

A report on

Spittal Playgroup

St Marys Church Hall
The Green
Spittal
SA62 5QT

Date of inspection: September 2025

by

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)

and

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and
Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh

About Spittal Playgroup

Name of setting	Spittal Playgroup
Category of care provided	
Registered person(s)	Suzy Armstrong
Responsible individual (if applicable)	Suzy Armstrong
Person in charge	
Number of places	24
Age range of children	
Number of 3 and 4 year old children	
Number of children who receive funding for early education	2
Opening days / times	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, 9.10 am to 12.30 pm
Flying start service	Yes
Language of the setting	English
Is this setting implementing the Child Care Offer?	Yes
Welsh Language Active Offer	No
Date of previous CIW inspection	April 2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection	April 2019
Dates of this inspection visit(s)	23/09/2025
Additional information	

Summary

Theme	Judgement
Well-being	Good
Learning (only applies to three and four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting)	
Care and development	Good
Teaching and assessment (only applies to three and four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting)	Good
Environment	Good
Leadership and management	Good

Non-compliance

No non-compliance was identified during this inspection.

Recommendations

- R1. Improve the use of assessment to inform future learning and make sure that all practitioners are clear about the intended learning outcomes of activities
- R2. Sharpen self-evaluation and improvement practices so that they identify and address priorities more accurately

What happens next

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

Main findings

Well-being: Good

Nearly all children have a strong voice. They make appropriate choices and decisions about what affects them confidently. For example, they choose activities and decide what they would like for their snacks. Nearly all children express themselves well through verbal and non-verbal communication. All children arrive at the setting happily and are eager to start playing. They settle quickly and cope very well when leaving their parents and carers.

Children have warm, close relationships with practitioners and receive support and comfort if needed. They feel safe and valued at the setting. There are well established relationships with families. All children are aware of the setting's routines. They take on responsibilities willingly, such as looking for resources to support them in their activities for the week. Nearly all children move between activities confidently, for example painting, sensory and block play. They interact well by playing alongside or engaging with each other appropriately for their stage of development.

All children are active and engage well in their play and learning. They show purpose and curiosity as they take part in activities. Nearly all children listen and follow instructions well. For example, when working with dough, they follow actions and prompts from practitioners happily. Nearly all children speak to friends and practitioners confidently inviting them to 'look at this' and use descriptive words such as 'squishy' when exploring sensory number pads.

Children develop skills and knowledge by following their own interests. They persevere and gain a sense of achievement. For instance, when playing at the outdoor water station they pump water into a watering can and use it to water plants. They are confident to seek help when they need it. All children are increasing their independence and self-help skills well. For example, they help to tidy up, wash their hands, and take responsibility for their belongings. They are becoming increasingly competent at snack time through the self-serve system. They butter crackers and pour their own drinks sensibly.

Learning (only applies to three- or four-year-old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting):

There is no report on children's learning. This is because the number of three or four-year old children present at the time of the inspection that do not receive funded education elsewhere was too few to report on without identifying individual children.

Care and development: Good

Practitioners work together well to keep children safe and healthy. They follow effective procedures to support good hygiene and health and safety. For example, they provide children with healthy snacks, such as crackers, cheese and fruit, along with milk or water to drink. Practitioners supervise children well. They record incidents, such as accidents, and required medication appropriately. They undertake reviews of incidents to analyse any trends carefully. All staff know what to do in an emergency and undertake regular drills, such as fire evacuation.

Practitioners follow established effective systems to support children who have allergies and dietary needs. They follow appropriate policies and procedures to keep children safe. For example, they ensure that good hygiene during nappy changing effectively. Practitioners have a good understanding of what to do if they have any concerns and act to protect children. The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

All practitioners are kind, caring and supportive. They interact with children in a warm and gentle manner creating a positive, calm, and engaging atmosphere in the setting. Practitioners know the children very well and talk to them about their families, promoting an environment where children feel safe and happy. The setting has an effective behaviour management policy in place, and practitioners give praise for good behaviour and use positive techniques skilfully. For example, children are given a five-minute reminder prior to tidying up and are praised for good sharing.

