



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

**Argoed Playgroup
Bryn Y Baal
Mold
CH7 6RY**

Date of inspection: March 2012

by

**Mr Peter Mathias
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

Argoed Playgroup is situated in the youth wing of Argoed High School near Mold, Flintshire which is the local authority. It has no connections with the school and is a registered charity. It provides nursery education for children between the ages of two and four years of age. Currently there are 14 children on roll. Of these six are under three years of age and eight have reached their third birthdays. It provides pre-school provision for morning sessions Monday to Thursday (9:15 – 11:45). Currently no child is identified as having additional learning needs.

The setting is led by two practitioners who jointly share responsibilities as the registered persons. There is also a management committee.

Children attending the setting come from a range of backgrounds and economic circumstances. Generally they are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged.

No child has English as an additional language and no child has Welsh as a first language. All come from white British backgrounds.

The setting was last inspected by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), in November 2011. The report did not make any recommendations. The setting was previously inspected by Estyn in the autumn term 2005.

Summary

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

Current performance

The quality and standards of educational provision are appropriate and successfully promote the Foundation Phase outcomes for children's learning because of:

- good standards in communication in English and Welsh;
- good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning;
- good teaching and supportive relationships between adults and children;
- effective shared leadership; and
- appropriate provision and planning for children of this age.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because of:

- the progress made since the last inspection;
- the establishment of honest self-evaluation and planning for improvement;
- effective day-to-day assessment procedures;
- positive and coherent leadership; and
- strong links with the local authority to improve provision and practice further.

Recommendations

The inspector has agreed with the setting the following recommendations for improvement:

- R1 refine the self evaluation process further in order to identify priorities for improvement and plan in more detail how to address them;
- R2 extend assessment arrangements in order to identify and record children's attainment on entry to the setting and their progress; and
- R3 make greater use of the outdoor facilities so that all children have regular opportunities for physical development.

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

Nearly all children make good progress and bearing in mind their often young age, achieve well. They are invariably active, eager to explore and to gain new experiences and knowledge. They successfully enjoy a wide range of practical activities organised for them and take part enthusiastically.

From their individual starting points, nearly all have good communication skills in English and in Welsh. They respond to questions and talk to adults and other children clearly and often expressively. They are building up a richer vocabulary in both English and Welsh. They respond appropriately to instructions in Welsh and know some simple phrases. They join in Welsh songs and rhymes confidently.

All children in the setting show a keen interest in living things, carefully planting and tending seeds and watching them grow. They enjoy visiting the nearby field to observe the horses and to make friends with them. They notice the changes in their surroundings as one season follows another. They look with surprise and wonder at a squirrel which quickly disappears into the trees holding a large fir cone.

Nearly all enjoy using a camera to record each others' work. They know how to 'point and press'. They understand how to program a toy microwave in their kitchen and how their household appliances need electricity to work.

In the setting nearly all are beginning to develop good manipulative skills, concentrating hard to cut and stick accurately when making their Easter cards and Easter baskets. They enjoy printing using their fingers and everyday objects. They build up colourful collages using natural materials thoughtfully. They respond well to the rhythms of a range of music and readily pretend to be people who help them.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all show high levels of confidence and independence. Even the youngest enjoy walking some distance through the playing fields collecting daisies and wondering how many there are. They share their equipment generously and are developing good eating habits and manners. They appreciate that fruit is good for them, although they still look forward to their Easter eggs. They are beginning to know how to look after their personal needs for themselves and the importance of 'washing your hands' before eating or handling food.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

Despite difficulties involving putting out and putting away all equipment each session, the setting is well laid out to provide a wide range of stimulating and carefully constructed experiences. They successfully support all the areas of learning the Foundation Phase curriculum, although physical development is at times under emphasised.

Both practitioners utilise local authority guidance well to plan thoroughly in the longer and shorter term. They are careful to ensure that the experiences which they offer help all children to build successfully on what they already know and can do.

The setting plans and arranges activities to foster children's physical development both within the building and in the secured grassed area next to it. However, these activities do not occur regularly and form part of daily routines.

