Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

Report

Ballymore Community Childcare
09WH0057

Market Hill
Ballymore
Mullingar
County Westmeath

Date of Inspection: 8th September 2017
CONTEXT OF SETTING

Ballymore Community Childcare is located in the heart of Ballymore village. The setting provides fulltime day-care, three sessional pre-school services running concurrently, and an after-school service. The inspection took place in the largest pre-school room where the children ranged from four to five years of age. It is worth noting that the inspection took place on the second week of September. While most of the children were in their second year of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, a small number of children were new to the setting. The manager and two practitioners were also present, one of whom was made available through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). 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 excellent.
- A very caring and welcoming atmosphere is evident in the setting. A new registration system sees children choose their picture from a chart and position it above a hook of their choice, where they hang their coat on arrival. A strong sense of empowerment is visible in the children as they take on this new responsibility in caring for their belongings.
- Practitioners are very effective in nurturing children’s sense of identity and belonging through personal conversations with the children about their families and their community. This is also facilitated through the use of photographs, homemade picture books, and individual learning journals.
- A recent change to the daily routine involves the successful introduction of a rolling snack time. This has resulted in children being active agents in choosing when they eat. This change in practice is very respectful of children and their well-being and is highly commended.
- Times of transition between activities are skilfully managed and very respectful of children’s engagement in play. For example, when moving indoors from the outdoor environment, the practitioners gave the children regular reminders of the impending change. The children gradually made their way indoors at different rates. As two children were still engrossed in building a house, one practitioner kindly agreed to assist both children so that they could complete their construction at their own pace.
- Secure and supportive relationships between the children and the practitioners are evident. This was clearly illustrated when one child sparked a conversation about his love for cars with his key practitioner. A wonderful natural and reciprocal conversation about cars ensued, covering the various car makes, models and the NCT process.
- Extensive efforts have been made to embed the service in and integrate it with the local community. Weekly walks in the community, trips to the local fire station, and visits into the setting by members of the ambulance service and Gardaí, and, most recently, the Sam Maguire Cup, are but some of the examples of the many opportunities the children have to connect with their local community.

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 very good.
- Practitioners have been involved in the development of an emergent curriculum with clear connections made to Aistear; the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.
- The implementation of the emergent curriculum is regularly reviewed and reflected on, with practitioners making changes to the programme of activities and experiences as necessary.
- Information about children’s learning experiences and achievements are regularly documented through a variety of assessment approaches. These include individual observations, learning journey scrapbooks and a group learning journal. Clear links are made between observations,
thereby ensuring continuity in children's learning. There is potential for practitioners to deepen their observations in order to capture an even richer picture of the depth and breadth of children's learning and development.

- It is very evident that the children are viewed as very competent and confident learners. The children are encouraged to be active agents in their learning, from putting on their own coats to taking off their own wellington boots independently.

- A significant part of the morning session was allocated to child-initiated learning. Practitioners acted as play partners alongside the children, supporting and motivating the children in their learning and development. For example, as an interest in the hairdressers emerged, one practitioner volunteered to be the customer visiting the hair salon. Several of the children became involved in the play which the practitioner successfully extended through her engagement.

- Exposure to outdoor learning experiences for the children is a priority in the setting. As a result, the children currently spend half of each session in their richly-resourced and inviting outdoor learning environment. Extensive opportunities exist for children to develop curiosity, creativity and imagination through the variety of multi-sensory learning experiences available outdoors. For example, children have access to a large mud kitchen, water barrel, sand and bark pits.

- The indoor environment has been carefully structured to ensure that children are exposed to a variety of play types. These include sensory play, block and construction play, socio-dramatic and creative play.

- Play is valued and supported as the central medium through which children learn and develop. Through a carefully structured environment that offers suitably resourced spaces, children have opportunities to engage in play activities alone, with peers and/or with practitioners.

- A commendable inclusive approach is adopted to ensure the engagement of all learners in the setting. Through the engagement with the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), the practitioners have been able to pay specific attention to the learning of children with additional needs.

**Action advised**

- The practitioners are advised to deepen their observations of children's learning in order to capture the children's learning dispositions, skills, attitudes and knowledge. This will also give greater visibility to the highly effective learning experiences and achievements of children.

**AREA 3**

**QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is very good.

- The children demonstrate great enjoyment in their learning. They relish in the freedom to make their own choices about and during their learning.

- High levels of motivation, interest and engagement were observed in the children as they engaged in their play. This was particularly evident in the outdoor environment where children demonstrated sustained periods of concentration and imagination in constructing a house, working in the Chinese restaurant, and baking a cake.

