is a big community centre which provides for approximately 80 children every week, in addition to providing a range of other social services. The maximum daily capacity is sixty children across the morning pre-school and crèche facilities, the full-day care service and the after-school service. On the day of the inspection twenty pre-school children and two practitioners were present. The room leader, the supervisor, and the manager of the setting took part in the professional dialogue at the pre-inspection meeting. 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 good.
- A caring ethos with an affirming atmosphere, where practitioners show a sensitive and positive regard for the children and their families, is evident.
- Recognition, praise and encouragement are regular features of the practitioners’ responses to the children.
- Practitioners model and provide guidance and encouragement towards positive behaviour; they thus foster caring and respectful child-child relationships.
- Children are supported to manage their own hygiene and personal care needs.
- The lovely displays in the setting such as the birthday calendar, the family wall, and photographs of play scenes on posters in the hall, provide opportunities for the children to develop an appreciation of themselves as individuals and as members of a group.
- The potential of meal times for promoting social interaction, well-being and a healthy lifestyle amongst the children needs to be utilised more.
- The routines and procedures need to be evaluated; ‘station teaching’ as currently organised in the setting is not appropriate for pre-school aged children. Currently, following a ‘station teaching’ model, the children are offered three parallel activities (for example, the sand table, making hedgehogs, and painting a picture) and, after ten minutes, are asked to stop their activity and to move on to the next activity until all three activities have been experienced. Children need time, space and the right environment in order to play, to be creative, to explore and to learn. They need to be enabled to be active agents in choosing and organising their learning and development activities. This more inclusive approach leaves scope to accommodate diversity in the style, pace and focus of children’s learning and development and facilitates the engagement of all learners in the setting.
- Inclusion strategies will have to be developed for the high percentage of children for whom English is not their first language.

Actions advised

- Meal time needs to be utilised as a social occasion and an opportunity to promote well-being, life-skills and a healthy lifestyle. Practitioners are advised to sit with the children during meal times in order to avail of opportunities to communicate about healthy choices and lifestyles. These informal, small-group times in a relaxed atmosphere during a meal together, provide time and space for children to listen and to communicate, a very important factor in the language development of pre-school children, particularly children for whom English is an additional language.
- It is advised to expand the indoor free-play time and to incorporate the arts and craft activities as free choice activities during this time. Time-restricted station teaching needs to be replaced by expanded free-choice play options, during which arts and craft activities can also be offered to the children that are interested.
- Strategies to aid the inclusion of children with English as an additional language need to be explored and implemented. The use of songs, rhymes and, in particular, gesture and movement games throughout the day and especially for transition times, will aid understanding and language acquisition. The use of visual prompts such as pictures to display the daily routine and different activities, will help the children to know what to expect and will give them greater agency. Displaying
a list with the most important everyday words in all the different languages will help practitioners to communicate more effectively with the children.

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.
• A broad-based curriculum is documented and planning for curriculum implementation is organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis.
• A variety of assessment approaches is used to gather information about children’s development and learning as well as to document their emerging interests. Information gathered through these assessment approaches is used to inform the next steps in children’s learning experiences.
• Practitioners are encouraged to develop a system to regularly consult with parents and to share information about the children’s learning and development, including information about their interests, dispositions, values and attitudes.
• The indoor and outdoor environments are well maintained and safe. The layout of the indoor area could be more purposefully structured and resourced in order to create areas for role-play and socio-dramatic play, construction play, as well as an arts and craft area. The adjacent little storage room would make a perfect construction area for big block building and other such activities.
• Part of the outdoor area is available most days and lovely, interactive play was observed on the day of the inspection. Equipping the children with suitable clothing, such as boots and waterproof dungarees, would enable the use of the whole outdoor area throughout the year, which is highly beneficial for the overall healthy development of the children.

Actions advised
• All of the play areas need to be accessible and fully equipped with a variety of developmentally appropriate, multi-sensory resources and materials, to be inviting, and to stimulate children’s curiosity, creativity, imagination and their desire to explore and play. For example, the children would benefit from having a few dolls with a bed and a pram and some clothes to change them. Their play would also be supported by a fully-equipped home corner with pots and pans, plates, cups and cutlery, weighing scales, and a selection of everyday items that can be used for purposeful role-play. The sand table, which needs plenty of sand and materials to work with, as well as painting, should always be available for daily indoor free play, so that children can follow their own interests and dispositions. Both indoor and outdoor environments need to be enhanced with a focus on providing more scope for the children to develop their physical fitness, their sense of balance, their spatial awareness and their gross motor skills.
• Families need to be consulted and informed about their child’s learning and development, their interests and dispositions on a regular basis.
• The practitioners are advised to engage with the Aistear/Siolta Practice Guide, in particular around the areas of ‘Environments’ and ‘Play’.

