Early-Years Education-focused Inspection

REPORT

Little Willows
09CN0047

1The Willow, Chapel Road
Bailieborough
Co Cavan

Date of inspection: 14 April 2016
CONTEXT OF SETTING

This privately owned service, based in Bailieborough, Co Cavan has been operating as a sessional service since 2009. It caters for 22 children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. There are three practitioners in total, with one practitioner working predominately with a small group of 8 children in one of the rooms and the owner/manager and another practitioner working with 16 children in a larger working space. The pre-school follows the Montessori curriculum and is implementing Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework to support children’s learning. The setting was given the opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and actions advised in this report; the service 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 children’s learning and development is good.
- A calm and encouraging atmosphere pervades the setting.
- The relationship between the practitioners and the children is warm and respectful with practitioners positively responding to children’s needs.
- Practitioners support children’s independence and, in particular, children with additional needs.
- Children are offered some opportunities to make decisions and choices within the daily routine and procedures.
- Practitioners modelled and encouraged good behaviours and management of positive interactions.
- Unexpected incidents were dealt with in a calm and reassuring manner by the manager and practitioners.

Actions advised

- To build on good practice within the setting, an adjustment to the current timetabling and to some routine procedures is advised in order to support children’s experiences of transitions within activities and between rooms.
- Practitioners are advised to establish a key person system with a view to building on the positive reciprocal relationships with children and to enrich the learning opportunities.
- It is advised that children be provided with additional opportunities to make choices in relation to the types of play and the duration of the activities which they engage in.

AREA 2

QUALITY OF PROCESSES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

- The quality of processes to support children’s learning is good.
- Practitioners expressed having high expectations for children’s learning. On the day of the inspection children were observed engaged in over-formalised learning that focused on rote learning and testing recall.
- Planning is informed by the principles of the Montessori approach and regular observations are used to document children’s learning. It is commendable that these observations are aligned to the four themes of Aistear. Practitioners are encouraged to make greater use of this assessment information to inform planning and the next steps of children’s learning.
- An extensive range of resources is available both indoors and outdoors with children having regular access to a well-maintained and inviting outdoor environment.
- Some high quality interactions were observed between practitioners and children and between children and children. However, there were some missed learning opportunities to extend and consolidate children’s individual and collaborative learning.
- Children have some opportunities for free play alone, with peers and with practitioners.
- Using different resources, practitioners demonstrated their understanding of the importance of developing children’s curiosity about the world.
- Books were used at arrival and departure times, as a support to developing children’s early mathematical concepts and skills and promoting positive experiences of literacy.
Actions advised

- Practitioners are advised to extend the current observation/assessment records to reflect the children’s emerging interests and to use this information to maximum effect in planning the next stages of their learning.
- It is advised that the emphasis on formal adult-directed activities which promote recall and rote learning be reviewed with a view to increasing activity-based and child-led learning initiatives.
- Practitioners are encouraged to extend their use of open-ended questions and prompts which support the development of children’s higher-order thinking skills.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN’S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of children’s learning experiences and achievements is good.
- Children demonstrated enjoyment and contentment in their learning.
- Children showed the ability to play cooperatively and were supported by the practitioners to negotiate and resolve disagreements.
- Children’s experiences of Irish were promoted throughout the day.
- Children showed good skills in being independent and in persevering.
- Children were engaged in formalised learning activities which included spellings and recall of numbers and facts.
- Children are confident in their physical gross motor skills and fine motor skills both indoors and outdoors.

Actions advised

- Children would benefit from being more active in their learning and also from a reduced engagement in learning activities which are overly formal for their age and stage of development.
- Children’s learning would be further enhanced from more practical hands on, creative and mark-making activities that sustain the child’s creative and imaginary processes. Aligning these activities to Aistear’s theme of Exploring and Thinking will support positive learning dispositions such as resilience, resourcefulness and persistence.
- Using photographs in children’s assessment records which celebrate their critical learning moments and illustrate their progression will provide them with valuable opportunities to reflect on and discuss their learning with practitioners and parents.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is good.
- The manager promotes high standards and demonstrates a strong commitment to the provision of a high quality learning environment for children.
- An ethos of teamwork is in evidence and all members of staff strive to enrich children’s learning within the setting.
- Regular staff meetings take place although systematic, formal engagement with the Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide has yet to be established.
- Practitioners report that the setting operates an open-door policy with children and parents coming to visit the setting before commencement and being supported through transition into the setting.
- A handbook is available to parents as a source of information about the setting.
- Practitioners meet with parents formally and informally to share children’s progress. Creating additional opportunities for parental involvement in their children’s learning could include sharing the children’s observation records or learning portfolios which illustrate the range and nature of children’s learning experiences and achievements.
- The manager reported current efforts to build links with local schools. It is advised that staff continue to strive to foster a working relationship with local schools to ensure the smooth transition of children from pre-school to primary school.
**Actions advised**

- Practitioners are advised to engage with the *Aistear, Síolta Practice Guide* to support their self-review and improve initiatives to promote the ongoing development of children’s learning.
- Expanding the opportunities for parents to be actively involved in their children’s learning is advised to include more regular sharing of children’s learning portfolios and observation records.

**CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE**

The practitioners and management are very committed to developing and promoting their professional work and engaging in professional reflection. They demonstrate 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>
</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>
</table>

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>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Published June 2016