



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 Gwynan's Playgroup
Ysgol Capelulo
Treforris Road
Dwygyfylchi
Conwy
LL34 6RA**

Date of inspection: November 2011

by

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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 Gwynan's Playgroup is an English medium playgroup based in Ysgol Capelulo, Dwygyfylchi, Conwy. All the children attending the playgroup come from the local village and the surrounding area. The area is recognised as neither privileged nor socially or economically disadvantaged.

The playgroup has been in this location for around four years and was previously based at the village hall. The playgroup shares the use of the building and grounds with the school and an after school club. The playgroup has an outdoor area that includes a garden and a yard and these are shared with the school.

The playgroup reports that a few children come from homes where Welsh is spoken. Children represent the full range of ability and the playgroup accepts children with additional learning needs. No children at the moment are recognised as having additional learning needs, however, the playgroup has received assistance from outside agencies to support children that have additional needs in the past. No children attending at present are from minority ethnic backgrounds and none come from socially disadvantaged homes.

The playgroup is registered for a maximum of 26 children and accepts children from two and a half years old. There are currently 22 children attending the playgroup at different times during the week. Two of these are three years old. The local authority and the Wales Pre-school Providers' Association support the playgroup. During the inspection, two children of three years old were present on the first morning and one on the second.

The leader has held the position since 2009. Four members of staff and occasional volunteers assist her and they are all suitably qualified.

There is an informative welcome pack available for parents and carers that provides them with details of the playgroup. Parents and carers bring their children into the playgroup and this provides for a meeting with the staff if needed. The playgroup opens for five mornings a week between 9am and 11.45am.

The playgroup is registered with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales. The playgroup's management committee oversees its work.

The playgroup was last inspected by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales in November 2010. Estyn previously inspected the playgroup in February 2006. Since the previous inspection, the playgroup has changed its location to the school and appointed new staff.

Summary

The Setting's current performance	Good
The Setting's prospects for improvement	Excellent

Current performance

The performance of the playgroup is good because:

- the learning experiences are planned very well;
- all children are supported very effectively and they benefit from a broad, balanced and interesting curriculum;
- the teaching is very effective and very challenging;
- the teaching concentrates very well on Foundation Phase outcomes;
- the recording of the children's achievements through comprehensive and detailed evidence books is excellent;
- very good resources are available, both indoors and outdoors;
- the playgroup is led and managed in an enthusiastic and very organised way;
- there are very good relationships between adults and children;
- there are excellent links with the school that shares the same site; and
- the staff work very effectively together and everyone contributes purposefully to the success of the playgroup.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- the leadership and staff provide a very clear direction for the work of the playgroup;
- changes and developments over time show that the playgroup has many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice in its record of improving for the sake of the children;
- the self-evaluation has many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice, which leads to very clear targets and a purposeful development plan;
- all the staff have very positive and active attitudes towards professional development and training;
- the playgroup's consistent and well planned use of support links and outside agencies has many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice;
- the links with the school that shares the same site has many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice; and
- the learning environment is very stimulating and challenging for all children.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the playgroup needs to:

- R1 set clear learning objectives and success criteria at the start of all focus activities; and
- R2 provide better opportunities for children to visit and learn about their own community.

What happens next?

The setting will draw up an action plan which shows how the setting is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will invite the setting to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Standards:

There is no report on children's progress, standards in their skills development, Welsh language and wellbeing. This is because the number of relevant children present at the time of the inspection was too few to report on without identifying individual children.

Wellbeing:

There is no report on children's progress, standards in their skills development, Welsh language and wellbeing. This is because the number of relevant children present at the time of the inspection was too few to report on without identifying individual children.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Good

Learning experiences: Good

The curriculum is very well planned to meet the philosophy of the Foundation Phase curriculum and to achieve the identified outcomes of children's learning. The curriculum builds very effectively on children's previous knowledge and experiences and incorporates stimulating opportunities for the development of skills across the curriculum.

Effective time is set aside for all staff to meet to plan the curriculum that provides the children with challenging and interesting activities. The curriculum is flexible and is matched well to the children's interests.

There are very worthwhile opportunities incorporated into the day-to-day working of the playgroup for children to develop their self-confidence and to become independent learners. Whilst specific activities are planned, all children do have the freedom to select their own tasks and activities. This is a very positive aspect of the provision.

The purposeful provision includes opportunities for all children to develop respect for each other; opportunities to form good relationships with each other and with adults; and to become tolerant of each other. This is very evident during snack times when the systems employed by the staff encourage polite and responsible behaviour.

