

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

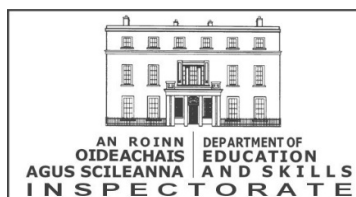
Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

**Alanna Playschool
09KE0152**

**Tirmoghan
Donadea
Naas
County Kildare**

Date of Inspection: 13 March 2017



CONTEXT OF SETTING

Alanna Playschool is located in the townland of Tirmoghan and has been in operation for sixteen years. It provides one morning session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. On the day of the inspection, twenty children, the owner (who is the lead practitioner), and two assistant practitioners were present. 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 at the setting is very warm and affirming of the children. Interactions are very kind, nurturing and respectful. Relationships between practitioners and children are secure. The practitioners regard each child as a unique individual; a key worker system is in place and each child is very aware of his/her own key worker.
- The daily routine has been carefully designed with due regard for flexibility to support the children's learning. Routines are in many ways organic, with children taking the lead as to how their day progresses. Children move with ease from one activity to another over the course of the day.
- The practitioners regard snack time as an opportunity for creating a social occasion. Rich conversations take place between the practitioners and the children, with the children taking the lead in such discussions.
- The children in this setting are encouraged to be independent and responsible. A helper system is in place and, under that system; the children take responsibility for different jobs each week. The jobs chart is displayed pictorially at the children's eye level, thereby enabling them to check their own particular jobs.
- The promotion of healthy eating is very evident in the setting and the children have made their own food pyramid.
- The practitioners provide excellent role models for the children in relation to desirable behaviour. They skilfully reinforce the positive interactions of the children. They encourage the children to resolve their own differences and to be kind to one another.
- The practitioners view the children as competent learners and give them autonomy to make decisions about their play. Commendably, they have involved the children in deciding strategies for signalling that a new activity is about to commence.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging is nurtured and celebrated. A 'friendship tree' depicting the children as a group, photographs of the children and their families, and the children's own drawings are displayed for the children and their families to see.
- Regular opportunities are provided which bring together families, children and practitioners in the setting. They include Christmas events and sports day. In addition, parents are invited into the service to share their skills, jobs and talents. The excellent links between the setting and the local community are further illustrated by the visits to the service from a Garda, nurse, doctor and postman.

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 excellent.
- Provision in the setting is informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Planning is organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis and is comprehensive. Plans are responsive to the changing needs and interests of the children.
- Highly effective systems are in place for gathering information about the children's learning and development, their interests and dispositions. Those systems result in a rich picture of each child's strengths and interests. They comprise the observations of the children that are made and

documented by the practitioners, notes of parental perspectives on their children's learning, and the practitioners' completion of developmental checklists for each child. Information gathered in these ways is compiled into an individual 'All about me' portfolio for each child. Commendably, there is a very close link between the information compiled about each child and the practitioners' planning for the next steps in the child's learning.