There is good provision in the planning to encourage learning in literacy and communication, numeracy and in Welsh language and culture.

The planning identified clear short-term objectives and indicated what should follow from them.

The setting emphasises in its planning ways to encourage all children to understand and respect differences and to be kind to each other. It helps them to understand that other people have different ways of life. Planning provides some good opportunities for children to begin to understand the importance of taking care of the environment.

Teaching: Good

Both practitioners work closely together to complement each other in the activities prepared for each session. They have a good understanding of how to extend children's learning and how to engage their natural, inquisitive natures in purposeful investigations and play. Both practitioners know each child very well and know how best to encourage each child to be confident and independent. They have high expectations of each child and ensure that all play a full part in the activities. Both ensure that each child's efforts are valued and warmly recognised. They regularly take opportunities to encourage the use of Welsh as well as English in songs and stories.

There are sound procedures to observe and record children's daily achievements and to note when the learning needs to be reinforced or extended.

The "this is me" process ensures that the setting builds up an ongoing record of how each child is making progress in all areas of their personal and intellectual development.

During each session practitioners thoughtfully encourage individual children to begin to evaluate their own work and to identify what they enjoy and did well. However, there is no reliable data which clearly indicates each child's basic skills on entry in order to form the basis on which they evaluate the progress made during time spent in the setting.

Reports to parents are in the form of "this is me" initiative which gives parents an accurate picture of their children's all round achievements.

Care, support and guidance: Good

There are appropriate policies and arrangements to encourage healthy living. These contribute successfully to children's development. All children receive regular encouragement to learn to be curious and to learn more about other peoples' ways of life, for example through the visitors they have to their setting and the visits they make to see for themselves. They show a natural sense of surprise and awe and wonder at some aspects of the world around them, when for example, they were investigating under trees or when looking for hidden Easter eggs in the setting.

There are good informal arrangements for all children to appreciate what is expected of them and to know what is right and wrong. They understand the principles of good behaviour and consideration for others. They take on responsibilities as the helper of the day and willingly show good manners when helping to distribute fruit and milk.

Across the setting there are many well taken opportunities for children to make choices for themselves and to recognise when it is right to make these decisions.

All children feel safe and happy in the setting. The setting has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

The setting has good arrangements to provide children with personal and special support, although currently there are no children with identified additional educational needs, there is evidence to suggest that previously those needs were quickly identified and individual play plans put into place. There are strong links with parents and other professionals in this process.

Learning environment: Good

The setting is well laid out and has a positive, busy atmosphere where all children feel they belong and are valued for who they are. Practitioners are very aware of the importance of treating each of the children equally and of encouraging good social skills and good attitudes to all in the setting. They have clear procedures in place to address any issues relating to concerning behaviour or discrimination.

There is an advantageous ratio of practitioners to children. Both are appropriately qualified and have considerable experience of organising within the setting.

Arrangements for their ongoing professional development are in place and are appropriate to meet their individual needs.

There are suitable resources to meet the requirements for all children. These are easily accessible for them to use.

The setting has sufficient space for both indoor and outdoor activities. However, the nature of the site inhibits the development of large scale initiatives to enrich the outdoor provision. From time to time the setting makes good use of a nearby adventure play area and the large playing fields of the secondary school.

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

Both practitioners, who have joint responsibility for the setting, work well as a busy and effective team. They share a common commitment to providing well for all of the children.

Both discuss and evaluate the day-to-day and long-term needs of the setting regularly on an informal basis. Following recent initiatives they plan in a structured way to maintain the setting and to continue to improve its provision. They are well motivated and committed to embracing new ideas and changes to the way in which the setting is organised and run. They ensure that they are kept up to date through their professional development programs.

Both practitioners work hard to lead and maintain a management committee structure. They are helped significantly in this by a small number of local, well motivated people who share a determination to make the setting a success. These people contribute generously of their time. Currently only a few parents are involved. The committee is well informed of the work going on. Financial matters are properly handled and accounts are audited regularly.

The setting meets local and national priorities well. There has been good progress in encouraging children to become confident in speaking in English and Welsh. The setting has adopted the principles and practice of the Foundation Phase successfully.

