



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

**Abracadabra Playgroup
Welsh St Donats Community Hall
Welsh St Donats
Nr Cowbridge
Vale of Glamorgan
CF71 7SS**

Date of inspection: September 2014

by

**Janet Marsden
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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW..or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.uk

© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO 2014: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The copyright in the material must be acknowledged as aforementioned and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 21/10/2014

Context

Abracadabra Playgroup is situated at the edge of the attractive rural village of Welsh St. Donats, not far from the affluent market town of Cowbridge in the Vale of Glamorgan. The playgroup serves many of the surrounding villages and accepts children in accordance with the published admission policy. The playgroup, which meets in the village community hall, first opened in 1990 and moved to its present location in 1992. A committee of parent volunteers run the playgroup and it is registered with the Charities Commission.

The playgroup is open every morning from Monday to Friday during school term time and caters for up to 32 children aged 2 and a half to 4 years. The leader of the setting has been in post as leader for 13 years and previously as a member of staff. There is currently a well-established, experienced team of 8 members of staff who work on different days.

At the time of the inspection there were 16 children registered. The local authority funded places for 7 three year olds and 1 four year old. All the children are white British and speak English as their first language. There are a very few children who have additional learning needs.

The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) inspected the playgroup in April 2014 and the last Estyn inspection was in November 2008.

Summary

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

Current performance

The setting's current performance is good because:

- children are offered an interesting and stimulating range of indoor and outdoor learning experiences;
- the setting affords children exceptional opportunities to work individually with adults to develop their communication skills;
- the setting provides frequent opportunities for children to speak Welsh;
- adults are warm and caring and help children settle into routines quickly;
- all the practitioners understand and support the individual needs of each child very well, including children with special or additional learning needs; and
- all the adults are excellent role models of good manners and respect.

Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are good because:

- all the adults, including parents, work together as an effective team for the benefit of the children;
- the leader and her staff clearly love their work and have an enthusiasm for learning and improving their knowledge and skills;
- there is an effective partnership with the local authority that successfully contributes to improving quality;
- the setting's plans for improvement correctly identify areas for development; and
- the setting has a good track record of securing improvement, for example, in increasing its capacity to successfully teach and promote the Welsh language

Recommendations

- R1. Develop curriculum planning for information and communication technology (ICT)
- R2. Ensure suitable challenge in focused activities for more able children
- R3. More formally involve the children in planning their own learning
- R4. Increase the use of visitors and outside visits to enhance children`s learning
- R5. Develop partnership working with other similar providers
- R6. Continue to develop a more formal system of sharing information on children`s progress with parents

What happens next?

There is no follow up. 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?

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?

Good

Learning experiences: Good

The setting uses an appropriate curriculum framework to plan a wide range of interesting indoor and outdoor learning experiences for the children that meet the requirements of the Foundation Phase.

Activities are well organised and there are exceptionally good opportunities for children to develop their communication skills by conversing with adults and with each other. The setting makes good use of role play and dramatisation of stories such as 'Going on a Bear Hunt' to successfully develop children's speech and language and early reading skills. There are good opportunities for children to listen to stories, select their own reading materials and practice their early writing skills. Planned and free choice learning activities successfully enable children to develop their numeracy skills, for example, when they match the numbers on their bikes to the numbers chalked on the outdoor play surfaces or learn to play hopscotch.

The children receive informal opportunities to contribute their ideas to planning activities, for example, when deciding what to grow in the garden. However, practitioners do not currently offer them greater choice of topics and themes. Opportunities for children to develop their ICT skills consistently are limited.

Practitioners do not always plan learning activities in sufficient detail or identify specific tasks for different groups of learners. On occasion, focused activities are not sufficiently challenging for the older or more able children. Practitioners plan well to support children with additional learning needs.

However, well organised free choice activities are very successful in meeting individual needs. At these times, there are exceptionally good opportunities for children to work individually with adults who challenge their ideas and develop their thinking, for example, when constructing a shelter for the dinosaurs.

