An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

REPORT

Pine Trees Community Playgroup
15WW0264

St Joseph’s Centre, Newtownmountkennedy
Co Wicklow

Date of inspection: 28 April 2016
CONTEXT OF SETTING

Pine Trees Community Playgroup is a sessional community-based playgroup. The service provides the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme in two rooms. Sixteen children were present in the room inspected. The service has 5 staff working across 2 rooms in the service, 2 full-time staff and 3 Community Employment (CE) staff. There were 2 CE staff and one full-time staff member in the room inspected. The setting implements a play-based curriculum informed by *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The setting was given the opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report; the setting chose to accept the report without a 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.
- The setting is characterised by a friendly and caring atmosphere in which children are greeted warmly and interactions are respectful. Children are supported to feel accepted and connected to both practitioners and their peers, with many examples of positive relationships and co-operative play occurring between children.
- Practitioners use a key person system to promote continuity of care and to support children’s sense of security and belonging. They demonstrate a very good knowledge of each individual child’s family members, values, beliefs and the important events in their lives.
- Practitioners model very effective strategies to promote healthy practices such as hand washing after messy and outdoor play, healthy eating, and support for children to be active and safe while outside.
- Children’s achievements are recognised and encouraged. Practitioners regularly acknowledge children’s work throughout the session and they comment positively on and listen attentively to each child’s ideas.

*Action advised*

- Practitioners are advised to maximise both the key person system currently in operation and the practitioners’ in-depth knowledge of each child and their families in order to promote the children’s sense of connection to their community. The use of concrete activities such as conversations about local events, and photographs that acquaint children with familiar locations such as schools, parks, local shops and the roles of people in their area, will further raise children’s awareness of and sense of belonging to a wider 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 good.
- The long and short-term curriculum planning is broadly informed by *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Planning sheets are completed daily and include a different activity for each of the three groups of children at group time. Children’s progress and emerging interests sometimes inform the planning process.
- Limited approaches to assessing and documenting the children’s learning and development are in use. They include the daily completion of a time sampling observation sheet by each key practitioner over a ten-minute period during free play. The observations record basic and general information on the types of play engaged in by each child such as dress-up, library, and construction play.
- Practitioners are very committed to promoting play.
- A daily routine is in place which is consistent and applied with flexibility to accommodate a balance of adult-led and child-led learning activities. The daily routine is posted above children’s eye level.
- The outdoor environment is spacious and well-resourced and is used effectively to promote children’s physical fitness, wellbeing, and their fine and gross motor development. Children were
observed actively engaging in a variety of activities such as running, climbing, playing hide and seek and exploring the natural environment.

- The indoor space is bright and spacious with an extensive range and variety of materials and resources available to children throughout the day. Some learning areas were defined to enhance children’s play choices and were logically located. For example, the home area and dress up area, and the sand and water and art area were placed together. Whilst resources and equipment are plentiful, the organisation and layout of materials sometimes inhibits children’s choices and ability to readily access the materials.

**Actions advised**

- To support practitioners in the next steps of assessment and planning for learning, it is advised that more detailed and strengths-based observations be undertaken which record emerging interests and individual progression of children’s learning and development.
- The introduction of a visual daily routine which is accessible at the children’s physical level is advised in order to support them in engaging more effectively in activities and to help them understand and name of each part of their day. This will also support children in making smoother transitions between activities and aid their opportunities to feel more involved in their daily events.
- It is advised that a clearer arrangement for and rotation of the indoor environment materials be undertaken. This would greatly enhance children’s ability to find and use materials of their choice and further enrich the potential in their play and learning opportunities.

**AREA 3**

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

- The quality of the children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
- Children are active in choosing and organising their own learning activities. They select from a diverse range of play activities, from drawing pictures of family pets, making spaghetti, to early numeracy activities such as sorting and matching objects.
- Practitioners encourage children to actively express and discuss their feelings and they use naturally occurring opportunities to promote children’s social and emotional competencies. During the inspection, one child’s interest in a book about feelings was used very effectively at circle time.
- Children are viewed as active and competent learners and display the capacity to respond to a variety of ‘I wonder why?’ questions. Practitioners sometimes promote children’s learning through conversation and questioning of their play ideas. Further open-ended and probing questioning would increase children’s opportunities to recall and consolidate new learning.
- Children are aware of the natural environment and its features with some opportunities provided for children to describe the properties of materials, such as bark mulch, during their play.
- Children understand rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

**Action advised**

- The increased use of a wider variety of interaction strategies which support opportunities for children to problem solve and which promote and scaffold children’s ability to reason and reflect on their play, thoughts, ideas, and plans is advised.

**AREA 4**

**QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING**

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- There is evidence of an ethos of professionalism and collaborative partnership among the staff team in the planning and implementation of the daily running of the service. Practitioners communicate well and share roles and responsibilities very effectively.
- The service team are committed to working in partnership with parents and informal communication with parents about children’s learning and development regularly occurs. Social media, a parent handbook and email are also used to keep parents updated on service events.
Parents are invited to visit and sometimes provide input into children’s learning and development activities in the setting.

- Regular continuing professional development events are attended by service practitioners and the learning is shared across the staff team. Staff meeting content is documented and some opportunities for self-review are in place.
- A very good range of policies and procedures are in existence to ensure the effective and smooth running of the service. The policies and procedures are shared with parents on a regular basis.
- The setting has developed strong links with the local schools and relationships are developed to support children’s smooth transition to primary school.

**Actions advised**

- To provide a more comprehensive picture of children’s developmental progression, the implementation of a more regular and formal assessment process which includes the views and observations of parents is advised.
- The development of a more structured approach to service development, which provides more opportunities for team reflection on practice and self-review processes which document curriculum planning and actions agreed by the staff, is advised.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The service team engaged professionally and responsively in the inspection feedback process and demonstrated a very good capacity and willingness to bring about the improvements advised above.
**Summary of Overall Inspection Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<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>Very 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>Very good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of children.</th>
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<tbody>
<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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