



*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**

**Little Acorns Playgroup  
Derwendeg Primary School  
Hengoed  
CF82 7HP**

**by**

**Mary Dyas**

**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:

<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

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Publication Section  
Estyn  
Anchor Court  
Keen Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW

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

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## About the setting

Little Acorns is an English-medium setting which serves the village of Cefn Hengoed and the surrounding area on the west side of the Rhymney Valley. It meets in the afternoons in a building in the grounds of Derwendeg Primary School which is used by the school nursery class in the morning.

The children who attend Little Acorns are considered to come from a wide mix of backgrounds. All have English as their home language and none speak Welsh at home. No children have additional learning needs.

The setting is open each afternoon during the school term and is registered for up to 20 children between two and a half years or for up to 24 children when there are no two and a half year olds present. At the time of the inspection there were 23 children on roll of whom there were three two and a half year olds, twelve three year olds and seven four year olds. Twelve of the children also attend the school nursery in the morning when they are in receipt of funded educational provision from the Local Authority. Seven three year olds are currently funded in Little acorns.

In March 2011 the setting obtained the Wales Preschool Providers Association Quality Award. The setting was last inspected by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales in October 2009 and this is the first time it has been inspected by Estyn.

## Summary

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

### Current performance

The quality and standards of educational provision, are appropriate and successfully promote the Foundation Phase Outcomes for children's learning.

The setting is good because:

- All children make good progress and achieve well
- Children are all happy to come to the setting and enjoy their learning experiences
- It provides a good range of varied and interesting activities which motivate children to learn; and
- Partnerships between the setting and the nursery class are very good

### Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because:

- The setting leader and staff are very enthusiastic and have very positive attitudes towards improvement
- Although the present staff have not been in post for very long there is good evidence that changes have already been made and sustained

## Recommendations

The recommendations for improvement are to:

R1 ensure that planning is consistent and that identified next steps in children's learning are included in future plans

R2 continue to refine self evaluation to ensure all stakeholders are included in the process and that shared targets identify areas for improvement in provision and in standards of children's learning; and

R3 improve the quality of information parents and carers receive about the activities that their children are offered and about their children's educational progress

### What happens next?

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

## Main findings

<b>Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?</b>
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<b>Good</b>
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### Standards: Good

Most children achieve well and make good progress in relation to their starting points across all the foundation Phase Areas of Learning. Children acquire new knowledge and understanding effectively and enjoy the challenge of new and varied activities. Many are confident learners who are willing to learn from their mistakes, take risks and explore their surroundings.

All three year olds apply their skills well to a wide range of play activities. Many have good communication skills and are beginning to use more complex sentence structures to express themselves. Most children join in with songs and rhymes with enthusiasm and enjoy listening to stories and sharing books with adults and with their friends. A minority show an interest in writing and are beginning to recognise their own written name.

Most children count objects accurately to three and many are able to do so to five. All join in with counting together to ten. Many children use mathematical language appropriately in their play and are able to recognise and name basic two dimensional

shapes. Their understanding of information and communications technology is developing through their use of a cash register and mobile phone in the home corner, a computer and battery operated controlled toys.

Children's progress in Welsh is adequate. While they respond appropriately to the use of Welsh during circle time, they are not yet able to use Welsh spontaneously in their play.

### **Wellbeing: Good**

All children enter the setting happily, are welcomed by their friends and settle immediately into activities. Relationships between children are strong, they know one another well and most treat one another with affection and respect. Behaviour is good. Most children work well with others and understand the need to share and to take turns.

All children enjoy their healthy snacks and meals and most are able to explain why it is important to wash their hands before meals or after using the toilet. Many make sensible suggestions when asked how they should carry out an activity.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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### **Learning experiences: Adequate**

The setting provides all children with a good range of interesting and stimulating learning experiences across all areas of learning. Practitioners work very well together as a team, know the children very well and are beginning to tailor activities to develop individual needs. Written planning, however is inconsistent and still in its early stages. It does not yet show consistency in provision to ensure continuity in children's learning and there is not yet sufficient evidence to show that evaluations of planned activities feed into future plans. Planning does not ensure appropriate challenge for more able children.

The outdoor area is a strong feature of this setting and practitioners make good use of it to encourage a respect for the environment and for sustainability. All children understand the need to care for the plants they grow and routinely make use of recycled paper and other previously used items for their classroom activities.

Welsh language provision is adequate. Practitioners have introduced simple words and phrases and count with the children in Welsh but do not consistently make systematic use of incidental Welsh throughout the session. The school has gained a gold award in recycling and children in Little Acorns routinely recycle their paper and items from their packed lunches.

