

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

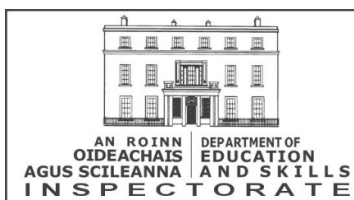
**Early-Years Education-focused Inspection**

**Report**

**Shooting Stars Crèche  
09SO0058**

**24 Ox Crescent  
Tubbercurry  
County Sligo**

**Date of Inspection: 21 February 2017**



## CONTEXT OF SETTING

Shooting Stars is a privately-owned, full day care and pre-school service located in Tubbercurry in County Sligo. The service operates two sessions that participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. One room was observed on the day of inspection. The manager, lead practitioner, assistant practitioner and fourteen children were present on the day of inspection. The session adopts the Montessori Method of education and the pedagogical approach is also informed by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. 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 very good.
- There is an energetic and warm atmosphere evident in the setting. The children are excited to see their friends and select an activity of choice from the Montessori materials available. The parents are invited to bring the children into the playroom and this gives the practitioners an opportunity to chat and establish a positive and supportive relationship with the parents.
- The daily schedule documents a list of specific activities which includes pre-writing, number counting, Montessori exercises, jigsaw, arts and crafts, cutting, circle time and matching. The routine of activities consists mostly of adult-directed activities and children would benefit from a more flexible routine that provided additional opportunities for them to choose and organise their learning and development activities.
- The times of transition are managed effectively to optimise the learning opportunities for children. Before snack time, the practitioners supported the children to make connections with numbers in real terms. The children worked together to figure out how many chairs they would need by counting each other and sorting out how many boys and girls are in the group. This type of activity is a fun and active way for children to learn about number using their own questions and through trial and error and creative problem-solving.
- Snack time is seen as an opportunity to promote children's well-being. It was a lovely example of a sociable gathering where all the children and the practitioners sat and ate together and shared stories. It was noteworthy to see the children getting involved and helping each other as they set up the table and chairs in preparation for what was a very positive large group experience.
- Opportunities are provided which bring together children, families and practitioners in the setting and help children to feel connected with the local community. The practitioners provide opportunities for parents to feel involved, through informal meetings and outings to the library and nearby playground. The setting has also been engaged with a farmyard pre-school initiative and this has helped the children to learn and develop a respect for the animals and the natural environment.

#### *Action advised:*

- The practitioners are advised to ensure there is a more appropriate balance between the adult-initiated and child-initiated learning activities in the daily routine and to ensure that it is sufficiently flexible to allow adequate time for children to play, share their news, stories and plan and reflect on their learning.

## 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 informed by the Montessori Method of education and underpinned by the principles of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The planning for curriculum implementation is organised on a medium-term and short-term basis. The weekly planning doesn't allow enough flexibility to accommodate children's interests.

- The practitioners are using the Montessori practical life exercise checklists and the learning story approach as their method to assessments to support children's learning and development. At the time of the inspection, the observations focused on the practitioners' expectations and there was little information captured about children's experiences and what they already knew.
- The child is recognised as an active agent in their learning by the practitioners who provide detailed guidance and appropriate feedback to enable children make decisions and persevere with learning activities. This was reflected on the day of the inspection during the Montessori session when the practitioner recognised when children needed additional guidance to complete an activity and achieve a sense of success and fulfilment. The use of open-ended questions helped the children to feel in control and think about how and what they should do to complete this activity. This is a good example of sustained shared thinking and collaborative learning.
- The children have opportunities to engage in play activities alone and with their peers. The play themes presenting at the time of the inspection focused on family, baking and having a birthday party. These emerging themes are important learning opportunities where children are learning to negotiate, plan and use vocabulary and mathematical thinking as they plan out a recipe and explain how many ingredients they need to make for their birthday cake.
- The Montessori materials are accessible and clearly laid out for children to choose from. The playroom is divided into two areas; one area is primarily dedicated to the Montessori materials and the other area has a book, a small children's couch, art easel, a table and chairs. At the time of inspection, there were insufficient resources in this area for children to freely engage in different types of play.
- The regular story-time activity and the books provided promote positive attitudes towards literacy among the children.

