

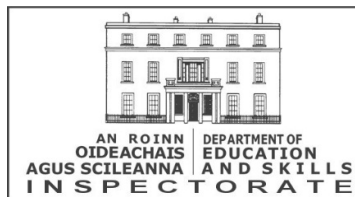
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection
Report

Bernie Tynan's Pre-school
09LS0007

24 Beechlawn
Portlaoise
County Laois

Date of Inspection: 25 January 2017



CONTEXT OF SETTING

Bernie Tynan's Pre-school is located in the town of Portlaoise in Co. Laois. It has been operation since 1991. It caters for fifty pre-school children distributed across two rooms. It provides two morning and one afternoon session for children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. Children divide their time between the two rooms. On the day of inspection, fifteen children were present in the ECCE group inspected together with the owner/lead practitioner and one practitioner. 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 relaxed and calm, characterised by very warm, caring interactions between staff, children and parents. Relationships are secure and respectful of children. Practitioners are softly spoken and affirming in their interactions with children.
- The daily routine has been carefully considered to best support quality learning experiences with the children afforded an opportunity to move between the two rooms. Each room offers different learning experiences and activities. Practitioners move with children from room to room which supports continuity for them. Transitions between rooms are handled very effectively through the effective use of a key person system with children fully aware of their routines and when to move rooms.
- Children are encouraged to be independent and responsible. They hang up their own coats and they take turns tidying up.
- A helper system is in place where children get an opportunity to lead activities. This is displayed visually for the children.
- An effective key person system is in place with practitioners having specific children for whom they each have responsibility. This supports the development of positive relationships between children and practitioners at the setting. Children receive significant individual attention.
- Practitioners model good behaviour strategies and reinforce positive behaviours. Children are encouraged to resolve their own differences and a display of simple meaningful rules is in place for the children and understood by them. These are 'good looking, good listening and good sitting'.
- Children are very much viewed as active agents by practitioners and plenty of choice and opportunities to negotiate activities and materials is provided. A suitable range of procedures has been successfully established to support children to self-direct their own learning.
- Children's sense of identity and belonging is fully nurtured. Photographs of children are displayed and birthdays are celebrated and documented. The importance of family is celebrated and meaningful family wall murals are on display with photographs of families, extended families and pets. Children's names are presented over their bags and group photos of children are evident. Children have a ribbon in their memory book, which relates to their height on starting pre-school. A similar ribbon is included at the end of the year showing their height upon leaving the service.
- Regular opportunities are provided to bring together families, children and practitioners. Grandmothers engage in regular baking for the service. Parents and extended families attend a Christmas show, a sports day and an Easter party. Parents also share their talents, and family diversity is celebrated in a variety of ways. As an example parents from abroad, come to the setting to sing songs with the children in their mother tongue. The setting has made excellent links with the local community. Visitors to the pre-school include a nurse, an artist and a member of An Garda Síochána. Links have also been made with the local theatre where the pre-school children put on an annual show. A commendable strategy is in place to support connections for children with their grandparents. The service seeks the views of grandparents about their grandchildren and this information is placed in children's memory books for them to keep.