Practitioners meet the needs of children successfully. They identify children who may need additional support and have effective systems in place to monitor emerging needs. Practitioners ensure children, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), have appropriate support. For example, they provide one-to-one support for children, when needed.

Practitioners provide a good balance of child-initiated play, alongside adult-led activities, such as circle and story time. This allows children to take a lead in their play and learning successfully. For example, during sensory play, children competently use equipment such as spoons and ladles to transport oats, developing an understanding of measure. All practitioners engage with children and extend their play thoughtfully. For instance, they share books with children, ask them questions, and discuss the stories purposefully. They use circle time as an opportunity to develop children's language and learning, such as the days of the week, colours, numbers and shape recognition, taught bilingually. They often use sign language to further embed this learning.

Teaching and assessment (only applies to three- or four-year-old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting): Good

Practitioners create a warm, inclusive, and stimulating learning environment that supports children's learning positively through play and exploration. They organise the indoor and outdoor areas thoughtfully to encourage independence, curiosity, and sustained engagement. Children have access to a wide range of resources, which they use to explore and investigate imaginatively.

Practitioners know children well and the setting's leader plans learning that addresses their individual needs appropriately. Practitioners adapt activities thoughtfully based on children's emerging fascinations. For example, they focus learning on a farming theme when children express interest in farming and allow children to take photographs around the local village when they become fascinated with taking pictures. However, not all practitioners are aware of the expectations set out in learning plans.

The lead practitioner evaluates the impact of planned learning on children's progress suitably. In general, practitioners contribute to these assessments suitably. However, the setting does not always use daily observations of learning to inform learning consistently enough.

Practitioners demonstrate a useful understanding of child development. They interact with children positively, modelling language and behaviour sensitively. During play, practitioners often ask thoughtful questions. This helps to extend children's thinking effectively. In general, practitioners know when to step back and allow children to lead their own learning, and when to intervene to support their understanding. This balance supports children's progress while ensuring children have meaningful learning opportunities, such as when examining and exploring autumn leaves and fallen apples from the village green.

Practitioners encourage children to express themselves thoughtfully. They engage children in conversations about their experiences effectively. For instance, when sharing milk during snack time practitioners encourage children to talk about farming and cows, and make authentic links with the food they eat and drink.

During adult-led sessions, practitioners help children to hear the Welsh language suitably, for instance singing Welsh songs and discussing the weather. However, few practitioners use Welsh regularly during learning sessions or integrate it naturally into daily routines.

Practitioners ensure that children have plentiful opportunities to develop their early literacy skills. They read with children regularly and encourage early writing for a purpose, such as writing their own names. Practitioners embed mathematics into everyday activities thoughtfully. They help children count objects in the outdoors and use

mathematical language to compare size and weight, for example when cutting apples. Practitioners ensure that children have access to, and use, digital resources purposefully to enhance learning. For example, children use microscopes and cameras to look at objects in detail and photograph what they see.

Practitioners support children's creativity and physical development well. They provide a wide range of materials and encourage children's experimentation through activities, such as collage. Children engage enthusiastically in activities, which are often inspired by seasonal themes or cultural celebrations.

The setting supports children in developing an understanding of different cultures sensitively. Practitioners provide well-considered activities such as stories and music to introduce different cultures from around the world. They celebrate special times of the year, such as Diwali, Christmas and Chinese New Year in age-appropriate ways, often using music, food and creative activities to bring these experiences to life. They have close links with the local church, and take children there to celebrate events such as harvest and Christmas. This makes a good contribution to children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

At set times during the year, practitioners observe children closely and record their development appropriately. They use this information to identify children's progress, which they share with families helpfully. They often discuss children's progress more informally with parents through daily conversations.

Environment: Good

Leaders ensure that the indoor and outdoor environments are safe and secure. They assess the learning environment for risks daily, including the outdoor area, and ensure that safety checks are completed in relation to visitors. The premises are clean and well maintained. Leaders ensure that practitioners follow hygiene procedures carefully, such as sanitising tables prior to snacks. They provide appropriate protective clothing when needed. The toilet and nappy changing facilities are suitable, and leaders ensure children's privacy and dignity are maintained.