Many engaging opportunities of very high quality are provided for children to develop their basic and key skills of literacy, numeracy, their knowledge and understanding of the world, physical and creative skills. A good aspect of children's learning experiences is the provision made for children to acquire the Welsh language. Welsh is not the natural language of communication between adults and children, however,

every opportunity is taken to use Welsh in all of the playgroup's activities, both incidentally and during planned activities. Through coherent opportunities, nearly all children, whatever their background, show enjoyment in speaking the language and singing Welsh nursery rhymes.

Children have many opportunities to develop their thinking skills through inspiring activities like gardening, bug hunting and studying the changes caused by the seasons. Communication, numeracy and information technology skills are evident in all aspects of the playgroup's provision. The children's daily work on these skills is highlighted by colourful displays that demonstrate the children's creativity when dealing with numbers and letters.

The traditions and celebrations of the culture of Wales are given due emphasis, like the celebration of St. David's Day. Good opportunities are also provided for children to acquire knowledge and understanding of other cultures and traditions, such as during their study of the Chinese New Year. Such activities help children to develop an understanding of the wider world and raise their awareness of age appropriate global citizenship.

All children have very good opportunities to plant seeds and look after plants and so begin their understanding of plant growth and sustainability.

Teaching: Good

The quality of very good teaching shows that the staff have a good, practical knowledge of the children's development needs and a clear understanding of the requirements of the Foundation Phase.

The staff have high expectations of the children and these expectations are put into practice well. The staff's active role in planning the curriculum ensures the best use of their expertise. However, at times, when an activity is introduced, there is not enough reference made to the activity's learning objective and its success criteria.

The system of sharing responsibilities means that staff have a very detailed knowledge of all the children and as such are well aware of their achievements and progress. Introductions are matched appropriately to the ages of the children and the comments and responses of all children are listened to intently. The staff respond to all children with sensitivity and respect.

There is a very good balance between adult directed and child selected activities, both indoors and out of doors. All children are free to select from either independent or adult led activities and they are all supported well by an adult during their chosen activities.

Staff model language well to the children's development levels and use questioning effectively to challenge and develop children's thinking and communication skills. The standard of the staff's Welsh is good and they aim to raise their standards further through appropriate courses. The staff provide a very stimulating environment that very successfully ensures every child's involvement and enjoyment.

Assessment procedures are very good and the staff keep detailed notes and check lists on every child, so that parents are kept well informed at all times about their child's development. The recording of the children's achievements through comprehensive and detailed evidence books is excellent. They are completed very efficiently and thoroughly with detailed notes and photographic evidence. The records of the children's achievements are available to parents. The staff know the children very well and plan the next steps in their learning very effectively.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The playgroup's provision for ensuring children's health and wellbeing is good. All children enjoy their time at the playgroup. They arrive showing a sense of anticipation and are keen to get involved. They partake enthusiastically in activities set out for them. The broad curriculum, which consists of many visitors, develops and extends children's experiences well.

The work in the classroom shows the wide range of experiences that arise from their activities and the children's sense of wonder. The many visitors to the playgroup develop the children's knowledge and understanding of their own community effectively, however, the playgroup does not often take the children out to their own community on visits very often.

The playgroup's provision for ensuring children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Children experience a very well planned curriculum. The playgroup is an organised unit, where children value each other and in turn, the staff value them.

Values, such as honesty, fairness, respect and an understanding of what is right and wrong, are fostered through the day-to-day activities and they are accepted without question. All children know and accept the social norms of living together, sharing and accepting the views of others and being members of a community. Individual children, in turn, accept specific responsibilities that develop their self-esteem.

Children's cultural development is good, which incorporates Welsh customs and traditions and it extends to other cultures when children celebrate events like the Chinese New Year.

The playgroup's staff are vigilant in identifying children requiring specialist help. They make use of professional help and guidance. The playgroup has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding. Staff have received regular and appropriate training. Staff undertake effective risk assessments routinely.

The playgroup is secure, where the entrance door is locked and only opened by a member of staff, consequently no one can enter or a child leave unaccompanied. Good care is taken when children are being collected to ensure that they are in the care of their parents or of a known carer.

Regular reviews of children's progress ensure that any child suspected of requiring additional help is noted and their progress is monitored closely. The playgroup's leader is the additional learning needs co-ordinator and is familiar with the necessary procedures for supporting such a child.

Where necessary external agencies are involved and one-to-one support is provided if needed. At present no child has additional learning needs.

Learning environment: Good

The playgroup, through its day-to-day activities and the approach adopted by the staff promotes a positive ethos. Staff know the children well and their individuality is recognised. All children have equal access to a stimulating curriculum enriched by very well resourced and interesting outside areas.

The homely atmosphere and the friendship provided by the staff ensures that a tolerant attitude pervades the playgroup. The playgroup employs positive behaviour strategies that have successfully eliminated any form of harassment or oppressive behaviour. All children enjoy equality of opportunity.

