

**A report on**

**Little Stars**

**Maesyrhandir Primary School**

**Newtown**

**Powys**

**SY16 1LQ**

**Date of inspection: January 2011**

**by**

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education  
and Training in Wales**



INVESTORS | BUDDSODDWYR  
IN PEOPLE | MEWN POBL

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

**Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?**

**Key Question 2: How good is provision?**

**Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?**

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>What the judgement means</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
<b>Good</b>	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
<b>Adequate</b>	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section  
Estyn  
Anchor Court  
Keen Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW

or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.uk](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.uk)

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

**This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh)**

**© Crown Copyright 2011: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.**

## Context

Little Stars is an English-medium playgroup located in the grounds of Maesyrrhandir Primary School in Newtown, Powys. The setting is housed in a purpose-built building with access to its own outdoor area. Children attend the setting from the estates of Maesyrrhandir, Vaynor, Maesyddail and Trehafren. The area is recognised as one of the most economically deprived in Powys

Children are admitted into the setting the term after their third birthday. During the inspection period, there were between 14 and 16 three-year-olds present, all of whom are funded by Powys Early Years Childcare and Development Partnership. The majority of children who attend the setting transfer into Maesyrrhandir Primary School, either the term in which they are four, or the term after their fourth birthday. The setting is open for four days a week from Monday to Thursday from 9am to 11.30am.

The setting is managed on a day-to-day basis by a senior practitioner who is supported by two additional practitioners. The headteacher and governors of Maesyrrhandir Primary School have overall responsibility for the management of the setting.

Almost all of the children who attend the playgroup come from English speaking homes. No children are from Welsh speaking homes. There are currently two children who have English as an additional language. The setting welcomes children with additional learning needs and each year supports a few children with such additional needs.

The setting was last inspected by the Care and Social Service Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) in January 2011. This is the setting's first Estyn inspection.

## Summary

<b>The school's current performance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>The school's prospects for improvement</b>	<b>Good</b>

### Current performance

The setting's performance is good because:

- R1 all children are motivated to learn and make good progress;
- R2 almost all children apply their early language and mathematical skills appropriately in play situations and when working with adults;
- R3 all children are courteous and well behaved and cooperate well with each other and adults and enjoy their learning;
- R4 activities are generally of a high-quality and encourage children to try new things and take risks with their learning;
- R5 all practitioners work well together as a team to support children's learning, and
- R6 there are warm, caring relationships between children and staff.

### Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are good because:

- a positive ethos creates a happy environment where the contribution of adults and children are valued;
- practitioners are committed to seeking ways to improve and respond positively to advice and guidance;
- the leader has established clear goals for further improvement; and
- systems for self-evaluation within the setting are good, and there is evidence that improvements have been made and sustained over time.

## Recommendations

In order to build on existing strengths the setting needs to:

- R1 improve children's information and communication technology (ICT) skills;
- R2 make sure that planning and classroom organisation more effectively meets the needs of more able and mature children;
- R3 continue to develop improvement planning by making sure that success criteria are focused more on outcomes for children and that actions are appropriately costed; and
- R4 further develop systems for the 'registered person' and governors to monitor and evaluate the performance of the setting

### ***What happens next?***

The setting will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations

## Main findings

### Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

#### Standards: Good

All children achieve well and make good progress in relation to their starting points across all the Foundation Phase areas of learning. Children are confident in making choices and enjoy the challenge of new and varied activities. Most children persevere for a reasonable amount of time with activities and take responsibility for tidying away resources at the end of sessions.

All children apply their skills well to a wide range of play activities. Most listen and communicate appropriately. Nearly all join in with songs enthusiastically in both Welsh and English and enjoy listening to stories and sharing books with adults. The majority of children recognise their own name when they self-register each morning. Many children have good fine motor skills when using small tools such as paint brushes or manipulating dough.

Most children use early mathematical skills effectively to count objects. A majority of children confidently count objects to 10 in English and Welsh. Many use mathematical language correctly in their play. They know for instance the cost of a cup of tea in the café and describe the position of objects in the sand accurately, for example using words such as 'on top of' and 'underneath'. A few children control a computer mouse with a degree of accuracy and use electronic toys satisfactorily. Overall, children's skills in using information and communication technology to reinforce and enrich their learning across the seven areas of learning are less well developed.

Children's skills of enquiry, investigation and independent learning are developing appropriately through activities such as 'Wellie Walks' in the school grounds.

