



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
Cylch Meithrin Pentre Bach
Cwm Golau Integrated Children's Centre
Dyffryn Road
Pentre Bach
Merthyr Tydfil
CF48 4BJ

Date of inspection: May 2011

by

Mr Nicholas Jones

Reporting Inspector under contract to Estyn

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 school'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

Cylch Meithrin Pentre Bach is a Welsh medium setting that is based in Cwm Golau Integrated Children's Centre, Pentre Bach, Merthyr Tydfil. Children attending the cylch come from the local area. The area is recognised as socially and economically disadvantaged.

The cylch has been in this location since 2005 and has sole use of the facilities in one large room and also use of the centre's outside play areas. There are cloakroom facilities and a notice board that gives parents useful information about the cylch, including the week's activities. Convenient toilet and hand washing facilities are available for the children and staff.

The large room, brightly decorated with wall displays, provides the children with a very attractive learning environment. It is suitably differentiated into activity areas that are well organised and resourced to develop the learning outcomes identified in the Foundation Phase for children of this age. A small and well-equipped kitchen is located in the room, where snacks are prepared. Outside is a secure and very useful area with very good resources. This area is accessible to the children and enables sand, water, gardening, painting and marking activities to take place. The cylch also has access to the centre's outside facilities including very good equipment and exploration areas.

The cylch reports that nearly all of the children come from English speaking backgrounds and attend the cylch so as to benefit from Welsh language education before nearly all children attend local Welsh medium primary schools. Children represent the full range of ability and the cylch accepts children with additional learning needs. Whilst none of the present cohort has been identified with such needs, the cylch has, in the past, received support from outside agencies. No child attending at present is from a minority ethnic background and a few are from socially disadvantaged homes. The cylch accepts children from two years old and are funded for children the term after their third birthday. They attend the local Welsh schools from three years old, depending on their birthday and parental choice. During the inspection, six children of three years old were present on both afternoons.

The cylch is led and managed by a very experienced leader with suitable qualifications. Four permanent members of staff and two volunteers assist her. The cylch benefits from the support of the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the local authority and the community. The cylch is also active in organising fund raising activities. All this has resulted in a very well resourced facility for the children. All staff speak Welsh consistently with the children and have attended a good range of training courses.

There is an informative booklet available for parents and carers that provide them with details of the cylch. Parents and carers bring their children into the cylch each afternoon and this provides for a meeting with the staff. Children are eager to get involved in the activities set out for them. The cylch operates five afternoons a week

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during term time from 12.30 pm to 3 o' clock. It also opens three mornings a week. It is registered with the Care and Social services Inspectorate Wales for 26 children. It provides children with a safe environment where all children are supervised at all times. The cylch is supported by the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin and has adopted, and where necessary, amended its policies where appropriate. The cylch has also received valuable help and support from the Early Years Partnership and Family Support staff of the local authority, Merthyr Tydfil. The cylch also benefits from the close association with the local Welsh schools. The cylch's management committee oversees the work of the cylch consistently. Self-evaluation has been undertaken regularly and relevant targets have been set and achieved in the past. Current targets for improvement are appropriate.

The cylch was last inspected by the Care and Social services Inspectorate Wales in September 2010 and received the 'Cylch Rhagorol' certificate in November 2006. Estyn has not previously inspected the cylch.

Summary

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

Current performance

The performance of the setting is good because:

- all children demonstrate good progress and achievement in all areas of learning;
- nearly all children enjoy and have positive attitudes to learning;
- nearly all children behave responsibly;
- on the whole, learning experiences are planned well;
- all children are supported well and benefit from a broad, balanced and interesting curriculum;
- the teaching is effective and concentrates well on Foundation Phase outcomes;
- very good resources are available, which includes the outdoor area;
- adults speak Welsh well and this has a positive effect on how children learn the language;
- the setting is led and managed well;
- there is a good relationship between adults and children;
- there are good links with the local Welsh schools; and
- the staff work very effectively together and everyone contributes purposefully to the success of the setting.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because:

- the leadership and staff provide a clear direction for the work of the setting;
- changes and developments over time show that the setting has a good record of improving for the sake of the children;
- the leadership is self evaluative, with clear targets and a purposeful annual development plan for improvements;
- the whole staff have a positive and active attitude towards development and training;
- good support links are used consistently; and
- the learning environment is stimulating.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the setting needs to:

- R1 extend the established system of planning to ensure that daily activities are planned in more detail and that all staff are aware of its requirements;
- R2 set clear learning objectives and success criteria for the children at the start of every activity; and
- R3 ensure that daily assessments and record keeping are consistently completed and that they lead directly to children's targets.

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

All children achieve good standards of achievement and make appropriate progress in all areas of learning. There is no significant difference in the standards of different groups of children in the setting.

All children make positive progress in developing their literacy skills in the Welsh language. Whilst a few children are reluctant to use the language, the majority have a good understanding of the language. Nearly all the children have well-developed listening skills and nearly all the children enjoy and are eager to contribute to stories that are read to them.

They all answer questions enthusiastically and this illustrates clearly their developing understanding of the language. Most children respond sensibly to group discussions and know the day and the weather. Another notable feature of their developing competence is that they respond in Welsh with very little prompting to colours and numbers.

Many children choose to look at books independently. They hold books appropriately and study pictures and print with interest. They recognise the main characters in a

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story and discuss the content of a story enthusiastically with each other.

Most children are beginning to develop their writing skills and a notable feature of their early writing is that they understand the purpose of writing through practical tasks. They, therefore, see the purpose of mark making and of their early writing. A minority of children are beginning to form recognisable letters of the alphabet independently.

All children are developing their numeracy skills well through the practical use of number, using mathematical language such as 'smaller than' or 'larger than' and through using two and three-dimensional shapes. All children can group objects by colour or shape.

All children use electronic equipment very well. They use digital cameras for recording and use the computer and interactive whiteboard with confidence through controlling the necessary equipment. All children enjoy participating in music making and dance. They have a good awareness of a store of Welsh songs and nursery rhymes, which they sing enthusiastically.

Nearly all children are fully engaged in every activity and concentrate and persevere for significant periods of time. They make decisions and work well independently inside and outside the building. All the children participate enthusiastically in the wide range of activities available to them that successfully develops their creative skills and the knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

Wellbeing: Good

All children, relative to their age, have an appropriate understanding of how they can keep healthy. They know, for example, when they need to wash their hands and do so with little prompting. Most children have the good knowledge that a healthy diet incorporates fruit and vegetables, which they purchase from a mobile shop on a weekly basis.

Nearly all the children's attitude to learning is good. They show interest in their work and in the activities planned for them. All children sustain good concentration for significant periods of time and make decisions independently.

All children relate very well to each other, to adults and visitors. They are courteous and considerate and willing to share resources. All children take a full part in the life and activities of the cylch, through offering suggestions and challenges to adults. They have worthwhile opportunities to suggest their own ideas and these are, when possible, incorporated into children's tasks and activities.

Community links also draws children's attention to those people, such as fire fighters, police and others who look after them. Overall, all children display a sense of belonging to their community, which they visit regularly. They are happy and well cared for and free from any form of harassment.

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

The curriculum is well planned in the long term to meet the philosophy of the Foundation Phase curriculum and to achieve the identified outcomes of children's learning. Through its mid term planning, the curriculum builds on children's previous knowledge and experiences and incorporates good opportunities for the development of skills across the curriculum. Time is set aside when all staff meet to plan the curriculum that provides the children with useful and interesting activities. The curriculum is flexible and is matched to the children's interests. However, daily activities are not planned in enough detail and staff are not fully aware of its requirements.

There are worthwhile opportunities incorporated into the day-to-day working of the cylch for children to develop their self-confidence and to become independent learners. Whilst specific activities are planned, children have freedom to select their own tasks and activities. This is a strong aspect of the provision.