#### *Actions advised*

- The practitioners are advised to take anecdotal notes of children's conversations, focus on what children are playing with, what they are talking about in their play and to use this information to help them plan activities that support children's play and emerging interests. The pillar 'Planning and Assessing' and the short-term planning template in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, will help in this regard.
- It is advised that the practitioners review the organisation of the playroom to provide additional resources and materials that support children's play skills, learning and development. The practitioners could consider having a prop box for socio-dramatic play, accessible mark-making, paint and junk art materials, a box for construction/block and small world figures and pots/pans and other kitchen utensils for a home corner. The 'Learning Environment' pillar in the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide*, will be a valuable resource.

### **AREA 3**

#### **QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is good.
- Children demonstrate enjoyment in their learning and a high level of engagement in their Montessori exercises.
- The children are developing the ability to play cooperatively and in small groups. The practitioners set up opportunities for children to help each other and work together. The children are displaying the capacity to share their ideas, listen and talk through what they need to do next to complete the activity. This helps supports children's understanding of the views of others.
- The children are very focused on completing an activity; their persistence and sense of resourcefulness was reflected in the way they used the resources and worked through the process to complete the exercise.
- The children demonstrated creativity when they used their peg boards to match the colours and worked together to make the same patterns; when asked the children also explained about the story behind their patterns. This is a good example of children using materials to represent their creative and innovative ideas.
- An over-emphasis on the use of templates and workbooks was noted which reduces the time for open-ended activities which would better support the development of children's creativity, mark-making and pre-writing skills.

- The practitioners have developed folders of children's template-based artwork and these are sent home to parents throughout the year. The children are very proud of these folders and it would be beneficial to develop these further in a way that clearly reflects the children's individual identity and unique learning experiences.
- During the session observed, there were some opportunities for children to come together and discuss and think about their learning experiences with each other and what interests them. The practitioner used an effective strategy at story time to reflect with the children about what they saw in the pictures and about what happened in the story.

#### *Actions advised*

- The practitioners are advised to reduce the template-based activities and work-book activities in order to provide more opportunities for open-ended mark making. By doing this, the children will be able to creatively represent their ideas and thinking and progress through stages of free drawing which is essential for pre-writing skills.
- To help the children reflect and talk to each other about their individual and group learning experiences, the practitioners are advised to further develop the displays and folders/scrapbooks to visually demonstrate children's unique learning achievements. The practitioners can consider using photographs, sample of the children's free drawings, art work and anecdotal notes of the children's conversations, questions and interests.

## **AREA 4**

### **QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The ethos of this setting is characterised by the warm and supportive approach to parents and children. There are informal opportunities for parents to come together and the practitioners also organise individual meetings with parents throughout the year. Practitioners share information with parents about their children's learning using social media, the information booklets and photographs of the children's pre-school experience on display in the hallway.
- Practitioners have created a collaborative and supportive atmosphere that contributes to the strong sense of team-work. The manager provides opportunities that allows the strengths and skills within the staff to be built upon and developed. Practitioners in the setting have taken a leadership role in the development and implementation of the curriculum programme to support children's learning and development.
- The practitioners engage in further training and professional development and when possible the manager and practitioners attend the workshops delivered by the local City and County Childcare Committee. The practitioners are eager to avail of the mentoring/support services to help them develop their curriculum, in particular the processes to support children's learning experiences in line with the standards and principles of *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* and *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*.
- The manager and practitioners recognise the need to ensure continuity of experiences and progression between the early-years setting and the primary school. They are using a resource tool to help support the sharing of information and children's transitions between the two settings.

#### *Action advised*

- The practitioners are advised to use the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to help them prioritise the areas for improvement, implement and review changes to practices that support the quality of provision for children's learning and development.

### **CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The manager engaged very well in the post-inspection meeting regarding the inspection findings and demonstrates a very good capacity to implement the actions advised in the report as part of the ongoing improvement process.

### **Summary of Overall Inspection Findings**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Quality Level</b>
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	<b>Very good</b>
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	<b>Good</b>
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	<b>Good</b>
Quality of management and leadership for learning	<b>Very good</b>

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

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