



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**St Asaph Community Playgroup
St Asaph Infant School
Upper Denbigh Road
St Asaph
Denbighshire
LL17 0RL**

Date of inspection: June 2011

by

**Mr Eifion Morgan
Reporting Inspector**

for

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

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 setting's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

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

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

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Context

St Asaph Community Playgroup is based in the grounds of St. Asaph Primary School and meets in the school's canteen – a building located in the school yard. The room is spacious, well lit by natural daylight with its own entrance. There are toilets and washing facilities and a designated kitchen area. The room is used for the school breakfast club as well as a refectory necessitating equipment being set out and cleared away for each session. The playgroup enjoys the use of the school facilities including the school yard, when not being used by older children a school field and the use of the school hall when necessary. Just inside the main entrance is a notice board providing information for parents.

Children attending the playgroup come largely from the Cathedral city of St. Asaph and no child comes from a particularly disadvantaged background. Neither are any from a particularly privileged background. This is an attractive residential area mainly English speaking, but parents who are supportive of the Welsh language. Currently there are 43 children on the register but never more than 26 attending at any one time – this is the maximum number set by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales, (CSSIW). Sixteen 3 year olds attend, of whom 11 are funded.

Children come from English speaking homes. None of the current cohort are from ethnic minority backgrounds, neither are there any identified with additional learning needs (ALN). The playgroup is happy to accept children whatever their background or ability and has supported children with ALN in the past.

The playgroup operates at different times of day between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. to accommodate parent's requirements. It is open daily during school terms.

Children attend from the age of 2 years 3 months and leave for the next stage of their education in the September following their third birthday. The playgroup is a member of the Welsh Pre-school Playgroup Association (WPPA) and was inspected by CSSIW in December 2010. There were no recommendations.

The playgroup has not previously been inspected by Estyn.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Good features

- All children achieve good and often very good standards and are making good progress.
- All children persevere on their tasks and show their ability to concentrate for increasing periods of time.
- All children have good and often very good literacy skills and the confidence to talk with visitors.
- All children have a developing understanding of how to keep healthy, enjoy their learning experiences and have excellent attitudes.
- All children are considerate, courteous and relate well to each other and to adults.
- Learning experiences are well directed at children's interests and encourage them to make good progress in their learning.
- Staff have high expectations of children and these are achieved in practice.
- The playgroup makes very good provision for children's health and wellbeing.

Prospects for improvement

- The leadership has provided a clear direction for the work of the playgroup.
- Recent innovations, changes and development show the playgroup as having a track record of bringing about improvement.
- All staff are self-evaluative and aim for the best possible provision for the children.
- All staff have shown themselves receptive to new ideas.
- Good support is provided by the local authority advisory teacher.

Recommendations

- R1 Plan to broaden the curriculum to include opportunities for children to develop their IT skills and to extend links with the community.
- R2 Refine assessment procedures so as to focus on children's skill development and to identify the next steps in children's learning.
- R3 Provide extra information for parents so that they can be more involved in their children's learning.

What happens next?

The provider will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

All children achieve good and often very good standards and this reflects good progress across the curriculum. All children are enthusiastic learners and are happy to work at full capacity for extended periods of time. Children persevere on tasks and make commendable effort.

All children have very good skills of communication. They have excellent listening skills and a good vocabulary to answer questions and to express their views. They converse freely in small groups and many had the self-confidence to speak with the inspector. All children carry out instructions without question and are eager to help and support each other and adults. Many children show an interest in books, they enjoy stories and hold books appropriately. Many children are also beginning to use pencils for mark-making and understand the purpose of writing.

Children's number skills are developing well and most children count accurately to 10 and some beyond 10. Most children correctly recognise numerals and use basic mathematical language. All children are adept at recognising pattern, sequences and relationships.

All children know that electronic equipment can be activated using buttons and switches, including mobile phones and CD players. However, children's information and technology skills, such as using computers, are limited.

All children show a wide range of skills in other areas such as their good hand-eye co-ordination when playing outside, their creative skills in painting and role play and in their knowledge of living things.

