



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
Hubberston Youth & Community Centre
Church Road
Milford Haven
SA73 1AF**

Date of inspection: June 2015

by

**Mr Eifion R 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

Little Acorns Playgroup opened in Milford Haven in August 1998 and moved into the present premises in 2011. It meets in Hubberston Youth & Community Centre and is currently registered by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) to accept up to 30 children from the age of two to four years in any one session. Currently there are 47 children on the register, 15 of whom are three year olds, 3 of them are funded. Five children have been identified as having additional learning needs (ALN).

All children attending the playgroup come from the immediate locality and all are from English speaking homes.

The playgroup has a joint leadership and a total of eight full time staff. All are suitably qualified and experienced in working with young children. Leaders are long established, in one instance dating back to 1998 and in the other instance since 2004. The joint leadership of Little Acorns Playgroup dates back to 2011 when the setting moved to the current premises.

The setting is open for four mornings (not Wednesday) and four afternoons (not Tuesday) each week for 50 weeks of the year.

The setting was last inspected by Estyn in October 2009 and by CSSIW in October 2013.

Summary

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

Current performance

Little Acorns Playgroup's current performance is good because:

- there is a welcoming, happy ethos and all children enjoy attending;
- all practitioners show a supportive, caring attitude towards children;
- all children are treated equally and respected as individuals;
- most children make good progress and achieve well. Their social skills are developing particularly well;
- relationships between practitioners and children are outstanding;
- practitioners show exceptional commitment to their work and this benefits the children substantially.;
- practitioners have a thorough understanding of the requirements of the Foundation Phase and plan accordingly;
- planned learning opportunities provide children with exciting activities, well matched to their ability.

Prospects for improvement

Little Acorns Playgroup's prospects for improvement are good because:

- the leaders have a clear vision for developing the playgroup firmly based on developing children's achievement and wellbeing;
- practitioners are fully committed to providing the best possible support and provision for the children;
- the leaders and practitioners have a close and beneficial relationship with the parents and carers;
- practitioners receive appropriate training that has a positive effect on children's achievement and wellbeing;
- the management committee is fully supportive of the playgroup;
- finances are managed prudently.

Recommendations

R1. To maintain current standards and to improve where possible.

R2. Refine assessment of children's achievement to focus on skills acquired and to use the results in planning.

R3. Ensure that the development plan targets improvement linked to the children's standards and wellbeing.

What happens next?

The setting will draw up an action plan that shows how it is going to address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?	Good
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Standards: Good

Most children make consistently good progress in their learning from the time that they start in the setting. These children make particularly good progress in their personal and social skills and this prepares them well for the next stage in their education.

A notable and worthwhile aspect of children's learning is their well developed listening skills. They listen to stories and presentations with interest and enthusiasm. The majority of children have a good vocabulary and speak clearly. Many children know a few basic Welsh words and a few use words confidently, such as when counting and referring to different colours. Most children recognise their names on a card held by a practitioner during registration. Nearly all children join in enthusiastically singing both Welsh and English rhymes and particularly like action songs.

Nearly all children are interested in books. They hold story books appropriately and many follow the stories, turning pages in story order. They understand that print conveys meaning and a few recognise some of the words.

Many children hold writing instruments appropriately and are beginning to understand some of the purposes of writing.

Most children's numeracy skills are developing suitably. Many children recite numbers to 12 and several beyond that number. These children understand the relevance of number, such as counting the children present at registration time. A few children are beginning to recognise number to 10. Many children match shapes correctly and a few can name simple two-dimensional shapes, including triangles, squares and circles.

Most children have developing creative skills and with help produce pleasing displays, such as "string paintings". These children show good control when handling paint brushes. Their gross motor skills are developing well as was evident in the control of large toys during activities in the hall.

Practitioners, through discussion, effectively develop children's thinking and problem solving skills. Great care is taken to use positive language rather than challenging these children and this effectively develops their self-confidence and their ability to work independently.

Wellbeing: Good

All children enjoy coming the setting. Most children are eager to participate in activities set out for them and persevere for a reasonable amount of time.

All children behave well particularly when supported by practitioners. This is particularly so when listening to a story and when they are actively involved. Children are considerate of others, take turns and share equipment, such as when playing outside in the sandpit.

Many children make sensible choices about what they would like to do and show a pleasing attitude to learning. These children use equipment sensibly and carefully and take responsibility for tidying-up.