## **Teaching: Good**

All practitioners demonstrate an understanding of the requirements of the Foundation Phase and support the children well in their learning using good questioning skills. There is a good range of planned activities but the setting is also very open to following the interests of the children. Planning is closely linked to that of the nursery class in order to ensure that available activities and displays are relevant.

Practitioners are very concerned about the welfare of the children and provide a warm and caring environment which enables children to thrive and to make good all round progress.

Practitioners make useful and evaluative observations of children's learning and achievements. The setting uses the Local Authority's recommended profile, 'My Story', to record both observations and photographic evidence. Parents and carers are invited to a meeting to discuss and contribute to their child's record of progress during the summer term and a written report is created from this information when the child moves on to the nursery class. There is time before and after the session for parents to come and talk to practitioners, to discuss any issues or concerns.

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

Good procedures are in place to ensure children's health and wellbeing and these contribute well to the children's overall development. Induction into the group is effective in ensuring that children settle happily and is dependent on the individual needs of each child. Good links exist with the nursery class which uses the room in the mornings. Some children continue to attend Little Acorns in the afternoon for wrap around care after they move on and receive funding in the school nursery.

The setting does not have any children with additional learning needs at the moment but the staff are well aware of the procedures they would need to follow.

Children, and their parents or carers, say they feel safe in the setting. A good range of policies to ensure the children are safe is in place and appropriate risk assessments have been carried out. Appropriate policy and procedures are in place with regard to Safeguarding and staff are aware of their responsibilities.

Good attention is given to healthy eating and children enjoy a healthy snack every day. Learning experiences promote children's personal development well, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **Learning environment: Good**

A particularly strong feature of the setting is the very positive ethos where staff and children are valued and respected. Behaviour is good and few examples of inappropriate behaviour were seen during the inspection. Most children share well and take an interest in each other.

All children have equal access to all areas of provision. The physical environment is appropriate for physical disabilities and would enable full participation in all activities.

The setting employs sufficient appropriately qualified practitioners to deliver the Foundation Phase curriculum. Practitioners work together as a strong team to create a stimulating learning environment and make effective use of the good range of available resources.

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

The setting is overseen by a management committee which has recently undergone some changes. The nursery class teacher holds the position of secretary to the committee which ensures continuity and ease of communication. The leader manager takes the lead in the day to day running of the nursery but the team is very close and all practitioners work extremely well together towards successful delivery of the Foundation Phase.. They are constantly striving to give the children the best experiences they can and, therefore, are keen to ensure that they themselves are doing their best. A system of annual appraisals is in place to support and improve staff.

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

### **Improving quality: Adequate**

Practitioners are strong in their informal self-evaluation but formal self evaluation in the setting is very much in its early stages and the Local Authority link teacher has provided good support. Included in the self evaluation and accompanying development plan has been the need to continue with self evaluation, the need to provide challenging activities and record differentiation and to develop partnerships.

Practitioners make good use of their training to benefit the organisation, for example the development of outdoor play and although in the early stages has had a positive impact on both the playgroup as a whole and the children.



### **Partnership working: Good**

A good range of partnership working contributes very positively to children's progress and well being. Relationships with parents and carers are strong and daily contact reinforces this. Meetings with parents are planned for the Summer Term to enable parents to be effectively informed about the learning of their child.

A range of notices and information is displayed for parents in the entrance and this ensures that they are kept up to date with what is happening in the playgroup.

The strong sense of unity within the setting and also with the local community benefits all parties. The local authority Early Entitlement link teacher provides good support and advice which is greatly appreciated by the developing team of practitioners.

The setting has very good links with the school's nursery class and the recent appointment of an additional member of staff who also works in the nursery in the morning has further strengthened this.

The setting makes good use of visitors from the community such as the school's 'lollipop lady', a health visitor and a beekeeper.

### **Resource management: Good**

Although the setting has a good range of resources these are used appropriately to support the planned activities. The setting benefits from sharing the space with the school's nursery class and the access to its resources. Practitioners work well together to ensure that the areas of learning both indoors and outdoors are effectively overseen to support children's learning.

The management committee oversees the budget effectively and the setting provides good value for money.

## Appendix 1

### Stakeholder satisfaction report

#### Responses to parent questionnaires

Eleven questionnaires were returned and almost all were very positive. A minority were not sure of the range of activities available for their children and a very few were unsure of the procedure for dealing with complaints. Additional comments expressed praise for the support for a child with a medical condition and also appreciation of the work of the staff.

#### Responses to discussions with children

Children say they enjoy coming to playgroup and that they enjoy playing with their friends. They feel safe and know what to do if they have a problem.

## Appendix 2

### The reporting inspector

Mary Dyas	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](http://www.estyn.gov.uk))

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