- Opportunities exist for the children to regularly discuss and share aspects of their learning achievements with others. This was observed when one child went in search of his learning journal to share it with his key practitioner. Looking through his journal, the child measured his hands against his handprints, explaining that they were his hands that he had painted the previous week.

- The children are developing the ability to play cooperatively; this was evident as the children negotiated roles in baking a cake and in taking turns on the slide.

- The children are communicating their thoughts and experiences in a variety of ways, for example, through mark-making, role-playing and some discussion. There is potential to further support children’s communication skills with both their peers and the practitioners.

- The children display a clear understanding of the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and respect these throughout the morning. Practitioners attribute this to the increasing opportunities available for exploration in the outdoor learning environment.

**Action advised**

- The practitioners are advised to provide children with the opportunity to communicate their experiences, thoughts and ideas in smaller groups throughout the morning. For example, children could be invited into a small-group activity that is prepared by their key practitioner. During this
time children could be encouraged to interact with other children and adults by listening, discussing, questioning, sharing ideas and taking turns in conversations.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- Planning, review and evaluation of the setting are strongly informed by *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*. Previously, the setting engaged with the *Síolta Quality Assurance Programme* (QAP) and intend to resubmit and update their validation later this year to reflect the recent developments that have been made to improve learning experiences for children.
- The manager and practitioners meet monthly to discuss practice, policies and procedures. These meetings are documented and followed up on as needed. Informally, the setting manager and practitioners meet daily to discuss the emergent curriculum and how this is planned for in practice.
- A strong culture of reflection and ongoing self-assessment is evident amongst the professional and committed team of practitioners.
- The manager and practitioners value parents’ views and seek their input during self-review processes. Each parent is provided with a parent handbook that outlines the policies and procedures of the setting. Additionally, the setting has also prepared a play handbook that informs parents of the setting’s play-based approach to children’s learning and development.
- Efforts to inform and involve parents about their child’s learning and development are commended. Parents are proactively and regularly consulted about their child’s learning and achievements. This information is regularly shared with parents who often contribute and respond. Documentation on children’s learning experiences is displayed throughout the service informing parents and families about the experiences children are involved in and how this supports their learning.
- The manager’s extensive experience in the early years, coupled with her and her team’s continuous professional development, are very apparent in the setting. She provides a very good role model for the team, promotes high standards, and fosters a clear vision and direction for the work of the setting.
- There is clarity around the roles and responsibilities of practitioners with an opportunity for each practitioner to take on a leadership role in promoting quality learning.
- Transitions into the setting are sensitively managed. A settling-in policy has been developed to support children starting in the setting. An open evening is held in August for new parents to become familiar with the setting and practitioners prior to their child’s arrival.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The setting manager, three pre-school practitioners, and a parent representative from the board of management attended the post-inspection feedback meeting. The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is excellent, based on the passionate and motivated culture that was evident in the setting and throughout the post-inspection feedback meeting.
### Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Quality Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of context to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of processes to support children’s learning and development</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
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</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>
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<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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

We were delighted to facilitate the Early Years inspection in our setting. We believe the report is an accurate reflection of our service. It has provided us with positive feedback and we have used this to continue to provide and enhance our provision of quality education and care for all the children attending our service. The report is comprehensive and demonstrates our dedication, passion and commitment as Early Years Professionals.

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

Action advised

The practitioners are advised to deepen their observations of children's learning in order to capture the children's learning dispositions, skills, attitudes and knowledge. This will also give greater visibility to the highly effective learning experiences and achievements of children.

Response

At staff meetings we have reviewed our observations using the feedback from the meeting after the Inspection. At time of the inspection, we only had sample observations from the previous year. We believe our observations now portray a better understanding of each child and shows a more in-depth representation of each child’s skills, knowledge and learning dispositions.

Action advised

The practitioners are advised to provide children with the opportunity to communicate their experiences, thoughts and ideas in smaller groups throughout the morning. For example, children could be invited into a small-group activity that is prepared by their key practitioner. During this time children could be encouraged to interact with other children and adults by listening, discussing, questioning, sharing ideas and taking turns in conversations.

Response

At the start of the year the children use play to settle in, it is unstructured and completely child led to give the children the opportunity to settle in. The Key workers give lots of support and encouragement and get to know the children. We find that over the first few weeks this works well in the transition from home, childminder or coming from another room within the service. We find during the following few weeks we can encourage and guide them to be more independent in play and small group activities which by then are initiated by the children themselves. We find this process happens naturally and is usually well established within 4 to 6 weeks. Following the action advised we are providing and supporting children when they start first with the opportunity to engage in small group activities to give them the opportunity to share their ideas and experiences.