



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 Mary's Playgroup
St Mary's Catholic Church Hall
Regent Street
Wrexham
LL11 1RB**

Date of inspection: January 2013

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:

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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About the setting

St Mary's Playgroup is an English-medium setting which meets in the hall of St Mary's Catholic Cathedral in Wrexham. The playgroup has the use of a very large airy room which is shared with other community groups so all equipment needs to be packed away several times a week. There is a secure outdoor area, which is accessible from the hall, and direct access to a kitchen. The playgroup is open for four mornings and one afternoon a week and has been part of the local community for 39 years. A toddler group run by Playgroup staff meets in the hall on Friday mornings and many children move on from this into the playgroup.

Most children attending the setting move on to the nearby Catholic primary school for nursery education. They are considered to come from a mix of socio-economic backgrounds and the setting currently has 66% children with English as an Additional Language, primarily Polish speaking. The Local Authority has recently funded the provision of a Polish speaking practitioner to support the setting. At the time of the inspection there were 30 children on roll of whom nine were three year olds in receipt of funded educational provision. Only five of these were present during the inspection.

The setting welcomes all children and makes appropriate provision for those with additional learning needs. No children have currently been identified with additional learning needs.

The setting was last inspected by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales in July 2012 with a follow up visit in September and by Estyn in November 2007.

Summary

The setting's current performance	Adequate
The setting's prospects for improvement	Adequate

Current performance

The setting is judged to be adequate because:

- All children are happy in the playgroup;
- Most children make appropriate progress in relation to their stage of development;
- Particularly good support is given to the high proportion of children with EAL; and
- Relationships between adults and children are warm and caring.

However:

- Teaching is not appropriately directed towards Foundation Phase outcomes and planning does not identify skills to be developed; and
- There are no processes in place for evaluation of teaching and learning or the identification of children's next steps in learning.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are adequate because:

- The setting's self evaluation plan has identified appropriate targets for improvement; and
- Practitioners value the setting and sincerely want to do the best for the children in their care.

However:

- Advice from the LA advisory service has not been appropriately acted upon, particularly with regard to planning and regular continuous provision of outdoor activities;
- Not enough progress has been made towards addressing the targets for improvement in the current action plan; and
- Not enough progress has been made to address the recommendation in the last inspection to develop procedures which provide an accurate and clear picture of each child's progress.

Recommendations

R1 Ensure that planning is clearly focussed on Foundation Phase skills and outcomes and that all areas of learning are covered appropriately over time

R2 Continue to develop effective assessment procedures to ensure outcomes of observations and assessments are used to plan future activities.

R3 Use the results from assessments to identify the next steps in children's learning to ensure that tasks are matched to their ability and level of attainment

R4 Continue to develop the daily use of the outdoor area ensuring a full range of continuous provision across the areas of learning.

What happens next?

The setting will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the setting's progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

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?

Adequate

Learning experiences: Unsatisfactory

The setting provides a range of activities which engage and interest the children. However, the level of planning in place is inadequate and does not ensure that the curriculum builds on children's existing knowledge and level of attainment. Planning does indicate some enhanced provision but there is no systematic identification of focussed tasks planned to develop skills identified in assessments of children's learning. Planning also does not identify opportunities for activities to be delivered outdoors.

Practitioners act as good language models and promote good language skills; however, they do not always make good use of opportunities to extend children's skills in reading and writing through a range of learning experiences. The provision for developing children's skills in ICT is at an early stage of development. Children do not have enough opportunities to use ICT to reinforce and enrich their learning.

Good opportunities are provided for children to acquire knowledge and understanding of other cultures and traditions, such as during their study of Chinese New Year. Children are enabled to develop an understanding of the wider world and raise their awareness of age appropriate global citizenship and cultural diversity.

The playgroup provides children with an opportunity to recycle paper and cardboard within the setting. Although Welsh is introduced for whole group activities such as registration and story time, incidental Welsh is not used regularly enough to develop children's skills. St David's Day is used well to introduce children to the customs and traditions of Wales.

Teaching: Adequate

Practitioners are experienced and understand the importance of providing opportunities for children to learn through play and active learning. They have an appropriate understanding of the requirements of the Foundation Phase but do not focus on specific learning objectives and success criteria when supporting an activity. Practitioners know the children well and interact with them appropriately for their level of knowledge and understanding. They work hard to ensure that children enjoy their learning. Where teaching is most effective practitioners make good use of questioning to develop children's thinking skills and to assess their level of understanding. However, this is not consistent.