The setting makes good provision for developing children's Welsh language skills. Practitioners use an effective programme of activities, songs and rhymes that enable children to build up their vocabulary and knowledge of sentence patterns day by day. Practitioners help children develop confidence in responding in Welsh because they

use the language frequently as part of their daily routines, for example when describing the weather or how they are feeling.

The setting provides appropriate opportunities for children to develop their understanding of Welsh culture through listening to traditional stories and marking national events. There are good arrangements for children to learn about different cultural traditions found in Wales today by celebrating festivals and eating food from different countries and cultures.

There are suitable opportunities for children to take responsibility for the natural environment, for example when they plan what they should plant in the newly created garden. However, the setting makes insufficient use of visits to the local area to promote children's greater understanding of where they live and children have few opportunities to welcome outside visitors to widen their understanding of the outside world.

Teaching: Good

Learning through play is at the heart of the setting's philosophy. Practitioners have a good knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Phase and make learning fun. Practitioners have high expectations of the children and they are consistent in managing behaviour. Children receive regular praise and suitable encouragement that helps them to understand what adults expect of them. Practitioners listen carefully to the children and value what they say. Relationships are excellent and children form strong bonds with the adults and with each other.

Practitioners ensure learning is purposeful; they skilfully engage children in conversations about their tasks to check understanding and give feedback. There is a good balance of activities that adults plan and those that children choose for themselves.

All the adults instinctively know when to intervene in children's learning and when to allow them to experiment for themselves, for example, when they play with toy boats in the water tray. When the children wonder if the boat might sink, the practitioner suggests putting something heavy into it, but it is the children who choose stones and work out how many they will need.

All practitioners are excellent role models of language. They use questioning very well to extend children's thinking and check their understanding.

Practitioners assess what children are able to do on a regular basis and as a result they know them well. They keep detailed records but do not always use this information to best effect when planning focused activities for them. However, their detailed knowledge of the children helps them to instinctively stimulate and challenge them during informal play activities.

The setting provides good information for parents and carers about their children's achievements before they leave playgroup; reports are individual and very detailed. Parents are invited to celebrate their children's achievements informally when they

gather to collect them each day. The setting does not yet formally share ongoing progress with parents and carers.

Care, support and guidance: Good

All the adults in the setting pay great attention to the safety and wellbeing of the children in their care. Practitioners know how to deal with any issues of health and safety, confidently attend to medical needs and protect children from harm.

The setting supports children very well emotionally when they first arrive at playgroup and enables them to settle quickly into daily routines. Staff frequently praise and encourage all the children to develop high levels of self-esteem and confidence.

Arrangements to ensure children's spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development are good. Practitioners are inspiring models of good manners, respect and teamwork and this naturally encourages the children to develop respect for the rights of others. At prayer time, the setting provides good opportunities for children to say thank you for the happy morning spent with their friends. Other daily routines promote a sense of curiosity about the natural world and foster values such as honesty and fairness.

The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meet requirements and give no reason for concern. There are good procedures for transporting equipment to the outdoor area and for managing the safety of the children outside.

The setting works sensitively with families and other professionals to identify any children with special or additional learning needs at an early stage. The leader and her team actively seek support to ensure that they have the necessary resources and expertise to meet particular needs. All the adults ensure that children with additional learning needs feel included in activities and are able to do their best. This is because they take the time to ensure that the children have suitable equipment to assist them and make them comfortable. This is a particular strength of the work of the setting.

The setting encourages children to eat and drink healthily and to avoid waste. The children save scraps from their snack to feed the birds; however, there are no formal arrangements for recycling.

Learning environment: Good

There is a warm, caring, family like ethos to the setting based on mutual respect and affection. Adults value the children as individuals and promote equality and diversity well. Children are regularly encouraged to think of others before themselves when they engage in numerous fund raising activities.

There is plenty of space in the hall for children to move around freely and make choices about what they will do. There are sufficient good quality toys and equipment for children to enjoy using that helps them to develop their skills in all areas of learning. The adults successfully arrange the learning environment in a way that encourages children to eagerly engage in mark making, counting, investigation and creative activities.