Improving quality: Good

The setting has recently established new procedures to formalise its self-evaluation arrangements and to quantify what needs to be achieved in order to improve standards further.

Both leaders have worked hard at this and have a clear understanding of the principles involved. They have, for example sought the views of other stakeholders. The plans to address priorities are logical and clearly set out. However, both the setting self-evaluation document and the related improvement plan does not fully

provide sufficient information to support its conclusions and related areas for development.

There are strong links with the local authority and with Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales. Both practitioners regularly attend training and professional development opportunities by both organisations. Links with the feeder primary school are limited. Despite the best efforts of those in the setting, there are no opportunities for the exchange of professional expertise with the primary school or with other settings in the area. Similarly there are no formal professional links with the secondary school, despite the setting's willingness to develop them.

Partnership working: Good

There are good, informal, day to day links with parents who are kept well informed. In addition, there are regular newsletters and invitations to parents to become involved in supporting the setting's activities.

The local authority works closely in partnership with the setting leaders. The arrangements for the successful transfer of children to primary school are adequate and the setting provides the primary school with all the necessary information the setting is able to assemble.

Resource management: Good

There is a good range of up to date resources, bearing in mind the limited storage facilities which are available. Funds are well used. A particular strength is the advantageous ratio of practitioners to children and how this advantage is generally managed to enhance children's learning. However, there is insufficient regular use of the outdoor facilities. The setting provides good value for money

Appendix 1

PARENTS

Twelve replies were received to the parent's questionnaire. All expressed very positive views in all but one of the areas surveyed. A very small proportion did not feel well informed about their children's progress. In the other areas all parents who replied were satisfied with the setting and felt that their children were happy there. They believed that their children had been helped to settle well when they began. All parents thought that their children were making good progress and that all children behaved well. They believed that the teaching was good; their children were treated fairly and were safe. All thought that their children were given all the support they needed. They were comfortable about approaching the setting if they had a question, suggestion or problem.

Parents understood the setting's procedures for dealing with complaints. They believed that their children were well prepared for moving on to school. They all believed that the setting provided a good range of activities, trips and visits and was well run.

PUPILS

All children liked coming to the setting and were happy. They enjoyed playing with their friends. They liked the close and supportive relationships they had with the practitioners.

All children knew what was expected of them and what they should do if they had any difficulties. They took on small responsibilities willingly and performed them well. They were always ready to help.

Appendix 2

The reporting inspector

Mr Peter Mathias	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.

Glossary of terms

Areas of Learning	<p>These are the seven areas that make up the Foundation Phase curriculum in English-medium settings. (Welsh-medium settings are not required to teach Welsh language development as this is already the language of the setting.) The Areas of Learning are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity • language, literacy and communications skills • mathematical development • Welsh language development • knowledge and understanding of the world • physical development • creative development
CSSIW	<p>Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) is a division of the Department of Public Services and Performance in the Welsh Government.</p>
Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP)	<p>This local authority partnership approves settings as providers of education. It also has the power to withdraw funding from settings which do not comply with the partnership's conditions of registration.</p>
Foundation Phase	<p>The Welsh Government initiative that aims to provide a balanced and varied curriculum to meet the different developmental needs of young children from 3 to 7 years of age.</p>
Foundation Phase child development assessment profile (CDAP)	<p>Foundation Phase on-entry assessment profile; a statutory requirement in schools from September 2011 and settings from September 2012.</p>
Local authority advisory teacher	<p>These teachers provide regular support, guidance and training to non-maintained settings which provide education for three and four year olds.</p>
Mudiad Meithrin	<p>A voluntary organisation, which aims to give every young child in Wales the opportunity to benefit from early years services and experiences through the medium of Welsh.</p>

National Childminding Association (NCMA)	This is a professional membership association working with registered childminders to ensure local high quality home-based childcare, play, learning and family support.
National (NDNA)	This organisation which aims to improve the development and education of children in their early years, by providing support services to members.
Wales Pre-school Providers Association (WPPA)	An independent voluntary organisation providing community based pre-school childcare and education.