- The indoor environment is very well resourced for play. It includes a well-stocked dress-up area, a home corner, materials for construction play, jigsaws, paint, resources for fine motor development, multi-cultural resources and items for small world play.
- Practitioners rotate the resources regularly in order to stimulate and sustain the children's interest in a broad variety of play types. Excellent use is made of an interest table that is changed regularly by the practitioners in response to the play ideas and emergent interests of the children. For example, at the time of the inspection, the children had a particular interest in 'office play' and, in response to that, the practitioners sourced an old typewriter, old desktop phones, pads and pens and a mobile phone.
- Literacy is promoted throughout the pre-school environment through, for example, posters, wall murals, books, labels, blackboards and a very good range of pre-writing materials. Books are accessible, are used by the children throughout the morning, and are rotated based on the children's evolving interests, *Aistear* themes and the seasons. Books of special interest are included in interest areas around the room; for example, a recipe book is located in the kitchen and a nature book at the nature table.
- The outdoor play area, although small, facilitates a range of play types. It currently includes a tent, a playhouse, a seesaw, various cycles, tunnels, a slide and a picnic table. Owing to its size, children use the outdoors in two groupings throughout the day. Plans are in place to extend the outdoor play area.
- An effective balance between practitioner-directed and child-directed activities is achieved over the course of the day's activities. Further, the children are consulted regularly about their views and opinions.
- Interactions in this setting are of a very high quality. The children are listened to, encouraged to explore their environment, and to express their thoughts. Their interests are extended and affirmed through the practitioners' engagement with them. The practitioners clearly value play. They play naturally with the children, showing enjoyment in so doing.
- Emergent language and numeracy skills are very effectively scaffolded through purposeful conversations and interactions. A mathematics week takes place in the setting at the same time as mathematics week in the primary school.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children present as very happy, motivated and engaged. They are enthusiastic and spontaneous in their play. They show an ability to stay with tasks and activities over time. For example, an office role-play scenario sustained the children's interests for some time.
- The children display a strong sense of self-esteem and emotional well-being. A soft toy called 'Worry Bear' is used to help the children to connect with their own feelings. The children take turns to bring 'Worry Bear' home with them and the toy bear's documented stories are used to stimulate discussions at circle time. 'Feeling cards' and 'feeling masks' are also used to promote the children's well-being. Throughout the morning of the inspection, the children were observed using these to communicate and share their feelings with each other. With the support of their practitioners, the children have created a booklet called, 'How I feel today' to indicate their feelings and emotions, thereby fostering their self-expression. This is commendable practice in supporting children's well-being.
- The children were observed making connections with their prior learning and knowledge. For example, following a previous discussion about a fire drill, a practise fire evacuation procedure took place as part of children's role-play.
- The children understand the rules of the service; take turns and they show an understanding of the rights of others.

- The children recall and reflect on their learning and they competently discuss future play plans with each other and with their key practitioner.
- Children confidently use mathematical language and demonstrate a growing awareness of the meaning of mathematical symbols and numbers.
- The children experience celebration of their efforts and achievements in the setting. For example, their art is on display together with their comments as scribed by the practitioners. Their portfolios are stored in the book area in a way that ensures the children have ongoing access to them and, accordingly, ongoing opportunities to review, connect with, and take pride in their achievements to date.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The owner has established comprehensive organisational systems to ensure efficiency in the setting's day-to-day functioning. She provides excellent role modelling and skilled leadership for the practitioners. A formal induction programme for all newly appointed staff is in place.
- There is a strong sense of teamwork amongst the practitioners. Formal staff meetings are held every six weeks and the staff also meet informally on a daily basis.
- The *Aistear*, *Síolta Practice Guide* informs the practitioners' regular reviews of education provision in the setting. The practitioners are very reflective. They have a comprehensive knowledge of both *Aistear* and *Síolta* and are fully involved in planning and in practice reviews. The outcomes of the reviews are documented and a reflective diary is kept. There are plans to involve parents in such reviews.
- The practitioners engage in regular and continuous professional development. The service is a member of a number of voluntary organisations that support children's development and learning. The practitioners liaise with the local County Childcare Committee to support their professional development. They recently completed a course on equality, inclusion and diversity and participated in the Healthy Ireland Smart Start Programme for pre-school services.
- A mission statement is in place.
- Communications with parents are excellent. The pre-school operates an open-door policy whereby parents are welcome to visit the service at any time. The setting's policies and procedures are shared with parents and a comprehensive parental handbook is available. A 'compliments and complaints' policy is also in place. The practitioners communicate daily with parents through newsletters and texts. They also maintain a comprehensive notice board for parents to refer to at drop-off and collection times. Parents are consulted in relation to their child's learning. Parent-practitioner meetings are held yearly.
- When the children are enrolled in the setting, the practitioners gather meaningful information about the children in order to support each child's transition from home into the setting. In addition, the practitioners carry out observations at the beginning of each term to inform their short-term planning for the next steps in the children's learning.
- Worthwhile links have been made with the local primary school to support the children in moving from pre-school to primary school. The service has built up the relationship with the local primary school over time and contact between the school and pre-school occurs towards the end of the year. Information relating to children transferring to primary school is provided to the school with the permission of parents. A transitions booklet is provided to parents in order to further support the transition to school. A transitioning policy, which documents the pre-school-primary school links, is in place.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The service has demonstrated its commitment to quality practice and to the ongoing development of education provision.

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	Excellent
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.