All children show that they understand basic Welsh words and respond to instructions, count and recognise Welsh words for colours. They understand more words than they can speak. Many children are happy to repeat Welsh words and phrases and join in Welsh action songs and rhymes. Children's use of the Welsh language in play and other activities is limited.

Wellbeing: Good

All children have a good understanding, relative to their ages, of how to keep healthy. Many know that certain foods are healthy and have ample opportunities to engage in robust physical activities.

All children show that they feel safe in the playgroup and free from any form of abuse.

All children have very good attitudes to learning and show enjoyment in participation. They arrive showing a sense of anticipation for the day's activities and an eagerness to become involved.

All children show excellent behaviour and this was very apparent in "circle time" when children listened intently and responded to questions. They treat adults and each others with respect and consideration. A notable feature is the willingness of children to help adults in clearing away equipment and tidying the room in preparation for its use as a refectory.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Good

Learning experiences: Good

Planning is done collaboratively and successfully engage all children. It is flexible and responds well to children's interests. Overall, it is well focused on meeting the Foundation Phase outcomes. It builds systematically on children's existing knowledge, understanding and skills.

All children are well supported and respected as individuals and this has successfully developed their self-confidence. They show respect for each other and are beginning to learn of other cultures and countries. In a circle time activity their knowledge of other countries and peoples was well developed based on holiday cards from different countries.

Children know the routines established by the playgroup and are sufficiently confident to be independent learners. There are good opportunities provided for children to develop their basic skills, including their physical and creative skills and to understand the need to care for living things. Provision is made to ensure the coherent development of skills across the curriculum, including developing children's thinking skills.

Children are encouraged to use the Welsh language as much as possible and there are appropriate opportunities for children to develop their knowledge and understanding of the traditions and celebrations of Wales.

Children learn about growing seeds, looking after them and the recycling of materials. Visitors to the playgroup enable children to begin to learn about the roles people play in the community.

Teaching: Good

Staff, in their planning and through the day-to-day activities of the playgroup, show that they have a good understanding of the philosophy of the Foundation Phase. Their experiences have also given them an up-to-date knowledge of child development.

A notable feature of the teaching is the high expectations the staff have of all the children and these are realised in practice.

A very good balance exists between child-selected and adult-led activities. Children's individual needs are recognised and acted upon and children's behaviour is managed and developed very effectively. Staff are good role models and challenge children in their questioning, intervening appropriately as necessary. All staff know and fully accept their roles.

Children are assessed regularly and observations recorded in individual booklets (Playing to Learn) across the 7 areas of learning. The observations are dated and this enables children's progress to be monitored.

Staff use their knowledge of children's achievements to plan future activities. However, the observations of children's achievements tend to be somewhat descriptive and insufficiently focused on children's skill development and as such do not always focus sufficiently on the next steps in children's learning. There are however examples of observations that specify accurately skills the children display, such as being able to identify specific two-dimensional shapes. Parents are happy with the information they have concerning their child's development but are less sure of what they can do to help their child's development.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The provision for the promotion of children's health and wellbeing, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with some very good aspects.

Day-to-day activities are very well designed to foster values such as honesty, fairness, respect for truth and justice. Activities help children distinguish right from wrong and to accept responsibilities. Children are praised when they take responsibility and show initiative. Overall, this establishes a very good personal framework of behaviour that will provide children with skills for life.

Snack times are social occasions when children choose when they have their snack, select their food from a range of healthy foods and relax and converse with their friends.

The playgroup makes good use of specialist services to support children when necessary. Children with additional learning needs (ALN) have been well supported in the past. Parents have been informed at each stage.

Safeguarding arrangements, including policies and procedures are in place. The leader is the responsible person and all staff have received recent training. The playgroup arrangements reflect the All Wales Child Protection Procedures (2008).

Learning environment: Good

The playgroup is an inclusive setting displaying an ethos that takes into account individual children's needs and their idiosyncrasies. All children have equal access to all aspects of the curriculum. A tolerant attitude pervades the playgroup and children are completely free from harassment or any form of oppressive behaviour.