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 already playing quite cooperatively in pairs and small groups. During these play episodes they are displaying self-confidence and initiative, as well as positive learning dispositions such as resilience and persistence.
• The children are beginning to understand the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour, recognising the rights and views of others, and they demonstrate some capacity for self-regulation.
• Children’s agency, choice and autonomy need to be fostered more throughout the day.
• Given the high percentage of children with English as an additional language, children need to be offered a broad variety of ways to communicate their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings, both verbally and non-verbally.
Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to foster throughout the day, and in a more practical and dynamic way, the children’s agency, choice and autonomy. A good opportunity for doing this exists at the first snack time, where currently the practitioners put out pieces of fruit on paper plates for each child, pour their drink and call the children to the set table. Rich learning opportunities are missed through this practice. The children could count how many people are present and lay the table accordingly. They could be enabled to help themselves to the food they want to eat, for example, from a bowl in the centre of the table; they could also be enabled to pour their own drink. Important learning and development can be facilitated in a meaningful, effective way if children are given opportunities to handle real cups and plates, to tidy up after the meal, put away their plates, cups and lunch bags, and separate the compost from the plastic. This will give them autonomy and self-competence as well as teach them self-care and life-skills, responsibility and environmental awareness.
- The children need to be provided with a broad variety of ways to communicate their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings throughout the day. This can be aided through the use of interactive story-telling, by offering ‘junk’-art, free drawing and painting activities, through mark-making opportunities, through dancing and singing, and by practitioners using interaction strategies and methodologies such as prompting, scaffolding and asking open-ended questions which the children are encouraged to answer. The use of a signing-in board and a job-board for the children would further aid the feeling of identity and belonging.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The room leader reviews the daily plan at the end of every day and adjusts it according to what activities were actually carried out successfully and also notes children’s emerging interests.
- Generally the practitioners reflect and review the practice, policies and procedures in order to improve children’s learning experiences and outcomes during a weekly team meeting. Senior management further meets once a week to discuss overall running issues of the Resource Centre. The outcomes of self-review and reflection need to be documented, shared and acted upon to improve children’s learning experiences and achievements.
- An ethos of teamwork, collaboration and partnership is evident amongst the staff and with management. Opportunities provided for each practitioner in the setting to take a leadership role in promoting learning.
- Effective strategies for continuous professional development (CPD) are in place.
- Clear two-way channels of communication between families and the setting are fostered in a vast variety of ways, through which the policies and procedures, the curriculum, and general information are regularly shared in a spirit of openness and mutual respect and transparency.
- Transitions into and from the setting are handled sensitively and effectively to ensure children’s continuity of experiences and the progression in children’s learning.
- The setting has established good relationships with some local primary schools. These support the continuity of experiences and progression in children’s learning and development at transition time.

Actions advised

- Effective strategies for documenting and sharing professional reflection, curriculum evaluation, mentoring, support and continuous professional development need to be established.
- Planning, review and evaluation need to be informed by Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and also need to reflect the views of staff, parents and the children.
- It is advised that CPD about the effective inclusion and stimulation of children with English as additional language be sourced and availed of.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the practitioners to implement the actions advised above is very good.
### Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Quality Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of context to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Provision that is very good is highly effective in meeting the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of children but with some aspects to be developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Provision that is fair requires practice to be improved to meet the needs of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Provision that is poor is inadequate and requires significant improvement to meet the needs of children.</td>
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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**

As per our practice in Macroom Family Resource Centre, I distributed your report to my Childcare Team for information purposes and met with the Team to agree our response to the report. We greatly welcome the positive nature of your comments in regard to the four areas covered in your report, i.e.

1. Quality of context to support children’s learning and development.
2. Quality of process to support children’s learning and development.
3. Quality of children’s learning experience and achievements.
4. Quality of management and leadership for learning.

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

We find it difficult to disagree with the actions advised and we would aspire to achieving many of these within our capacity to do so in terms of actual space and resources.

At all times it is our intention to maximize the learning and development experience for all our children through providing the right context, process and leadership available to us.

I must say that the resources available to us makes this ambition challenging and it would be remiss of me not to point out the inadequate nature of our resourcing especially when it comes to enhancing quality.

Our efforts to continue to enhance our services is evidenced by our involvement in the AIM programme, for which our senior staff are now receiving training with the intention of improving our practices and integrating best practice where possible. However, the challenge of supporting continuous staff development is ever present. We are hopeful that EYEI can impact nationally in regard to this.

My team has asked that I communicate our commitment to parental involvement which may not have been evident on the day of inspection. Our practice is to involve parents through;

- Daily feedback.
- Ongoing observations and feedback.
- Formal progression meetings with parents.
- Work display.

The other advised actions have been taken on board as part of our Practice Improvement Plan and we will endeavour to formulate practices around this advice with a view to incorporating these where and when possible in our programmes.

We look forward to your continued support in and around the quality issues affecting childcare and you can be assured of our full cooperation in this regard.