During snack time most children show awareness of good hygiene and are developing good social skills. They sit and wait appropriately, talking with their friends. Several children help to prepare the food and help to serve it. With little prompting they say “please” and “thank you”.

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

Planning is done collaboratively taking into account children’s interests. It provides children with a wide range of learning experiences that consistently engage their interests. Activities are based on a thematic approach

Planning is further refined into weekly and daily activities indicating the main activities, resources required and suitably differentiated work. An outstanding aspect of the planning is the detailed cross reference made to skill development. Planned learning outcomes ensure continuity and progression in children’s skill development across all areas of learning.

Planning provides effective opportunities for children to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. There are regular opportunities for children to listen to stories, talk about their experiences and to look at books. Children are well supported by adults during these activities and this makes a positive impact on children’s learning. Planning also incorporates worthwhile opportunities for children to develop their mark making skills, to hold writing instruments and to begin to understand the purpose of writing.

There are well used opportunities for children to develop their mathematical skills. Children learn to count, such as during morning registration, and develop their understanding of shapes, including triangles, rectangles and circles, during play

sessions. Collecting food during snack time and paying with artificial money is a well planned opportunity to develop their understanding of money. Their basic ICT skills are appropriately developed, such as when using their computer and playing with a programmable toy.

Daily planning incorporates worthwhile opportunities for children to take physical exercise in the adjacent hall. Their creative skills are well developed when for example making “string paintings”.

Whilst English is the medium of communication, the work of the setting promotes children’s early bilingual proficiency effectively. Welsh words and phrases are incorporated in daily activities, such as circle time, and when practitioners are working with children in small groups.

Children learn about the traditions and celebrations of Wales through activities, such as celebrating St. David’s day and Christian festivals and about other traditions, such as the Chinese New Year and Divali celebrations. Appropriate visits to the local shops to purchase healthy foods helps children understand their community as do visits to the setting by the police and fire service.

Teaching: Good

Practitioners work well together as a team, providing stimulating and exciting learning experiences for the children. This is highly effective in promoting children’s involvement, participation and enjoyment.

The setting has well-established routines to ensure that children settle quickly and feel safe and secure. Relationships between all practitioners and children are positive and beneficial to the children. Such relationships are based on mutual affection and high regard for one another.

Practitioners have a sound understanding of the expectations of the Foundation Phase and use a wide range of suitable strategies to capture children’s interest. A notable and outstanding example seen during the inspection was a story time. The story “The Bear Hunt” was vividly told by a practitioner with accompanied sound effects and all the children’s response displayed their complete enjoyment.

Practitioners use every opportunity to speak with the children to nurture and develop their communication skills in both English and Welsh. Questioning is used well to encourage children to reflect on their learning and to develop their thinking skills.

There is an appropriate balance between activities that are adult-led and those selected by the children. Children are given beneficial opportunities to work independently but all children are kept under review ensuring that they are all actively involved.

Tasks are well differentiated to take into account the needs of children of differing abilities.

There are effective arrangements in place to assess and track children's progress. Practitioners observe and evaluate children's achievement during activities and record their progress. These records, including pictorial evidence, provide a clear picture of children's achievement and progress. Records relate to all areas of the Foundation Phase curriculum but are not always sufficiently focused on children's skill development.

The setting uses these records well in order to identify the next steps in children's learning and to provide tasks well matched to their needs.

Practitioners use praise well to encourage children to raise their self-confidence. Parents are regularly informed of their children's progress and details about individual children are made available to the primary school to which children transfer.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The setting has effective arrangements to support children's health and wellbeing and to encourage children to look after themselves. The setting makes appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking and for children to realise the importance of cleanliness. Children have regular opportunities to take part in robust physical activities.

Learning experiences are effective in fostering children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Daily routines, such as snack time, provide worthwhile opportunities for children to develop important social skills, such as sitting at a table, talking with friends, taking responsibility, co-operation and independence. Children have worthwhile opportunities to better understand the world they live in through celebrating festivals such as Divali and the Chinese New Year.

Day-to-day activities help to consolidate values, such as fairness, respect, truth and a sense of right and wrong. For example, practitioners encourage children to take responsibility for caring for resources, to help each other and to take turns when using equipment.

Children learn about recycling and sustainability during their theme on the "Environment".