The purposeful provision includes opportunities for all children to develop respect for each other; opportunities to form good relationships with each other and with adults; and to become tolerant of each other.

High quality opportunities are provided for children to develop their basic and key skills of literacy, numeracy, understanding of the world and physical and creative skills. A notable and very good aspect of children's learning experiences is the provision made for children to acquire the Welsh language. Welsh is the natural language of communication between adults and children. Through coherent opportunities, nearly all children, whatever their background, display enjoyment in speaking the language through looking at Welsh storybooks, practical activities and the weather.

Children have ample opportunities to develop their thinking skills through inspiring activities like food preparation, which focus on numeracy skills, science and wellbeing.

The traditions and celebrations of the culture of Wales are given due emphasis, like celebrating of St. David's Day. Good opportunities are also provided for children to acquire knowledge and understanding of other cultures and traditions, such as during their study of the Chinese New Year and other customs such as Diwali. Such activities help children to develop an understanding of the wider world and raise their awareness of age appropriate global citizenship.

All children have very good opportunities to plant seeds and look after plants and so begin their understanding of plant growth and sustainability.

Teaching: Good

The quality of teaching shows that the staff have a good, practical knowledge of children's development and a clear understanding of the requirements of the Foundation Phase.

The staff have high expectations of the children and these expectations are put into practice well. The staff's active role in planning the curriculum ensures the best use of their expertise. However, when an activity is introduced, there is not enough reference made to the activity's learning objective and its success criteria.

The system of sharing responsibilities means that staff have a detailed knowledge of a small number of children and as such are well aware of their achievements and progress.

There is a good balance between adult directed and child selected activities, both indoors and out of doors. Children are free to select from either independent or adult led activities.

Staff model language well to the children's development levels and use questioning well to develop children's thinking and communication skills. The standard of the staff's Welsh is good and they aim to raise their standards further through appropriate courses. Practitioners provide a stimulating environment that successfully ensures children's involvement and enjoyment.

Assessment procedures and recording children's achievements are on the whole completed efficiently. However, the daily assessments and record keeping are not kept consistently and do not lead directly to children's targets. There are records of children's achievements available to parents. Staff know their children well and are able to plan the next steps in their learning, even though further detail is required on the daily processes.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The cylch's provision for ensuring children's health and wellbeing is good. All children enjoy their time at the cylch. They arrive showing a sense of anticipation and are keen to get involved. They partake enthusiastically in activities set out for them. The broad curriculum, which consists of visits and visitors, further develops and extends children's experiences and their sense of curiosity.

Follow-up work in their classrooms shows the wide range of experiences that arise from their activities and the children's sense of wonder. Visits to the community and visitors to the cylch develop children's knowledge and understanding of their own community well.

The cylch's provision for ensuring children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Children experience a well-planned curriculum designed to extend their sense of curiosity about the world they live in. The cylch is an organised unit, where children value each other and in turn, the staff value them.

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Values, such as honesty, fairness, respect and an understanding of what is right and wrong, are fostered through the day-to-day activities and accepted without question. Children know and accept the social norms of living together, sharing and accepting the views of others and being members of a community. Individual children, in turn, accept specific responsibilities that develop their self-esteem.

Children's cultural development is good, which incorporates Welsh customs and traditions and it extends to other cultures when children celebrate the Chinese New Year and Diwali.

The cylch's staff are vigilant in identifying children requiring specialist help. They make use of professional help and guidance. The setting has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding. Staff have received regular and appropriate training. Staff undertake effective risk assessments routinely.

The cylch is safe and secure, 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 they are in the care of their parents or of a known carer.

Regular reviews of children's progress ensure that any child suspected of requiring additional help is noted and their progress is monitored closely. The cylch's leader is the special educational needs co-ordinator and is familiar with the necessary procedures for supporting such a child.

Where necessary external agencies are involved and one-to-one support is provided if needed. At present no child has additional learning needs.