Nearly all children understand simple instructions in Welsh and many use individual words, such as colours or numbers in responding to simple questions. Most children answer the register in Welsh and, with encouragement, count the children present in Welsh. A few children spontaneously sing Welsh songs with confidence and clear enjoyment and will happily use Welsh and English together, for instance, by saying "I'm barod" or counting "one dau tri".

#### Wellbeing: Good

Children's standards of wellbeing are good. Almost all children settle well on arrival and enjoy their learning.

In line with their age and stage of development, most children have an appropriate understanding of the importance of eating healthily and of the benefits of keeping active. Snack time is a social occasion where children enjoy healthy snacks and independently butter their own Welsh cakes. All children engage enthusiastically in activities that encourage physical movement and many understand that such activity makes their hearts beat faster.

Almost all children are confident to ask for help from adults and a few describe clearly what will happen if a child is unhappy or ill. Nearly all children take responsibility for their personal hygiene and most put their own coats on unaided or with a minimum of help from adults.

Behaviour is good and all children are polite to adults and to their friends. Most work well with others and many show care for one another as they play, when sharing toys and taking turns.

Children confidently make decisions about what they like and dislike playing with in the nursery and often choose when to play indoors and outdoors.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>	<b>Good</b>
---	-------------

### **Learning experiences: Good**

The setting provides a wide range of stimulating, high-quality experiences. An appropriate emphasis on play and learning through first-hand experiences engages and holds children's interest and enthusiasm.

Planning for the progressive development of children's' language and numeracy skills is developing appropriately both indoors and outdoors. Organisation and planning for the development of children's ICT skills is less effective.

Practitioners know the children very well and respond to their varying needs and abilities spontaneously and appropriately during activities. Planning is detailed and thorough. It does not always, however, provide well enough for more able or mature children by, for instance, organising activities for children of a similar ability in order to extend their learning.

Practitioners develop children's Welsh language skills well. They use Welsh effectively throughout the sessions and children are encouraged to use the language as much as possible. A suitable range of activities develop children's understanding of the traditions and celebrations of Wales. For instance, children are encouraged to wear something red to match the colour of the dragon on the Welsh flag to celebrate St David's Day.

Practitioners make good use of the setting's outdoor areas and of visits in the locality to develop children's respect for the environment. Recent work on Chinese New Year is increasing children's understanding of the world in which they live.

### **Teaching: Good**

The quality of teaching is good. Practitioners have a sound understanding of the Foundation Phase and use an appropriate range of approaches that engage and interests children. Rules and routines are well established and children feel safe, secure and cared for. Practitioners own language skills provide a good role model for children. As a result, children's oracy skills and vocabulary are enhanced and improved.

There is a strong sense of co-operation, mutual support and teamwork amongst all practitioners in the setting. This ensures that staff work well together to provide consistency of approaches in, for instance, managing children's behaviour or intervening appropriately in children's play.

Practitioners use careful observation of, and interaction with, children during play and active learning to monitor consistently children's learning in all areas of learning. This information is generally used appropriately to inform future planning, particularly for less able children.

Parents are kept well informed about their children's wellbeing and their educational progress. Reports to parents when children transfer into Maesyrrhandir Primary School are generally evaluative and give parents a clear picture of their child's strengths. The personal comments on these reports show how well staff know the children and their level of care and concern.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The setting successfully promotes children's health and wellbeing. Children are well cared for and they feel safe and know whom to approach if they need help. Day-to-day activities foster values such as honesty, fairness, respect and a sense of right and wrong. Practitioners effectively encourage children to take responsibility for their actions and resources and to understand the importance of living and sharing with others.

The strong caring ethos of the setting means that children settle quickly into routines when they start and are ready to learn.

The setting has good arrangements for supporting children with additional learning needs. A positive working relationship exists with outside agencies, such as the local authority assessment unit and the Wales Pre-school Providers Association special needs co-coordinator. Appropriate, practical play plans are in place for children who require them and parents are regularly informed of their children's progress.

The setting has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

Learning experiences promote children's personal development well, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **Learning environment: Good**

The classroom provides a welcoming environment for all children. Displays are attractive and words are displayed in all areas of the classroom and outdoors to provide children with as much exposure to print as possible. Resources are generally plentiful, of good quality and accessible to the children. However, there are not enough resources to successfully support children's learning in information and communication technology and cultural diversity. Day-to-day activities appropriately promote equality and diversity.

The outdoor environment is developing well and is used regularly to support children's learning.