The setting was well established and effective procedures in place to support children with additional learning needs. Practitioners access appropriate professional help for these children and parents are fully involved at each state. Where necessary, these children have individual educational plans, are closely monitored and receive 1:1 support if needed.

The setting's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Learning environment: Good

The setting is an inclusive community where all children have equal access to resources and activities. Children are respected as individuals and all are treated fairly whatever their background. Practitioners appreciate the different backgrounds of the children and develop a good understanding of the needs of each child. As a result children are happy in each others' company and many are sufficiently self-confident to speak to the Inspector.

There is an ample supply of age appropriate, good, quality resources to deliver the Foundation Phase curriculum successfully. The building is secure and staff ensure that no one can enter or leave unannounced. Staff are also vigilant when children are collected at the end of the sessions to ensure that children leave with recognised parents or carers.

Practitioners work extremely hard to create an exciting and supportive learning environment for the children. All practitioners are constantly busy preparing the next activity, supporting ongoing play and ensuring good order in the setting. Activities are well paced and this ensures that children are actively involved and purposefully engaged.

Resources are easily accessible with an appropriate focus on developing children's skills, particularly their communication and numeracy skills.

The outdoor area is limited. It comprises a very small cordoned off area from a public park area. Good use is made of the facility to enable children to play in a sand area. Lack of space limits what can be done and the number of children that can use it at any one time.

The setting uses a large hall which is part of the building for physical activities. Children use large moving toys and show competence during these exercises.

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

The setting is led effectively by two experienced practitioners. They display a clear vision and a strong sense of purpose that promotes children's high standards of achievement. The leadership successfully convey high expectations to their colleagues and these are very largely achieved in practice. Relationships are outstanding and the setting is well established as a focus in the community. Parents

express their total satisfaction and report on the worthwhile progress their children are making, particularly in their personal and social skills.

Practitioners work very well as a team with a strong commitment to providing the best possible and effective education for the children. Through regular discussion and close co-operation, they develop agreed priorities for effective improvement and the maintaining of high standards.

The management committee is fully supportive of the setting and are well informed about the organisation of the playgroup. Performance management processes are in place for evaluating the work and specific training needs identified.

National and local training needs, including healthy eating, are implemented and the setting is taking good account of changes in the literacy and numeracy framework.

Improving quality: Good

Leaders know the setting well and demonstrate a strong commitment to regular reviews and constant improvement. Practitioners reflect regularly on the provision and discuss issues arising during the weekly team meetings. Parents are regularly consulted both formally and informally and the setting makes good use of the helpful advice provided by the local authority advisory teacher. As a result the setting is consistently looking for and implementing opportunities to improve its provision and consequent improvement in children's achievement and wellbeing.

The leaders have conducted an appropriate evaluation of the setting's strengths and areas for improvement and this is appropriately recorded in the self-evaluation report. The development plan identifies areas for improvement, but these are not always sufficiently focused on children's achievement.

Partnership working: Good

The setting has established a range of partnerships that contribute effectively to the quality of provision and children's development.

A highly effective relationship exists between the setting and parents. Regular informal contact when children are brought to the setting and the setting's open door policy ensures that these are regular opportunities to discuss children's needs. Parents also know that they can approach the setting's leaders on matters that concern them and their families. Parents are also appreciative of the support provided by the setting for children identified with additional learning needs.

The links with the primary school are effective. The Nursery teacher visits the setting before transfer to meet the children. Transitional meetings take place to discuss children with ALN.

The setting makes good use of local professional help including speech therapists, education psychologists and health visitors. The local authority support teacher provides the setting with valuable advice and suggestions. This has made an important contribution to the standards achieved.

Resource management: Good

The setting is appropriately staffed with experienced and well qualified practitioners to deliver the Foundation Phase curriculum successfully.

Practitioners attend suitable professional courses and this is beneficial in their own professional development and in terms of children's achievement and wellbeing.

The positive impact of training is reflected in the quality experiences provided for the children and their consequent standards of achievement.

The Management Committee have a thorough understanding of the budget. Spending is prioritised in line with the setting's needs.

Given the quality of leadership, the learning experiences that children have and their wellbeing, the setting offers good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

The number of responses received were fewer than 10. No data will be shown.

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)

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 partnerships 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>

Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)	This is a professional membership association working with registered childminders to ensure local high quality home-based childcare, play, learning and family support.
National Day Nurseries Association (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.