Learning environment: Good

The cylch, through its day-to-day activities and the approach adopted by the staff promotes a positive ethos. Staff know their children well and their individuality is recognised. All children have equal access to a stimulating curriculum enriched by a very good and interesting outside area.

The homely atmosphere and the friendship provided by the staff ensures that a tolerant attitude pervades the setting. The cylch employs positive behaviour strategies that have successfully eliminated any form of harassment or oppressive behaviour. All children enjoy equality of opportunity.

The cylch's staff are well qualified and experienced and there is a very favourable child-adult ratio. Staff expertise is well used both in planning and in supervising activities. The cylch is well resourced to meet the requirements of the Foundation Phase curriculum and the needs of the children. This is a very good aspect. The resources are accessible to children and this promotes the children's sense of independence and responsibility.

The local environment and the setting's resources are used very well on a regular basis and they contribute well to children's understanding of the world around them.

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

Staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities and work together well as a team, sharing values, aims and objectives. The leader involves all staff in planning and this ensures the best use of their expertise. The leader is actively involved giving clear directions and a sense of purpose to the work of the cylch. There is a positive ethos and a commitment to provide the best possible experiences for the children.

The leadership and all staff are well focused on children's needs and the cylch successfully achieves this aim in practice. Recently, staff have received relevant and appropriate training and this has impacted well on the quality of provision provided. Effective links with the parents are in place. Parents are kept well informed of their children's achievement and progress and this helps them to support their children's learning.

There is a well-established management structure in place with clear definition of duties. However, at times, the leader does not delegate enough responsibility to others when needed to do so. The management has taken good account of relevant legislation and guidance meet legal requirements in full.

The cylch has taken good account of National priorities, including implementing the Foundation Phase curriculum. It has also made good use of opportunities to work with the local Welsh schools to ensure useful and solid links.

Improving quality: Good

The cylch is self-evaluative and has recently identified areas for improvement and implemented them for the benefit of the children. This has included developing an outdoor numeracy play area, better links with parents and internal changes like the interactive whiteboard that broaden children's experiences and develop the children's independence.

Areas for improvement have been identified and prioritised, including further developments of funding that focus on improving provision. Future plans focus on the development of wellbeing, staff training and developing child observations.

Staff have made very good use of training opportunities and professional learning experiences, including degree and vocational qualifications, which are impacting well on children's learning and wellbeing.

Partnership working: Good

Parents, in the questionnaire replies and in discussion expressed their total satisfaction with the cylch and are highly appreciative of the standards of care and

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the quality of education available. They appreciate the open door policy and the opportunities they have to meet staff on a daily basis.

By the time children leave the cylch, parents feel that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education, especially in Welsh. The links with the local Welsh schools are good.

The support provided by the local authority staff and the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin benefits the setting. Their advice and suggestions have helped in developing the cylch and has contributed to the current high standards of provision.

Resource management: Good

Staff work together effectively. Planning is completed collaboratively and this results in individual expertise being used well, even though aspects of daily planning need improving.

The cylch is very well resourced and resources are very well used to further the aims of the Foundation Phase curriculum. Resources are also accessible to the children and this encourages independence and has a positive impact on their learning.

The cylch provides very good outdoor experiences for the children through regular use of the very good outdoor areas.

The setting's staff and management have identified areas for development well and they are aware of how to move the setting forward.

Overall, the cylch provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Nine questionnaires were returned. Discussion with a sample of parents during the inspection indicated their very strong support for the setting. All parents and carers were particularly pleased with all aspects of the cylch, especially the care provided, children's progress and their competence in the Welsh language.

Responses to learner questionnaires

All children are happy in the cylch. Their enthusiasm is evident when they arrive and meet with their peers. Nearly all of them are self-confident from knowing that they are well supported and that they have interesting and challenging tasks.

Appendix 2

The reporting inspector

Mr Nick Jones	Reporting Inspector
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Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)