

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Early-Years Education-focused Inspection
Report

Higgy's House
09WX0105

Ramsgate Village
Gorey
County Wexford

Date of Inspection: 9 June 2017



CONTEXT OF SETTING

Opened in 2005, Higgy's House is located in a housing estate in Gorey. It is a full-time, private, purpose-built, early-years' service. The service caters for children and families from a number of backgrounds from the local community and surrounding areas. A morning pre-school session of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme is provided in three rooms. On the day of the inspection, the oldest group of children were observed. Nineteen children and two practitioners were present. 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 excellent.
- A friendly, caring, and a very personal atmosphere is evident on entering the setting. The practitioners and the manager demonstrate a real passion for their work with children; this is evident in the sensitivity and warmth they show to all of the children and their parents.
- The daily routine offers structure and predictability for the children. It also promotes children's active engagement in learning. The children demonstrate familiarity with the routine; this was clearly evident in how they could describe the daily events, alluding to sequence and key times. This ability to connect with the daily routine so knowledgeably is supported by the visual photographs of the routine on display at the children's eye level. To make the display even more user-friendly for both children and parents, its arrangement in sequence, with written titles for each transition, such as welcome, free play, snack, outside time, would be of benefit. The keeping of transitions to a minimum is commended; this affords the children the time to develop their ideas and thoughts.
- All children demonstrated confidence in their ability to take care of their own hygiene and personal needs.
- Practitioners see snack time as an opportunity to encourage the children's independence, social and motor skills. The children retrieve their own cups, plates and lunch bags prior to sitting down for their snack. They pour their own drinks and some children cut their own fruit. Practitioners sit with two of the three groups of children and many conversations take place. A changing of the table layout would provide all children with the opportunity of sitting and conversing with the practitioners.
- Healthy eating is promoted in the service. The practitioners have recently been awarded their Healthy Ireland Certificate and all food is freshly cooked on site.
- Relationships between the practitioners and the children are remarkably positive. The practitioners constantly engage with the children at their level and give much recognition and meaningful praise to the children for their engagement in activities. The attention of children who disengage from time to time is gently directed to activities happening around the room.
- The children behave kindly and respectfully towards one another and to the practitioners.
- The children's sense of identity and belonging are very well supported. Photographs of the children and their work are displayed throughout the building. Each child is given the opportunity to mind the 'birthday teddy' on the day of their birthday and a cake is cooked by both practitioners and the children for the birthday child. The children are encouraged to bring toys from home to show and tell at circle time.
- Links between the setting and the children's families and the local community are both welcomed and encouraged. The children have received visits from the dentist, local doctor, ambulance personnel and librarian. In addition, one of the families visited the setting to play music; during the visit the children had the opportunity to try out a range of musical instruments.

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 excellent.
- Higgy's House implements its own curriculum which is called, 'The learning tree'. This curriculum is play-based and is informed by *Aistear*, *The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*, *Síolta*, *the National Quality Framework for Early Education*, and the Montessori Method of early education. Monthly thematic planning of seasonal events and celebrations and weekly topics that incorporate the children's emergent interests are used to promote learning and development. There are clear links between the children's individual interests and the weekly plans.
- A variety of approaches is used to gather information about the children's learning and development. These include observations and Montessori checklists. Individual and group learning journals, art work and photographs are used also to document the children's learning. The children are encouraged to help develop and design individual journals. During the inspection, a child was observed independently adding a photograph to his journal; he then designed the page around the photograph by cutting and sticking pieces of paper on it. To enrich the individual learning journals, the practitioners could consider annotating further the children's own interpretations and comments on their creations in the learning journals.
- There are high quality interactions between the practitioners and the children. A key-worker system is in operation. During the session inspected, both practitioners sat at the children's level and facilitated and engaged in children's play as required. During circle-time all children and practitioners held hands and sang friendship songs.
- The practitioners view the children as capable and competent learners and demonstrate a high level of trust in the children's abilities. This was evident through the children's active engagement in self-chosen activities and materials, and their ability to tidy up with little or no adult direction. When children elect to play in the art area they independently choose paint colours and they successfully pour paint from large containers into small ones. When activities were complete, the children independently decided to brush the floor and wipe the tables. The children also decide the weekly cooking activity; they are given two recipes and asked to choose one by voting using a counter which they place in a jar beside their chosen recipe.
- The environment is inviting, safe and maintained to a high standard. It is very well structured both indoors and outdoors and is divided into interest areas.
- Play is provided for through a variety of age-appropriate materials that promote and support the children's creative, social, emotional and physical development.
- Ample mark-making, literacy and numeracy materials are freely available throughout the session. A separate library located outside the room is used to encourage the children's literacy skills and love of books. The children borrow books from the library and bring them back to their room for a period of time. The inclusion of more socio-dramatic materials would add to richness of the learning experiences.
- The service adopts an inclusive approach to all children in the service. Children in attendance came from a number of different cultural backgrounds. Should a child display any additional needs, relevant information is documented and shared with parents and a report is compiled for parents to take to the public health nurse.