The playgroup's staff are well qualified and experienced and there is a very favourable adult to child ratio. Staff expertise is used well both in planning and in supervising activities. The playgroup is resourced very well to meet the requirements of the Foundation Phase curriculum and the needs of the children. This is a very positive aspect. The resources are accessible to children and this promotes the children's sense of independence and responsibility.

The local environment and the playgroup's resources are used very well on a regular basis and they contribute well to children's understanding of the natural world around them.

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

Staff understand their roles and responsibilities very well and work together effectively as a team, sharing values, aims and objectives. The very organised and enthusiastic leader involves all staff in planning and this ensures the best use of their expertise. The leader is actively involved in giving clear directions and a sense of purpose to the work of the playgroup. All the staff have a positive ethos and the commitment to provide the best possible experiences for the children.

The leadership and all staff are very focused on the needs of the children and the playgroup successfully achieves this aim in practice. Staff have received relevant and appropriate training and this has impacted very well on the quality of provision provided.

Very effective links with the parents and carers are in place. They are kept very well informed of their children's achievements and progress and this helps them to support their children's learning. They are encouraged to participate in play days at the playgroup, which promotes good links between the home and the playgroup.

There is a well-established management structure in place with a clear definition of duties. The leader delegates responsibilities very effectively to others when needed

to do so. The management has taken good account of relevant legislation and guidance to meet the legal requirements in full.

The playgroup has taken very good account of national priorities, including implementing the Foundation Phase curriculum. It has also made good use of the opportunities to work with the local school to ensure excellent links. The very effective partnership with the local authority and the Wales Pre-school Providers' Association is extremely beneficial to the work of the playgroup. The local authority uses the playgroup as an example of very good practice.

Improving quality: Excellent

The playgroup is very self-evaluative and this has been in place for a long period of time. It has adopted a new self-evaluation system recently, however, self-evaluation is a practice that has been embedded thoroughly into the work of the playgroup in recent years. The self-evaluation practices used by the playgroup have many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice. It identifies areas for improvement very effectively and implements changes immediately for the benefit of the children. This has included developing the outdoor areas, in partnership with the school, which broadens children's experiences and develops the children's independence very effectively.

Areas for improvement are identified and prioritised through a wide-ranging network of consultation with external agencies, which play significant roles in the life of the playgroup. The annual questionnaires and consultations are evaluated thoroughly and used to move the playgroup forward in terms of raising children's standards and improving provision. This is very good practice and is both informative and an excellent example of using a professional learning community to enhance provision and opportunities for the children.

The self-evaluation systems lead directly into concise and accurate targets in the development plan, which prioritise the raising of children's standards in the areas of learning and the development of children's skills.

Staff have made very good use of training opportunities and professional learning experiences, including vocational qualifications, which are impacting well on children's learning and wellbeing.

Partnership working: Excellent

Parents, in the questionnaire replies and in discussion expressed their total satisfaction with the playgroup. They are highly appreciative of the standards of care and the quality of education available. They appreciate the open door policy and the opportunities they have to meet staff on a daily basis. The parents are encouraged to participate in play days that helps in developing good links between the home and the playgroup.

By the time children leave the playgroup; parents feel that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The links with the school that shares the same site

are excellent because they plan the use and share resources together, especially the use of the outdoors.

The wide-ranging network of consultation with external agencies has many strengths and it is an example of sector leading practice. All the agencies are questioned on how the playgroup can improve and develop. This information is used very effectively by the playgroup to raise the quality of its leadership and management systems, its quality of provision and the opportunities for improving children's standards.

The support provided by the local authority staff and the Wales Pre-school Providers' Association benefits the playgroup greatly because it is used very effectively by the playgroup as a resource to help raise standards. Their advice and suggestions have helped in developing the playgroup very effectively and has contributed to the current high standards of provision.

Resource management: Good

Staff work together very effectively. Planning is completed collaboratively and this results in individual expertise being used very well.

The playgroup is very well resourced and the resources are used very effectively to further the aims of the Foundation Phase curriculum. The resources are also accessible to the children and this encourages independence. This has a very positive impact on their learning.

The playgroup provides very well planned outdoor experiences for the children through regular use of the very good outdoor areas.

The playgroup's staff and management have identified areas for development accurately through excellent consultation systems and they are very aware of how to move the playgroup forward.

Overall, the playgroup provides very good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Eight questionnaires were returned. Discussions with a sample of parents during the inspection indicate their very positive support for the playgroup. Nearly all parents and carers are particularly pleased with all aspects of the playgroup, especially the care provided and their children's progress.

Responses to discussions with learners

All children are happy in the playgroup. Their enthusiasm is evident when they arrive and meet with their peers. Nearly all of them are self-confident from knowing that they are well supported and that they are provided with interesting, stimulating and challenging tasks.

Appendix 2

The reporting inspector

Nicholas Jones	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)