<b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b>	<b>Good</b>
--	-------------

**Leadership: Good**

The setting's lead practitioner is an enthusiastic leader who promotes a very positive ethos where staff, children and parents feel valued and respected. Practitioners work effectively as a team to help children to make appropriate progress and to get the most of their time in the nursery. They have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and a shared purpose and commitment to providing the best possible experiences for children in the setting.

The headteacher as 'the registered person' for the setting, along with the governors, is responsible for the overall management of the setting. While informal systems are in place to share information and monitor the setting's performance, managers do not support the setting well enough as a critical friend.

Staff respond positively to relevant national and local priorities. They are fully involved in training and developments connected with the Foundation Phase.

**Improving quality: Good**

Practitioners know the setting well and have a good understanding of their strengths and areas for development. Practitioners are reflective and are constantly seeking ways to improve.

There are appropriate opportunities for parents to suggest improvements in the setting, which the setting strives to respond to. For instance, a parent suggestion box in the setting foyer is as a direct response to a parent suggesting this in a questionnaire response earlier this year. The views of children are taken into account by allowing them to make choices about what to do and where to play and identifying which activities they like and dislike.

The self-evaluation report is a useful document which, together with the setting's improvement plan, identifies many of the setting's strengths and areas for improvement. The setting improvement plan identifies appropriate targets for improvement. However, it does not always explain how practitioners will measure the success of these improvements in terms of outcomes for children or how planned actions are financed.

Practitioners are well trained and experienced in working in the Foundation Phase. They make every effort to improve their own knowledge, understanding and skills and make good use of training for the benefit of the children. For instance, after attending cluster training, practitioners have set-up an investigation area in the class. As a result, children take delight in using the magnifying glasses to look at objects and talk about what they see.

Practitioners regularly attend cluster training sessions to share their good practice with other settings or to learn from others. For example, the lead practitioner shared her idea of children taking home an African snail for weekends and holidays as a way to develop parental links.

### **Partnership working: Good**

A good range of partnerships appropriately promotes children's good achievement and wellbeing.

Parents value the work that the setting does and consider that their children are making good progress.

The strong sense of team work in the setting means that practitioners work well together to plan and assess children's learning and to share ideas. This partnership contributes significantly to children's progress and wellbeing.

Partnership with the other settings is fostered appropriately through practitioners' regular attendance at half-termly cluster meetings. There is a positive relationship with the local authority and Wales Pre-school Providers Association. The monitoring support and guidance provided by these partners enhances the quality of the provision at the setting. Good links exist between the local authority children's assessment unit and the setting. This benefits children with additional learning needs who attend both settings.

Suitable informal links exist between the setting and Maesyrrhandir Primary School. . Children transferring into this school from the setting make visits to the nursery class and the setting leader meets regularly with the nursery teacher to discuss individual children's need. Access to the school grounds and wild-life area and pond enriches children's learning experiences in the setting.

When appropriate, good use is made of community links, such as visits from the police or fire-fighters, to enhance children's experiences.

### **Resource management: Good**

Good use is made of staff time, expertise and experience to effectively support children's learning. Staff have a good understanding of the Foundation Phase curriculum and monitor the day-to-day provision in areas of learning well.

The indoor and outdoor classroom areas are generally well resourced. Resources are of a good quality and are appropriate for the age of the children.

While managers efficiently manage the setting's budget and financial matters, there is not enough forward planning in place to make sure that all available funding is used effectively to support improvement.

Overall, the setting achieves good outcomes for children and provides good value for money.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Stakeholder satisfaction report**

#### **Responses to parent questionnaires**

Analysis of the 17 returned questionnaires indicates a high level of satisfaction with the service provided by the setting. All parents regard the teaching as good. They are pleased with the way that their children are helped to settle in well when they start in the setting and feel that all staff treat their children fairly and with respect. All parents state that the setting is well run. A few parents felt that they would welcome more information about their child's progress and did not agree that the setting offered a good range of activities including trips and visits.

#### **Responses to discussions with children**

All children like coming to the nursery and enjoy the daily activities on offer. Children are confident when undertaking role play and when speaking to adults and visitors. They show genuine affection towards staff and often towards each other. The children said that their helpers are kind and they go to them if they were unhappy or need some help. Children like the fact that they can choose what to play with and whether to play indoors or outdoors. They know they should always try to be kind and share their toys.

## Appendix 2

**The inspection team / reporting inspector – delete as appropriate**

Bev Jenkins, HMI	Reporting Inspector
------------------	---------------------

### **Copies of the report**

Copies of this report are available from the setting and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk))