An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection
Report

The Village Crèche
09LS0013
Bog Road
Ballyroan
County Laois

Date of Inspection: 17th November 2017
CONTEXT OF SETTING

The Village Crèche is a privately-owned setting providing a pre-school and full day-care service. The setting provides a morning Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The pedagogical approach is play based. On the day of the inspection, nineteen children were present together with three practitioners. 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 good.
- There is a friendly and relaxed atmosphere in the setting. Parents and children are greeted warmly on arrival by the practitioners.
- There is an established daily routine in operation. On the day of the inspection, during the free-play period and the adult-led activity, some of the children became disengaged and the activities did not provide sustained and purposeful learning opportunities for the children.
- There is a key worker system in operation. This supports the building of relationships between the practitioners and the children. The practitioners are calm, responsive and affirming in their interactions with the children. There is scope to develop the key-worker system to support the planning process for each individual child’s learning.
- Some transitions between activities are signposted verbally with the use of effective strategies such as engaging the children in song and discussion while waiting. Other transition periods result in a lengthy waiting period until the materials or all of children are ready for the next activity. As a result, a number of children become restless.
- Effective praise and encouragement are a regular feature of the practitioners’ responses to the children. There are some inconsistencies in approaches to supporting positive behaviour amongst the children. While there is some supportive fostering of respectful child-child relationships, at times a more directional approach is used which includes direct, instructional language telling the children what to do.
- The children’s sense of identity and belonging in the environment are well supported. For example, there is a family tree display, a birthday chart display, and a self-portrait of each child with their height measurements noted. The book area has a shelf on which the children’s favourite books of the month are displayed. The setting has recently begun to make connections with the community. For example, the Order of Malta recently visited the children with their ambulance. There is scope to further develop these connections.

Actions advised
- The practitioners are advised to review the organisation of the daily routine in relation to ensuring a balance between adult-led and child-initiated experiences that are responsive to the children’s interests and needs, and developing the children’s engagement in effective small-group activities and purposeful play.
- The practitioners are advised to implement a consistent approach to promoting good behaviour.
- The practitioners are advised to have clear signposting of transitions, consistent use of transition strategies, and clarity around the arrangement of activities in order to allow children to transition effectively.

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.
- The practitioners are developing an enquiry-based, emergent curriculum. They are currently moving to a weekly planning model, with some evidence of children’s emerging interests being planned for. The plan is linked to Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The lead
practitioner develops the curriculum plan following a team review of the documented observations of the children.

- The practitioners gather information about the child’s learning using the Aistear learning record template. The next steps for children’s learning are identified and noted. There is no connection between those identified next steps and the short-term plans. The practitioners are developing individual learning journals for each child; these are beginning to capture the richness of each child’s learning. The setting plans to share these ‘special books’ with parents to highlight the children’s learning journey and to encourage parents to share their thoughts on their child’s learning. The group learning journal captures the children’s emergent interests. There is scope to develop these documents to introduce the voice of the child.

- Play is central to the children’s learning in this setting. The indoor learning space is bright, attractively designed and provides for many types of imaginative and exploratory play experiences. It includes sand, water, an art and mark-making area, a sensory winter box, playdough, construction materials, and a book and home corner areas.

- The practitioners use some effective interaction strategies such as naming and affirming children’s actions and ideas, introducing descriptive words into the conversations, engaging as a play partner and asking some open-ended questions. There is scope for increased adult support to extend and scaffold children’s thinking and reasoning throughout the daily routine and activities.

- The children have regular access to the outdoor area where the available materials promote gross motor play and some socio-dramatic play. There is potential for developing interest areas in the outdoor environment.

**Actions advised**

- Practitioners are advised to develop a more comprehensive view of the child’s learning and experiences by introducing key-person planning. When planning to extend learning, key practitioners are advised to think about the individual child, their interests and development needs, and to incorporate the child’s voice in the planning and documenting process. Individual learning journals and Aistear learning record observations can be merged, with the addition of the child’s voice to create a comprehensive assessment document.

- The practitioners are encouraged to reflect on their role in children’s play and to plan and predict how they could scaffold the children’s learning further. In this regard, the preparation of some open-ended questions that provoke and challenge children’s thinking is advised.

**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 their freely chosen play.

- For the majority of the time they are engaged and motivated in their activities. At times some of the children become disengaged and would benefit from additional support to engage them in purposeful play.

- The children demonstrate self-confidence in their abilities. For example, when there was no flour left in the shaker, a child announced she could open it and re-fill it and did so independently.

- The children are developing friendships and greet each other warmly on arrival.

