CONTEXT OF SETTING

Amanda’s Playgroup is a privately owned, sessional pre-school, located in a church hall on the outskirts of Carrigaline town. All the equipment needs to be tidied away daily and set up again every morning. The service is open in the mornings, Tuesday to Friday, for forty-one weeks per year. The manager/owner together with three assistants, who share the four day week, provide early years education for fourteen children per morning. The owner/manager and the assistant of the day attended the post-inspection feedback 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 good.
- The atmosphere in the setting is very warm and welcoming, with a caring ethos. Practitioners are sensitive to and display a positive regard for the children and their families.
- During the free-play period, the children have some agency over choosing and organising their learning experiences.
- A rough routine plan is hand written for the day and displayed on the notice board inside the playroom. Parents and children have no access to this plan. The routines and procedures outlined on this plan need to be changed, to more consistently promote children’s physical, social and emotional security together with their learning and development.
- Snack time is utilised as social occasion with children sitting and eating together. Practitioners are currently not joining in meal times.
- Practitioners model positive behaviour and provide some guidance and encouragement towards it.
- Children’s identity and belonging need to be nurtured more within the displays, the environment, the activities and the interactions.

Actions advised
- Practitioners are advised to implement a daily routine consisting of long, uninterrupted, child-initiated/led activities interwoven with short, practitioner-initiated/led activities such as circle time and story time. Art and craft activities, planting, cooking and baking, making playdough and experiments can be offered parallel to free play as choice activities for children who show an interest in them. Once a clear, well-balanced daily routine is established, it needs to be displayed in writing for the parents and in picture sequence for the children, so that they gain security in knowing the rhythm of each day.
- Practitioners are advised to sit, eat ad communicate with the children during snack time, creating a family-type mealtime in a relaxed atmosphere conducive to small group conversation. This will promote a healthy lifestyle and provide more scope to foster well-being. It will also support the children’s language acquisition.
- Problem-solving and conflict resolution strategies need to be explored and implemented by the practitioners in order to empower children to become more competent, self-efficient and self-reliant.
- Diversity needs to be recognised, valued and affirmed within an inclusive learning environment. Opportunities for the children to develop an appreciation of themselves as individuals and as members of groups need to be provided. For example, an ‘All about me’ sheet could be created by children and their parents before they enter pre-school, and a family wall could be utilised to explore diversity.

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.
• A pre-planned curriculum for the whole year is drawn up from which weekly and daily plans are derived. The curriculum implemented at present does not meet the individual learning dispositions, needs and interests of all the children in the setting.
• Some short narratives about children are documented.
• The focus of the practitioners, even during the long free-play period, is on table-top activities and the completion of tasks, such as puzzles, completing constructions, and learning letters, numbers, colours and shapes through worksheets and other didactic activities and materials.
• The indoor environment is safe and well maintained with some good resources to stimulate, support and extend children’s learning and development. Children’s opportunities to use and develop their physical skills, particularly their core strength, gross motor skills, sense of balance, and spatial awareness are greatly curtailed by the absence of an outdoor play area.
• The setting caters for a very diverse group of children and is trying to implement an inclusive approach. At the time of the inspection, the manager was participating in a course on diversity and equality.
• Didactic teaching methods, such as colouring-in and work sheets, are currently used to teach academic knowledge.
• The rationale for and the desired learning outcomes of the practitioner-initiated/led activities need to be reviewed.

Actions advised
• Practitioners are strongly advised to engage with the ‘Planning and assessment’ pillar of the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide in order to gain an understanding about the development and implementation of an interests-based, emergent curriculum.
• Meaningful, strengths-based observations need to be developed, focusing on children’s interests, their knowledge, values, attitudes, needs, cultural back backgrounds and previous learning experiences. The information arising from such observations can build the basis for planning an emergent curriculum.
• Practitioners need to focus on the creation of a diverse, individualised approach that recognises and accommodates diversity in the style, pace and focus of children’s learning and development. Participating in the ‘Leadership for Inclusion Course’ (LINC) is advised, with a particular focus on the inclusion of children with additional needs.
• Exploratory, enquiry-based, interactive free play needs to be recognised and utilised as the main medium through which the children learn and develop. Practitioners are advised to explore and use appropriate interaction strategies such as active listening, prompting, asking open-ended questions, and scaffolding to co-construct knowledge together with the children.
• The environment needs to be restructured to facilitate, inspire and support a broad variety of types of play including socio-dramatic play, messy play, physical play, and creative play. In the absence of an outdoor play area, the practitioners are advised to consider how they could use the indoor environment for more physically active activities and gross motor skill development.
• Practitioners are advised to refrain from the use of didactic teaching methods to impart academic knowledge.
• Activities offered need to be planned so that they are meaningful for children’s learning and development. The rationale for activities needs to be clear and relevant learning goals and outcomes have to be developed. Planning for children’s learning and development needs to build on their interests, previous experiences and achievements.

AREA 3
QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

• The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
• The children demonstrate enjoyment in some of their activities.
• During the free-play period, some positive, interactive play engagement in pairs and in small groups was evident. At those times, the children are refining their personal and social skills such as self-regulation, problem-solving, negotiating, turn-taking, co-operating, and building relationships. This needs to be fostered more.
• The children use their verbal and non-verbal communication skills to give and receive information, ask questions, negotiate and clarify their thinking.
• The children have some opportunities to express their thoughts, feelings and creativity through drawing, moving to music, and construction play. Currently art activities are outcome focused (as distinct from focusing on processes) and are largely based on templates.

Actions advised
• Practitioners are advised to focus on encouraging and facilitating interactive play in pairs and in small groups in order to enable the children to further develop their personal and social skills.
• The focus of art and craft work needs to be on the provision of suitable, age-appropriate opportunities for the children to inspire and freely express their creativity, their uniqueness and individuality while utilising their autonomy and agency in the process.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING
• The quality of management and leadership for learning is fair.
• There are no arrangements in place for management and staff to regularly meet to reflect on and review their practice or to develop the curriculum together.
• The current practice of employing three different practitioners as assistants for the four mornings is not conducive to professional teamwork or collaboration. It is not supportive of children’s attachment and the forming of trusting relationships.
• Currently the rationale for activities, the learning goals, and the planned outcomes are not clear. A clear, shared vision and direction for the work of the setting needs to be established.
• Some two-way communication channels between the setting and the families are established.
• Transitions into and from the setting are managed sensitively.

Actions advised
• Regular formal team meetings are advised in order to review the service’s practice, procedures and policies. The outcomes of those meetings need to be documented so they can be shared, acted upon and re-evaluated in order to improve children’s learning experiences and achievements.
• The current practice of having three different assistants for the four mornings needs to be evaluated and adjusted.
• The engagement of external advisory supports such as ‘Better Start’ is strongly advised.
• In-depth engagement with all the areas of the online Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide, starting with the ‘Curriculum foundation’ pillar, is advised for all staff members.
• It is advised that continuous professional development opportunities be sought and utilised, particularly around implementing Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Attending courses on the leadership and management of pre-schools is further advised.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE
The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is fair.
### Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Quality Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of context to support children's learning and development</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children's learning and development</td>
<td>Fair</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>Fair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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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</tbody>
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