AREA 3

QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- The quality of the children's learning experiences and achievements is excellent.
- The children display confidence and enjoyment and are very at ease in their surroundings. They display a positive sense of well-being and identity. They talk frequently and naturally about their families and friends.
- The children display very good turn-taking and concentration skills. They were highly engaged throughout the session inspected.
- The children's skills of enquiry and exploration are highly developed and the children present as extremely capable learners. Most children confidently expressed their views in relation to their emergent interests. While playing outside with a ball and balancing it on top of some cones, a child confidentially discussed and explored why one ball could balance on a cone and the other could not, noting the significance of the slope on the ground and the impact of the breeze.

- Most children demonstrate exceptional communication skills and confidently express their views, thoughts and ideas, both verbally and through play. The children experience success in what they do and take pride in their achievements. During the inspection, they were seen sharing their achievements, ideas and interests with others.
- Excellent use is made of open-ended questions to develop the children's higher-level thinking and to link with their past and recent activities. For example, one child, while engaged in an activity with a practitioner, reflected on a previous activity of 'making rainbows'. With the help of the practitioner, the child's emergent interest in 'rainbows' was followed to help her reflect on the colours of the rainbow and later she went on to paint rainbows with her friend.
- The children demonstrate excellent fine and gross motor skills as illustrated, for example, in how they thread small beads and climb without the aid of a climbing frame. While threading beads one child discussed and demonstrated step-by-step how to tie a knot in the lace and how to thread the beads.
- All children show awareness and curiosity in the use of natural materials in their play. This was observed both indoors and outdoors when children were engaged with items on the nature table such as shells and stones and when making dinner outside with wood, leaves, stone and grass.
- The use of numeracy and mathematics in everyday language is praiseworthy. The children understand the functioning of mathematical equipment such as a scales; when threading beads the children counted how many they were adding; and, during circle-time, links were made to the number of songs on a CD.

AREA 4

QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

- The quality of management and leadership for learning is excellent.
- The manager is very committed to ensuring the smooth organisation of educational experiences and activities in the setting. To achieve this, there is a high level of engagement between herself, the children, staff and parents, and she knows all of them extremely well.
- A very professional atmosphere is evident throughout the whole service. The practitioners' commitment to both the service and the children is exemplary.
- Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and both practitioners observed on the day of the inspection had opportunities to lead learning in different and highly successful ways.
- Formal team meetings take place every three months. The outcomes of those meetings are documented. Informal chats take place daily within each room. Formal annual appraisals and regular supervision of all practitioners are undertaken by the manager.
- Many links have been established with parents. These include the sharing of the children's learning and development through learning journals, informal chats and formal meetings. Information is also shared with parents through the written policies and procedures, the setting website, its social media page, newsletters and the noticeboard displays.
- Links with external agencies such as Better Start, Early Childhood Ireland, and the Wexford Childcare Committee have been established to support the children, the practitioners and the manager.
- The manager and practitioners participate regularly in training. During the team meetings, they share with the whole team the information on the courses they have attended.
- The children are very effectively supported in becoming familiar with the setting through visits with their families in advance of starting in the setting. Photographic displays of the children and their families are also in place as the children transition into the setting.
- Transitions from the setting to primary school are also supported in a highly effective way. For example, the ceremony to celebrate the children's 'graduation' is held two weeks before the children leave and photographs of the graduation are displayed in the lobby; this supports the children and their parents in talking about the move to primary school. Some links have been established with some local primary schools and, on occasion, a staff member from a school to which the children are transferring comes to observe children who may have additional needs.

CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE ACTIONS ADVISED ABOVE

The capacity of the service to implement the actions advised above is excellent, as reflected in the commitment from management and staff to ensuring high quality care and education for all children.

Summary of Overall Inspection Findings

Area	Quality Level
Quality of context to support children's learning and development	Excellent
Quality of processes to support children's learning and development	Excellent
Quality of children's learning experiences and achievements	Excellent
Quality of management and leadership for learning	Excellent

Language used in Early-Years Education-focused Inspection reports

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