An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

REPORT

Little Stars Community Playgroup
09CN0021
Cootehill
Co Cavan

Date of inspection: 28 April 2016
CONTEXT OF SETTING

Little Stars Community Playgroup and After School Service has been in operation for twenty years in Cootehill, Co Cavan. There are currently twenty-two children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. 21 children together with the manager and 2 practitioners were present on day of the inspection. 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 will 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 children’s learning and development is very good.
- A caring ethos with a strong emphasis on promoting children’s emotional well-being is in evidence.
- A warm, welcoming atmosphere is fostered for children and their families.
- Respect for the uniqueness of each child is evident. Practitioners show interest in the children’s own ideas and use enabling prompts to support children in making decisions about their learning.
- A key person system has been established to support the development of positive relationships between children and practitioners in the setting.
- Many suitable routines are in place that contribute to the smooth organisation and sense of calm which pervades during the session. Some opportunities are provided for children to be involved in these routines.
- The lunch-time routine involves prolonged waiting time for children that could be used more beneficially.
- A commendable range of strategies has been employed in this setting to support children’s awareness of and respect for diverse social and cultural backgrounds.
- Regular opportunities are provided to involve parents and members of the community in children’s learning experiences.

Action advised
- Practitioners are advised to review the lunch-time routine with a view to reducing the waiting times for children and to maximise the learning opportunities for them.

AREA 2
QUALITY OF PROCESSES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of the processes to support children’s learning and development is very good.
- A broad-based curriculum, informed by Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and by the children’s emerging interests, is used effectively to support age-appropriate and stage-appropriate learning.
- Practitioners use a suitable range of strategies to gather information about children’s learning experiences and achievements. They use this information purposefully to adapt practice in accordance with children’s needs and interests.
- The indoor environment is very well prepared with clearly defined areas of interest and very good use of labelling. A good range of resources is provided to facilitate children’s engagement in free play and other playful learning activities.
- It was noted on the day of the inspection that children were less attentive and engaged during the indoor large whole-group activities such as story time.
- The outdoor environment is inviting, well-maintained and used regularly.
- Opportunities are provided for a suitable variety of types of play using both the indoor and outdoor environments.
- Practitioners are very skilful and playful in their interactions with children as they consolidate and extend their learning. In particular, the considered attention given to the development of early mathematical concepts and language is commendable.
Action advised

- Practitioners are advised to review large-group learning activities and to consider introducing some small-group activity time to optimise children’s engagement in discussion.

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 very high levels of engagement in their learning.
- Information documented by the practitioners reflects great breadth, balance and cohesion in the children’s learning.
- Children make connections between their new learning and what they already know.
- A very good level of gross and fine motor skills was observed among the children.
- The use of rich mathematical language among a number of children during play activities was also observed.
- Some children availed of the opportunities provided to express their thoughts and feelings during the pre-school session observed.
- Children are developing personal and social skills which enable them to respond appropriately to different situations which involve turn-taking and co-operation.

Action advised

- It is advised that children be provided with additional opportunities to discuss their thoughts and feelings, particularly when responding to story-time activities and when resolving conflict issues which occasionally arise.

AREA 4
QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is very good.
- The manager has established very good systems to ensure efficiency in the day-to-day functioning of the setting and is proactive in leading change.
- The manager and the staff have reviewed their practices in recent times and engaged in a number of valuable improvement initiatives to reflect the principles of Aistear. They have also engaged in the Smart Start programme which has also contributed to the development of some very good practices.
- A strong sense of teamwork is evident among the staff.
- There is regular liaison between the staff and members of the community management body.
- Positive relationships have been nurtured between the setting and children’s families.
- Suitable attention is given to supporting children in their transition into pre-school and from pre-school to primary school. Links have been established with some local schools to share information which will support children in their transitions.

Action advised

- To further develop good practices, it is advised that children’s learning journals be shared regularly with them and with their families.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The management and staff of Little Stars Playgroup and After School Service demonstrate a very good capacity to implement the actions advised in this report.
### 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>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of management and leadership for learning</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>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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APPENDIX

SETTING RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF THE SETTING

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to address the actions advised in the inspection report

Area 1
We have trialled a few different ways of organising the lunch time routine to lessen the waiting time; we have reduced the waiting time by approximately four minutes by introducing two teams for handwashing. Children are also now more involved in the routine and we have two children helping every day, one to wipe tables and another to take lunches from the fridge to the table where children collect their own lunch when their hands have been washed. This routine is working a lot better and flows better within the session.

Area 2
Again we have trialled a few ways of reducing the use of large-group activities. This works very well for some activities where we do key groups of activities and then swap over, e.g., story time and an art activity. However, some days we still carry out our large-group activity but keep the length of time the activity lasts to a minimum to ensure we keep the engagement of the children.

Area 3
At Little Stars we pride ourselves on the amount of time we spend engaging and discussing thoughts and feelings with children. As we have halved the size of the group that we now carry out story time activities in, this has allowed the children to get more time to engage and put forward their thoughts and views within the smaller group. When resolving conflict issues within Little Stars we always try to get the children to resolve issues themselves, or to put forward ideas and suggestions as to how the conflict can be resolved. However, when a child is hurting another child a staff member will step in. When both parties have calmed we will discuss what happened, why, and what should happen.

Area 4
From September 2016 children’s learning journals will be shared more regularly, for example, at Halloween, Christmas, February mid-term, Easter and June.

Published June 2016