- Some children understand the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and demonstrate an evolving capacity for negotiation and collaboration. This was observed when two children exchanged a car for binoculars and then returned the items to each other after a period of play. Some instances were observed where a number of children showed difficulty in solving their own small conflicts and needed the practitioner to resolve the issues.

- The children have many opportunities to represent their ideas and feelings in a creative way, through sand, water, playdough and the art and mark-making materials. During free play in the home corner children ‘read’ recipe cards and ‘wrote’ their shopping lists.

- The children are competent and capable at describing their interests, opinions, families and recent events. This needs to be fostered and encouraged.

- The children are developing an awareness of the local community and community helpers through recent activities and visitors to the setting, such as the recent visit of the ambulance.
• The children are supported to develop the capacity to reflect on their learning. For example at large-group time, the practitioner effectively facilitated the children in discussing and recalling their recent experience of the ambulance visit. There is scope to further foster this skill.

**Actions advised**

• The children would benefit from more opportunities to reflect on their recent play and learning activities. For example, after the children have played in the morning they could come together to discuss, share ideas and reflect on what they were involved in. This could be facilitated by the key workers in small groups or at snack time.

• The practitioners are advised to provide additional appropriate activities that are reflective of the child’s interests, needs and dispositions.

• The practitioners are advised to support the children in negotiating, verbalising their feelings, empathising with others and resolving for themselves the small conflicts that arise.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

• The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.

• Informal team discussions happen daily before and after the session. At those meetings practitioners discuss their observations of the children and matters of child development. The team leader subsequently develops the short-term plan.

• The team is committed to continuous professional development. They have engaged both the Better Start Access and Inclusion service and the Better Start Quality Development service. They have identified the learning environment as an area for development.

• There is a professional ethos in the setting, with the owner/manager providing good support. There is evidence of good teamwork with clarity of roles; there is scope to develop shared leadership for learning in the setting.

• There are informal opportunities for the parents and practitioners to discuss their child’s learning and progress at arrival and collection times. The practitioners encourage parents to visit the setting and to discuss any matters of importance or relevance to them or to their child. Parents are invited to participate in activities in the service and to collect recyclable materials for craft activities. The documented observations of the children are shared regularly with the parents. Furthermore, at the end of the year, the service shares with parents all of the documentation collected regarding their child’s learning and development.

• The setting has established contact with the local primary school and the children attend the Christmas concert in the school each year.

**Actions advised**

• The practitioners are advised to develop a formal approach to reviewing their practice through the implementation of self-review using the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*. This will support the practitioners in taking a specific leadership role in promoting quality learning.

• The management team is advised to use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to formalise their team meetings and to develop a whole-team review process.

• The practitioners are advised to formally share with parents at intervals throughout the year the children’s learning journals. The eliciting of parental comments and opinions on the materials shared is also advised.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is good.
### 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>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>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

<table>
<thead>
<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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*Published September 2018*
APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report.

Steps have been taken to develop the pedagogical leadership capacity in our service. We are committed to supporting staff to improve their knowledge and implementation of Síolta and Aistear and associated planning, implementing and review activities.

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

Area 1
- Daily routine has been adapted to maintain a more effective use of an emergent curriculum, particularly with small group activities, reflection has commenced on medium term planning across all rooms.
- Practitioners are more consistent with promoting good behavior.
- Practitioners have implemented new transition strategies, e.g. count downs to tidy-up/snack time etc.

Area 2
- Practitioners have merged the individual learning journals and learning records into one document, this document now contains more photos and anecdotes, showing clear links between the plan for extended learning and the implementation of this plan.
- New leader is very reflective practitioner. She relies heavily on open ended questions to gain insight into the children and supports the other 2 practitioners with future planning and implementing.

Area 3
- More effective circle-time routine has been established, this is used to discuss previous/recent play activities and future activity plans that the children request.
- The practitioners have made a designated emergent area for group learning while maintaining smaller interest areas throughout the environment.
- Practitioners are implementing the high scope conflict resolution approach to support the children in challenges they may face with others.

Area 4
- Practitioners are using the Aistear Síolta practice guide Curriculum Foundations: Element 2 and Planning and Implementing: self-evaluation document throughout the setting (0-6) and small group discussions with other practitioners have been facilitated, which has improved the confidence of the practitioners, promoting quality learning for all children.
- Team meetings are more formalized but this still requires further planning and implementation as we have had a high staff turnover this year and it is difficult to arrange practitioners across all age groups, currently being done in two groups, 0-3y & 3-6y.
- Parents received individual learning journals at the end of each term but many parents did not
engage in giving feedback so the arrival/departure room has been adapted to display more emergent learning themes and the large group emergent area can be clearly seen from this room.

I feel confident that if we were to be inspected again today we would certainly receive a higher quality level in all areas, in all 4 of our ECCE rooms.