There are appropriate records of children's achievements which are shared with parents before their children move on to the next stage in their education. However, assessment is not used sufficiently to plan future activities to match children's needs or to move them on to the next steps in their learning. Practitioners communicate regularly and informally with parents about their children's progress though this tends to focus more on wellbeing than on progress and development.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Provision for ensuring children's health and wellbeing, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. All children enjoy their time at the playgroup. Arrangements for the induction of children into the group are flexible and adapted to the needs of individual children, particularly those for whom English is not their home language. Visits to the community and visitors to the playgroup help children to develop their knowledge and understanding of their own community. The setting has strong links with the nearby primary school to which most children move on and practitioners are working hard to strengthen transition arrangements.

Practitioners are very experienced in identifying and supporting children with additional learning needs and this is a strength of the setting. Good use is made of advice and support from other professionals.

The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meet requirements and give no cause for concern. All practitioners receive relevant training and are aware of their roles and responsibilities. The playgroup is safe, 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.

Learning environment: Good

The setting provides a welcoming and inclusive environment to all children and their families. Practitioners value the children and encourage them to respect each other and celebrate diversity through a variety of activities such as when they celebrate Chinese New Year and Divali, the Hindu festival of light. All children have equal access to all aspects of provision. The large hall is laid out with the full range of areas of learning including space for physical play such as a slide and seesaw. There are plans in place to further develop the outdoor space to enable more planting and growing.

The setting employs sufficient practitioners who are appropriately qualified and resources are adequate for the delivery of the Foundation Phase but are not always fully used to deliver the best provision for the needs of the children.

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

Although the setting does not have stated aims, the leader and her staff are highly committed to the playgroup and to supporting the children and their families. The setting provides a warm and caring ethos for the children which successfully supports their personal and social skills. This is greatly appreciated by both past and present parents and carers of children attending the setting. A system of annual appraisals is in place and targets for personal improvement are agreed between the leader and the staff member. These targets are realistic and demonstrate an understanding of what they need to do in order to improve. However, progress is not always made towards meeting these targets. Staff work together well as a team and provide positive support for one another.

Not enough progress has been made since the last inspection on either of the two recommendations made. The setting was without an effective management committee for some time but that has recently been addressed and a committee is now in place with appropriate officers. However, there has not been time yet for them to form a clear picture of the present status of the playgroup and the direction in which it needs to move in order to improve.

The setting broadly meets the requirements of the Foundation Phase and is hoping to be involved in the Local Authority's 'Grow with Me' scheme this summer.

Improving quality: Adequate

The setting's recent self-evaluation and action plan has identified areas for improvement. However, the process of self-evaluation and setting improvement is not yet embedded into the work of the playgroup and little progress has yet been made towards meeting the targets of the action plan.

Practitioners attend training offered by the Local Authority and have visited other settings in order to see good practice. As a result of such a visit they have successfully re-organised the continuous provision within the hall.

Partnership working: Good

Parents of children attending the setting report that they are very happy with the standard of care and support offered and many appreciate the opportunity to bring their children to the Friday morning Toddler Group which enables them and their children to become familiar with the setting and the staff who work there. A rota for parents to help in the setting enables them to see at first hand how the progress their children are making and is also helpful for providing some additional support for the high percentage of children whose first language is not English. Practitioners provide informal information about the children's activities at the end of each session and are considering ways in which they might improve this to ensure that all parents have equal access to the information.

The setting has strong links with the nearby Catholic Primary school to which most children move on for their nursery education and staff from the playgroup spend time talking to the headteacher about the children.

The setting has worked with their link teacher from the Local Authority for many years but has not always taken the advice they have been given in order to improve the provision.

Resource management: Good

The setting manager deploys her staff and supporting parents appropriately during the session. Staff and the management committee manage a limited budget effectively and prioritise their spending carefully. Financial decisions are discussed by the practitioners before being taken to the committee for agreement. The setting gives appropriate value for money.

Appendix 1

Responses to parent questionnaires

There is no commentary on the parent questionnaires due to the small number of responses received.

Responses to discussions with children

Due to the small number of children present in the setting there is also no report on discussions with children.

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)

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.