Whilst no child currently present show any form of disability, the playgroup is ideally positioned to accept such children and to ensure that they would not suffer unfavourable treatment.

The staff are well qualified and experienced and have worked together for substantial periods of time. The playgroup is generally well resourced to meet the requirements of the Foundation Phase curriculum and the needs of the children. An exception is the need to provide the children with more opportunities to work with IT equipment.

The accommodation is suitable and used effectively and supplemented by the school's facilities. The local environment is used well to enhance the existing facilities at the playgroup.

Whilst the room is a multipurpose room, staff all combine well to ensure that activities are set out in readiness for the children and stored away promptly at the end of the session.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

There is a clear sense of purpose evident throughout the work of the playgroup, focused on promoting and sustaining high quality provision. All staff work very well together under the direction of the leader. They know their roles very well as a result of several years experience of working together. The implementation of policies, procedures and initiatives is very effective. Learning and teaching are managed very well and routines are well established. The philosophy of the Foundation Phase is successfully incorporated into the work of the playgroup. The outcomes for children are good and often very good.

Relationships with the children, parents, the primary school and the management committee are good and the outcomes for the children are highly beneficial on their achievement and progress.

The management committee fully understand their role and are well informed about the performance of the playgroup. However, the management is not complacent and are continually seeking ways to improve and making the best use of advice available and to further extend the experiences that can be provided for the children. Leaders and managers have taken good account of national and local priorities including the Foundation Phase.

Improving quality: Good

Staff know their children well. Areas for development have been addressed and currently the provision for children is consistently good. A positive culture of self-evaluation pervades the work of the setting. Staff are open to new ideas and share ideas and the views of the children are well used. In discussion staff are able to show improvements that have been made and the improved provision for children's achievement and wellbeing.

Future plans for improved experiences for the children are realistic and achievable. This includes developing an extended outdoor area for growing plants and observing wildlife in conjunction with the schools' nursery and reception class.

Partnership working: Good

Partnership activities make a very worthwhile and beneficial contribution to children's good achievement and wellbeing. Parents reported that they are very satisfied with their children's progress and the contact they have with the staff. They reported that staff are approachable, listen to them and are sensitive to children's needs. Parents are very supportive of their children and would benefit from more information on how they could support their child's learning and the work of the playgroup.

The playgroup has highly effective links with the primary school. They make good use of the school's resources and facilities; children know the nursery teacher and they visit the school regularly. This facilitates the transfer of children and gives their education a holistic feeling.

The relationship with the local authority advisory teacher has been highly beneficial and a source of help and ideas. This close working relationship has enabled the Foundation Phase to be implemented successfully. Good links are also in place with other relevant organisations. The playgroup is also a member of the Wales Pre-school Playgroup Association (WPPA). Community links are used effectively to support children's learning.

Resource management: Good

Resources are managed and deployed effectively. Whilst, by the nature of the setting, resources have to be set up and stored away each day, this is done with the minimum of disruption to the work of the playgroup.

Leaders and managers understand the budget and prioritise spending in line with planned actions for improvement. Spending priorities always have clear educational purposes and the playgroup gives good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

10 questionnaire replies were received.

None of the replies disagreed with the statements on the questionnaire. There was 80% strongly agreed replies to the following statements.

1. Overall I am satisfied with the setting.
2. My child likes this setting.
3. My child was helped to settle in well when he/she started at the setting.
4. My child is making good progress at the setting.
5. Teaching is good
6. Staff treat all children fairly and with respect
7. My child is safe at the setting
8. I feel comfortable about approaching the setting with questions, suggestions or a problem.
9. My child is well prepared for moving on to school.
10. The setting is well run.

Responses to discussions with children

Children enjoy their time at the playgroup and several agreed that they looked forward to coming in the morning. They particularly like painting and listening to stories.

Appendix 2

The reporting inspector

Mr Eifion R Morgan	Reporting Inspector
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Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the setting and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

If available, the data report can be found on our website alongside this report.