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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Cylch Meithrin Coed Duon
Blackwood Comprehensive School
Ty Isha Terrace
Blackwood
NP12 1ER**

Date of inspection: March 2014

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

Cylch Meithrin Coed Duon meets in a demountable portacabin based within the grounds of Blackwood Comprehensive School. Blackwood is located in a Gwent valley some 10 miles north of Newport. The Welsh medium Cylch was established over 25 years ago and serves Blackwood and its immediate environment. The cabin and the surrounding land have been donated by the school and both organisations enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship.

The setting operates five mornings a week, between 9.30 a.m. and 11.45 a.m. during the school term time. The setting is run by a voluntary management committee and is an educational provider as a member of the Caerphilly Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership. It is also a registered member of the Mudiad Meithrin and received the “Mudiad Rhagorol” award in 2010-2013.

Children’s background is not considered to be prosperous being described as comprising some economically disadvantaged areas. The setting provides for children between the ages of 2½ and 4 years. It is registered by the Care & Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) to accommodate a maximum of 26 children. Currently there are 18 on the register, 7 three years old, of whom 3 are funded - the other 4 children are due for funding after Easter.

Nearly all children come from English speaking homes. There are no children from minority ethnic backgrounds present. The setting is able to provide for children with additional learning needs although none of the present cohort has been identified with such needs.

The portacabin provides ample space for the children. Very good use is made of the space available to provide children with a very extensive range of facilities well designed to meet the needs of the Foundation Phase curriculum. The portacabin has been extensively renovated and recently painted and the display of children’s work further enhances the working environment. There are also toilets and washing facilities for the children and the portacabin also comprises a hallway where parents can wait before and after the sessions.

Outside is an extensively developed, attractive and enclosed area. This area is an excellent addition and provides children with very worthwhile facilities, much of which is under a large canopy. The recently erected fence ensures the safety of the children.

The setting is staffed by a leader and two well qualified and experienced deputy leaders. They are supported by two assistants and voluntary helpers. All have a good command of the Welsh language. Parents provide the setting with very good support. Most children leaving the setting transfer to the Welsh medium local schools.

The setting was most recently inspected by CSSIW in 2012 and by Estyn in November 2007. The recommendations have been addressed.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of the setting is good because of;

- children's progress and standards achieved overall and in particular their language development;
- the learning opportunities provided for the children;
- the leader and staff's high expectations of the children that are very largely achieved in practice;
- the care, support and guidance provided for the children;
- the quality of the teaching;
- the partnership with parents and their support;
- the children's attitude and behaviour.

Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are good because of;

- the quality of leadership and management well focused on providing the best possible provision for the children;
- the team spirit displayed by the staff;
- the well established track record of bringing about improvement;
- the support provided by the parents, carers and members of the community;
- the support provided by the local authority support teacher and the Mudiad Meithrin.

Recommendations

To further improve the setting needs to:

R1 plan activities to extend and challenge individual children.

R2 further involve parents in children's learning, particularly in the Welsh language.

What happens next?

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

Estyn will invite the setting to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

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

All children are making good progress and achieve well. They make particularly good progress in their acquisition of the Welsh language relative to their "starting point". Children make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding and skills across the whole curriculum and in activities that strengthen and develop their learning.

All children listen well relative to their age and enjoy stories. Older and more able children are beginning to enjoy participation in such activities and show their developing Welsh language skills when answering questions based on the story. All children express their feelings through gestures and singing and particularly enjoy action songs such as "pen, ysgwyddau, coesau a traed" and "Lan a lawr; nôl a mlaen".

All children respond well to practitioners and carry out instructions willingly, such as during registration. Older children recognise their names written on cards and the younger ones do so as well with a little prompting. In an instance seen during the inspection a child, during play activities, assumed the role of a member of staff and repeated the registration activity with a group of friends. The activity was done orderly with the name cards attached to the registration board.

All children converse during play, many using Welsh words and phrases.

Many children show interest in books and virtually all handle them with care. Older children turn pages appropriately and know some of the characters in the stories.

All children experiment with mark making, using chalk, crayons and pencils. More able children hold pencils appropriately, follow shapes and dots on display cards. Children are beginning to understand the purpose of writing, such as to make lists of what is required.