The recently developed outdoor learning environment has become a valuable learning resource where children can explore and develop their independence. The new garden provides good opportunities for children to plant and watch things grow and the log circle promotes quiet reflection.

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

Leadership: Good

The leader has a clear sense of purpose and vision which she communicates effectively to her team. The leader manages and deploys her staff well and has high expectations of them. Members of staff have clear roles and responsibilities and they have a developing sense of the school's strengths and areas for improvement

There are regular meetings with staff to discuss individual children, evaluate learning and plan activities. Members of staff appreciate the opportunity to share their ideas at these meetings and they feel that their views are valued. The team is very united and members of staff are passionate about the work they do.

The setting takes appropriate account of local and national priorities. Practitioners understand the principles of the Foundation Phase well and they are developing greater confidence in planning effective outdoor learning.

Improving quality: Good

The leader knows the setting well. She has correctly recognised strengths and areas for development and has taken appropriate steps to address them. Some of these, for example working with the local council to create a safe outdoor learning environment and garden within very extensive grounds, have taken time and patience to achieve.

The leader and her staff have successfully overcome many constraints related to the building so that they do not have a significant negative impact on learning. For example, the rules governing use of the hall do not permit the playgroup to display learning materials or decorations. The leader and her staff have worked co-operatively with the hall committee to imaginatively create folding displays of children's work that improve the attractiveness of the learning environment.

The self-evaluation process has now become a well-established part of the work of the setting and everyone is involved. Planning for improvement takes appropriate account of the views of staff, parents and the management committee. The leader uses this information to evaluate what the setting does well and what needs to be improved.

The improvement plan focuses appropriately on relevant areas that should have a positive impact on learning. For example this year one of the targets is to ensure that the setting plans provision for developing children's ICT skills in more detail.

The leader has identified the need to develop partnerships with other settings to share good practice and professional development.

All members of staff are reflective, eager to learn and open to new ideas. They are a strong asset to the setting. The setting has a good track record for securing improvement. Practitioners previously recognised the need to learn Welsh and all of them have worked very hard to become confident and successful in using the language as part of their daily routines.

Partnership working: Good

The setting works exceptionally well with parents to provide a nurturing environment for the children. Parents support the playgroup enthusiastically with fundraising activities and in assisting with improvement projects. For example, parents have been a considerable help in establishing the new garden.

The setting has established a very good relationship with the primary schools to which children transfer to ensure they move confidently to the next stage of their education. There are extremely effective partnerships with other professionals and specialists that provide excellent support for children with specific learning needs and expert advice for practitioners.

There is a well-established professional partnership with the local authority that successfully contributes to improving quality. Practitioners appreciate the support of their advisory teacher and are willing to respond to her advice and guidance.

However, the setting does not consistently make best use of the local community to enhance children's learning about the wider world.

Formal partnerships with other similar settings to observe and share good practice are not yet firmly established.

Resource management: Good

The playgroup has a large number of well qualified and experienced practitioners that provide a high level of individual attention for children. The leader and her staff are experienced practitioners and hold relevant qualifications in the care and education of young children. Members of staff eagerly attend regular, relevant, training opportunities, and are keen to implement what they have learned in their daily work.

Good use is made of the available space indoors to provide for the full range of areas of learning of the Foundation Phase. There is a plentiful supply of resources in most areas of learning apart from in ICT; there are no computers, whiteboards or tablets.

The recent development of the outdoor learning area and garden offers children greater opportunities to experiment with 'messy' activities such as digging and planting and handling garden tools. The setting utilises its hard outdoor surfaces effectively for a good range of physical activities such as climbing, crawling, jumping and playing organised games. It is also well used for developing literacy and numeracy skills when children use chalk to record their ideas on the ground.

A report on Abracadabra Playgroup
September 2014

The playgroup leader has an appropriate understanding of the budget and prioritises spending according to need. The committee are very successful fundraisers and ensure that the playgroup always has sufficient funds. In view of the quality of provision, the setting gives good values 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

Mrs Janet Heather Marsden	Reporting Inspector
---------------------------	---------------------

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.