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 fully informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and the principles and themes of *Aistear* are used comprehensively to inform and guide curriculum planning.
- Planning is organised on a long-term, medium-term and short-term basis and planning for learning is comprehensive. Plans are adaptive and organic as they are based on the changing needs and interests of the children.
- A variety of assessment strategies is used, both formal and informal and these are strengths-based and fully aligned to the themes of *Aistear*. A group-learning journal is in place and children all have their own memory books with sample activities, photographs and meaningful learning experiences, which go home at the end of each year.
- The indoor environment incorporates two bright, inviting and well-resourced rooms providing extensive opportunities for the children to engage in different play experiences, moving from room to room in a planned way. One playroom includes a den, a painting area and a sand tray. A range of pre-writing materials is available including left-handed and right-handed pencils and scissors. The second room incorporates a home corner complete with mock fireplace and real materials, a light box, a stage and puppet theatre. The book area is well stocked, with varied books that support diversity and incorporate the themes of *Aistear*. The dress-up area includes shoes of different sizes. The setting has a wide variety of literacy and numeracy resources and a print-rich environment in both Irish and English, which is used effectively throughout the morning.
- The outdoor environment comprises a front and back garden, which includes a picnic bench, train track table, two playhouses, climbing frame and slide, a variety of ride-on toys, provision for water play and opportunities for mark making. Children connect with their outdoor environment further through their interactions with a pet rabbit, a bird table, planting area and a tree with meaningful objects related to the current season displayed on it. The daffodils the children have grown last season are starting to make an appearance. The children also have access to a local field, which the owner reports they visit regularly.
- There is a strong balance between adult-directed and child-directed activities where practitioners and children take the lead. Children are consulted about their experiences of their day and about their expectations for it. On the day of the inspection, the children were provided with opportunities to take turns providing their news using a microphone.
- Very positive and effective interactions between practitioners and children were evident. Children were continually encouraged and re-affirmed. Continuous encouragement of strong peer interactions between children was also observed.
- Effective scaffolding of emergent language and numeracy skills was observed with an interactive story-time taking place using laminated story cards and stick on props. Laminated pages have been created to illustrate the fortnightly story topic for each child, which they bring home in order to revisit the story at home, sharing learning with parents and providing children with opportunities for recap and recall. Children are encouraged to enjoy books and to be imaginative through their engagement with books.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is very good.
- Children present as very comfortable and content at the setting and they are very familiar with the routines of their day. They are motivated and fully involved in all their learning experiences.
- The children displayed confidence and demonstrated very good communication skills in sharing their learning experiences with the inspector.
- Children demonstrate a strong sense of self-awareness, perseverance in tasks and ownership of their own ideas. As an example, one child drawing her family decided she did not have enough room on her paper to fit everything in she wanted. She resolved the issue after some thought by carefully sticking an extra piece of paper at the end.

- Children engage in a wide range of multi-faceted activities at the setting. In putting on a show in the local theatre for families and extended families, they are involved in planning for it, making their own props and directing it. They also at this time get an opportunity to see how a show is presented in terms of lighting and staging. A hatching egg project supports children in learning about their environment, life cycles and how to tend for chicks.
- Philosophising activities take place using a puppet show through the practitioners presenting a moral situation to children and encouraging them to reflect on how to deal with it.
- The children enjoy many opportunities to use books creatively, engaging in stories with their peers and discussing aspects of the stories on a one-to-one basis with the practitioners. A range of the 'I wonder why books' are used regularly to support children's capacity to respond to 'I wonder why' questions.
- Children are aware of their feelings and express themselves creatively in a variety of ways such as through mark making and through song.

Action advised

- Building on the current very good practices in place, it is advised that practices be further extended for children to have ongoing opportunities to name their feelings and emotions to contribute to their developing awareness. Supporting this with a visual display or accessible props will augment this provision further.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- Management have established comprehensive organisational systems to ensure efficiency in the setting's day-to-day functioning. They also provide excellent role modelling and leadership to staff.
- The Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide, informs regular reviews of practices in this setting. A comprehensive knowledge of Aistear is evident and this is used purposefully to inform ongoing improvement initiatives
- There is a strong sense of team evident as practitioners demonstrate a shared sense of dedication to supporting and enabling children to learn and develop. Formal staff meetings are held monthly and practitioners assigned to specific rooms meet as a team daily to support practice and provision.
- The service engages in regular and continuous professional development and is a member of different voluntary organisations that support children's development and learning. They liaise with their County Childcare Committee to support this professional development further. Currently the owner/manager is taking part in the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme.
- A key worker system and an open- door policy are in place where parents are welcome to visit the service at any time.
- Practitioners at the service communicate daily with parents using social media. A monthly newsletter is provided to parents. A complaints and comment policy is in place and parent evaluations are provided through questionnaires. Children are consulted regularly about their views and opinions.
- Meetings are held with parents individually prior to children starting at the setting. Information is sought about children's likes, dislikes and individual needs. This information is used to assist children transitioning into the service and to inform plans.
- The management at the setting has made links with their local primary schools to support children transitioning from pre-school to primary school. The primary school provides an art activity for the children to complete and send back. A transitions booklet is shared with parents. In the past, visits have taken place by teachers from the local primary school and this is something the service is interested in developing again.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the action advised above is excellent. The service shows a great insight and interest into the continuous improvement of practice.

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	Very Good
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.