All children are learning to count, such as counting girls and boys present during registration. Younger children count by rote but a minority are beginning to appreciate the relevance of number. Older children recognise number in written form and match number, shapes and colour correctly. These children are beginning to use basic mathematical language, such as “large and small”. The use of toy cash registers in their shop gives them opportunities to familiarise themselves with money.

Children are becoming increasingly familiar with current technology. They handle the computer mouse competently and move screen icons appropriately. They play with mobile phones and know that buttons and switches turn equipment on and off.

Children are increasingly able to use their thinking skills, such as when playing outside in the wide range of activities available to them such as building with sand.

Children’s knowledge and understanding of living things is well supported by their gardening activities and observing tadpoles developing.

The setting displays the wide range of creative activities that have taken place. Children enjoy painting and making different artefacts linked to their topic.

The setting is successful in preparing the children for the next stage of their education through the medium of Welsh. This is because during their time in the setting children make very good progress in the language. Older children are developing a good understanding of basic Welsh words, phrases and sentences. Children understand more than they speak, but during a small group story time children answered simple questions in Welsh and all used Welsh words when prompted. Children have a wide repertoire of Welsh songs – the day is introduced with “Bore da ffrindiau” and “Ble mae...?” to recognise their names.

Discussion with parents and the outcome of the pre-inspection questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with the progress that their children are making in the language.

Wellbeing: Good

All children enjoy their time at the setting and this is apparent when they arrive each morning. Their sense of excitement is evident as they are warmly greeted by the staff and are soon engaged in the wide range of activities set out for them. All

children have good attitudes and play with their colleagues happily. Behaviour is very good and children make a full use of all the activity areas, choosing those that interest them. They play individually and in groups showing consideration towards each other. As children get older they show increased ability to sustain their concentration on tasks.

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

The learning experiences successfully engage all children and are well focused on encouraging children to progress towards meeting the Foundation Phase outcomes. Practitioners have high expectations for children's learning and a secure appreciation of the Foundation Phase philosophy. The curriculum builds systematically on children's existing knowledge, understanding and skills and is successful in maintaining children's interests and commitment.

Planning is done collaboratively and based on experience and good practice. Planning is sufficiently flexible so as to respond to children's interests and incorporates activities in the classroom and outside that stimulate children across all areas of learning.

Children's skills, particularly their literacy and numeracy skills are well developed across the curriculum. Skill development is well co-ordinated and planning illustrates well the coherence in children's learning experiences. Practitioners exploit opportunities to develop children's skills such as following a snow fall. Following play activities in the snow children were introduced to the concept of snow melting into water. Focused sessions are well planned and children's development monitored and supported as necessary.

Planned learning opportunities provide encouragement for children to form good relationships with others and to respect each other. Children are encouraged to become independent learners and to experiment. This was seen when children were floating toy ducks in water. The children were confident and came to realise that the ducks floated down the trough quicker if more water was added. This is a good example of children developing their thinking skills.

Children's knowledge and understanding of living things is well developed through garden activities where children learn to care for living things.

Children's creative skills are provided for by access to paints and other materials to represent their ideas and physical play is given prominence in outside activities.

Planned activities and informal play activities ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for children to develop their skills and that there is coherence in

children's experiences. Staff also recognise opportunities to extend children's experiences, particularly the planning for activities outside the classroom.

The planning for developing children's Welsh language and the Welsh dimension is good. All children are immersed in the language and all communication is in Welsh. Opportunities are provided for children to develop their language and to promote children's awareness of the traditions and celebrations of the culture of Wales.

Teaching: Good

Practitioners understand the Foundation Phase philosophy particularly as it applies to children's learning. They have high expectations for all children and these are very largely achieved in practice. Children learn through play and are provided with stimulating learning experiences across all areas of the curriculum. The staff make good use of resources both inside the classroom and outside to support children's learning.

Activities are well planned – a good range of different and varying activities during the morning session ensure that children maintain their interest and are fully engaged. There is a good balance between child-initiated and adult-directed activities and practitioners know when it is appropriate to intervene in children's learning.