The environment is welcoming and engaging. It provides a good range of opportunities for children to play, learn and move within indoor and outdoor areas. Leaders provide a range of interesting equipment and resources, organised into zones, in the open-plan room and outdoor area. Many areas contain recycled materials, real-life objects, and open-ended materials, such as blocks, pebbles, fabric, or sticks. This allows children to move, combine, and use the resources in different ways and promotes their natural curiosity. Nearly all resources are easily accessible to children.

The outdoor environment provides a suitable range of developmental experiences. Children confidently make independent choices about where they play and the resources they would like to use. They have beneficial opportunities to engage in physical activity, such as riding trikes or pumping water. Practitioners regularly make use of the local park and the green opposite the setting, for instance to look at the signs of autumn. This further enhances children's outdoor experiences.

Practitioners display children's photographs, work, and achievements attractively. This supports a sense of belonging and promotes children's self-esteem successfully. Leaders use play and learning materials to promote children's cultural awareness, including their Welsh heritage. They visit local areas of interest within the community, such as the church, and take part in walks around the village. This promotes children's understanding of their local community effectively.

Leadership and management: Good

The setting's leader has a clear and purposeful vision that places children's well-being at the heart of the setting's work. This vision is shared effectively with practitioners and families, creating a strong sense of community. The leader has a clear understanding of how to provide effective and engaging early childhood education and works diligently to plan and deliver this effectively.

The setting's statement of purpose is clear and reviewed regularly. It provides an accurate representation of the setting's ethos and operational priorities, helping families make informed choices about their child's early education.

Leaders demonstrate a commitment to self-evaluation and routinely gather feedback from parents and external partners. This helps them build a broad understanding of the setting's strengths and areas for development. However, leaders do not always focus well enough on key aspects of the setting's work and prioritise more accurately areas for improvement, such as how well practitioners promote children's development and meet individual needs.

Leaders identify a few areas for improvement thoughtfully, such as the need to embed speech and language screening. However, improvement work lacks a focus on priorities that can bring about the most relevant and needed changes. Priorities too often focus on completing tasks or implementing recent training. Leaders recognise the need to shift towards more rigorous practices that prioritise purposeful improvement.

Leaders ensure that practitioners' roles and responsibilities are defined clearly. Their regular informal discussions foster open communication and help practitioners understand their contribution to the setting's success. Supervision and appraisal systems are well established. Leaders use these processes thoughtfully to help identify individual

practitioners' strengths and areas for growth. They align training with identified needs carefully and beneficially.

Leaders ensure that practitioners access relevant professional learning, including courses such as early childhood education, safeguarding and 'dough disco'. They encourage practitioners to reflect on their practice and share insights with colleagues, which contributes to a culture of continuous improvement.

Leaders ensure that all practitioners complete relevant checks prior to employment and receive regular updates in areas, such as child protection and health and safety. They review policies suitably and update practices in line with national guidance.

Leaders have established a range of valuable partnerships within the community, such as with local businesses, the nearby school and church. Children take part in local events and benefit from activities such as celebration services in the church alongside pupils from the village school. These relationships help children develop a purposeful understanding of their locality and help support smooth transitions. Leaders work closely and positively with advisory staff, enabling the setting to access beneficial advice when needed.

Leaders provide parents with regular updates through a digital platform, termly meetings and informal discussions. They open the setting to parents at set times during the year, such as when celebrating harvest and Easter. These events strengthen the connection between home and the setting well. Leaders actively seek parental input to help in shaping provision and make good use of children's surveys to identify their likes and fascinations. This ensures that children enjoy their time at the setting, are happy and make good progress.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the setting and from CIW and Estyn's websites (<http://careinspectorate.wales>) (www.estyn.gov.wales)

CIW and Estyn evaluate a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh weaknesses but improvements are required
Poor	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths and significant improvements are required

This document has been translated by Trosol/Prysg (English to Welsh).