Children's behaviour is well managed and this provides the children with a homely atmosphere. Staff are good language models ensuring that the children are immersed in the Welsh language. Questioning is well used to develop children's language. Additional practitioners are used effectively.

Children's progress and wellbeing are tracked across all areas of learning. Staff record children's achievements and are more formally recorded in individual children's record books. The results of assessment are used in planning future activities. However, individual children's specific needs are not always sufficiently identified so as to meet their needs and to challenge them.

Parents reported that they are kept well informed of their children's achievement and progress. Parents, however, are not always made aware of children's language development and what they can do to help them improve.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The provision for ensuring children's health and wellbeing, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Effective arrangements are in place and the arrangements contribute substantially to children's general development, including their emotional and physical health. Parent's views fully support this conclusion.

The setting provides good opportunities for children to develop a sense of curiosity. Visits to places of interest, such as a local farm, enables children to develop a sense of wonder about the world outside their immediate experiences. The Cylch effectively promotes values such as honesty, fair play and concern for each other. Simple rules of behaviour are understood and acted on. Children have choice and are encouraged to make decisions. Good arrangements are in place to encourage children to act sustainably. Children are aware of materials that can be composted and the use made of compost. Waste paper is recycled.

Children are developing an understanding of some of the traditions and celebrations of Wales, including celebrating St. David's day. They dress appropriately, make relevant artefacts and sample foods, such as Welsh cakes. Other cultures are also introduced including the celebration of Divali and the Chinese New Year.

The setting has appropriate arrangements in place for supporting children with additional learning needs. None of the current children has been identified as having special needs.

The setting has good arrangements in place for safeguarding children. The location of the setting within the grounds of the Comprehensive School is an advantage in maintaining the safety of all attending the setting. The building is kept locked once children arrive in the morning and this ensures that no one can enter or leave unannounced. The outside area is secure within a fenced area and the gate is kept locked. Children are never unsupervised.

Staff are experienced and have attended relevant courses so as to be fully aware of child protection issues.

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

Learning environment: Excellent

Children benefit from an exceptionally good learning environment. Facilities for the children are outstanding and are a credit to the practitioners, the management committee and all who have helped to create the learning environment.

The indoor activity areas are very well designed to maximise the use of space and provide experiences for children in line with the Foundation Phase philosophy. Activity areas are well and imaginatively resourced, with equipment easily accessible to the children. Each activity area has an "aide memoire" of useful questions and answers that help to develop the Welsh language. Resource materials produced by the practitioners are attractively illustrated and in very good condition, such as in the mathematics area and this is an encouragement for children to participate. Over the internal teaching area is a superb learning environment enhanced by illustrations of children's work.

Another notable feature is the use made of the different activity areas by the children. They have well developed decision-making skills and all areas are used so that the whole area is a busy community where all children are actively involved and supported by the staff where necessary. Additional practitioners make a valuable contribution in ensuring that resources are in place and available to the children.

This is a highly industrious environment displaying an outstandingly good ethos where all children get equal access to all aspects of the curriculum.

The outside provision is exceptional and very well used to extend children's experiences and learning. It provides children with a highly imaginative series of activities mostly under cover. There are opportunities for small group activities in a wooden shed setup as a working area for developing literacy skills with notebooks for writing and a story area.

There is a garden area for growing plants, and a small dolls house. The wet area enables children to experiment and the toy "building area" incorporates equipment including a toy "cement mixer". The area has a soft play surface.

Overall, the teaching room and the outside provide an exceptionally imaginative and highly creative learning environment.

The setting is generously staffed – the leader has two deputy leaders and two assistants. They are well qualified and have considerable experience of working with young children. They work very well together sharing their sense of enjoyment of working together and with young children. This makes a valuable contribution to establishing the very warm, supportive feeling in the setting.

Resources are very well used and very well matched to address the requirements of the Foundation Phase curriculum and the specific needs of the children.

The building and the outdoor area are secure – a six foot high fence encompasses the outside area which is kept locked. Children are always supervised and the door of the teaching room kept locked. Overall this is an excellent learning environment for the children.

The local environment is well used for visits and visitors to the setting, such as during the inspection by the local police, make a valuable contribution to children's learning.

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

The leadership provides the setting with a strong sense of purpose that promotes and sustains improvement. It is well focused on ensuring the best possible provision

for the children and extending their experiences. The leader has high expectations of her staff and they respond positively. The leader in her unobtrusive way monitors and evaluates the provision effectively. Staff work very well as a team both in planning children's activities and in the day-to-day running of the setting. Staff fully understand their roles and fully accept their responsibilities. A positive ethos is apparent where staff feel valued and their contributions respected.

Time is well managed and the morning session proceeds at a good pace ensuring the active engagement of all children. Collaborative planning makes the best use of all practitioners' ideas and experiences. They help each other and actively support children in all activities. They know well when to intervene and the sense of purpose evident promotes an active learning environment. Children's needs are central to the work of the setting and children are well managed resulting in a warm, homely atmosphere.

There is a close working relationship with the management committee who themselves are very supportive of the staff and their contribution to children's learning. Staff appraisal is done annually and identifies areas for development.

Policies and initiatives including local and national priorities are consistently implemented.

Overall, the setting displays a self-critical nature where relevant information about the setting is well used and ensures a sustained focus on achieving progress based on providing the very best experiences for the children. The outcomes for the children are good.

Improving quality: Good

The setting displays a positive self-evaluation culture which is apparent in all aspects of the work of the setting. It successfully identifies areas for development and whilst this has resulted in very good facilities and provision, it is not complacent and is forward thinking. The views of all interested parties, including parents are always taken into account and this has ensured their help and support, particularly in providing and maintaining the outside facilities. Improvements are prioritised and sound strategies have ensured the desired improvements are implemented within available funding.

Overall, this has resulted in very much improved provision and standards of children's achievement and wellbeing.

Partnership working: Good

The setting has well established links with all partners involved in children's wellbeing and achievement. This is largely as a result of the setting's philosophy of involving

parents and the community and the active steps it takes to involve all involved in children's development.

Parents reported in pre-inspection questionnaire and in discussion that they were particularly satisfied with the progress their children were making, particularly in their acquisition of the Welsh language. Parents were highly appreciative of the approachability of the staff and the good quality teaching.

Parents and carers were particularly appreciative of the wide range of experiences that the children enjoyed and that all children were treated fairly and with respect. Overall, they reported that all children enjoy attending and that children were encouraged to be healthy and to take regular exercise. Parents and carers are happy in that their children are safe at the setting.

The setting has effective links with the receiving primary school. Teachers from the school visit the setting and children attend school activities usually in the term before transfer. Very good links exist with Blackwood Comprehensive School. Students from the school gain experience of working with children on "placements". They are supported by the setting's staff. As mentioned the setting benefits from the land donated to it by the school.

The management committee is pro-active and supportive of the work of the Cylch and this enhances the work of the setting.

The setting also benefits from the support and advice provided by the Local Authority support teacher and the representative of the Mudiad Meithrin. Community links are used effectively to support the children as necessary.

Resource management: Good

The setting is very well resourced which are well deployed to support learning. The staff and management committee have a detailed understanding of the budget. Over the years spending has been carefully monitored. Improvements to the provision have been prioritised and linked to the available finance.

Financial decisions are closely evaluated by the management committee and they have been very effective in raising finance and making very good use of help received from the community. The comprehensive school has provided the setting with the accommodation land and building. However, the setting has been extensively modernised by the present practitioners and management. Fundamental to all development is the positive impact on outcomes including the children's standards of achievement, progress and wellbeing. This has been successfully achieved in practice.

The staff maintain their professional skills through attendance at local courses, meeting other staff and visiting other settings. This is a well-established professional

learning community where staff share their professional expertise ensuring good quality provision across all aspects of the setting.

The setting provides 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	Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) is a division of the Department of Public Services and Performance in the Welsh Government.
Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP)	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.
Foundation Phase	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.
Foundation Phase child development assessment profile (CDAP)	Foundation Phase on-entry assessment profile; a statutory requirement in schools from September 2011 and settings from September 2012.
Local authority advisory teacher	These teachers provide regular support, guidance and training to non-maintained settings which provide education for three and four year olds.
Mudiad Meithrin	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.

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.