



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

**Northop Hall Playgroup
The Pavillion Community Centre
Llys Ben
Northop Hall
Flintshire
CH7 6HS**

Date of inspection: June 2013

by

Mary Dyas

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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About the setting

Northop Hall Playgroup has been established for over 25 years. The children who attend the setting come from the village itself and the surrounding rural area.

The playgroup meets in the village community centre on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings from September to December and additionally on Friday mornings from January to July.

The setting has the use of the main hall and a small side room which is ideal for quiet times when the whole group meets together. There is also a kitchen with a hatch opening onto the hall and toilets to which the children have to be escorted. The centre is also used by other groups and equipment has to be set up and cleared away every day. A noticeboard is set aside for the use of the playgroup and displays examples of the children's current work.

Children are able to start at two and a half years and the playgroup receives funding for three year olds in the spring and summer terms. At the time of the inspection there were 26 on roll of which 20 were three year olds. Sixteen of these were in receipt of funded educational provision.

The playgroup does not have access to a dedicated outside play area but has sufficient space indoors to ensure that the children have daily opportunities for physical play. They do, however, try to access a part of the field adjoining the community centre when there are sufficient staff and volunteer parents to make it safe to do so.

The children in the playgroup come from mixed socio-economic backgrounds where often both parents are working. There are currently no children from ethnic minority groups and all children speak English as their first language. Children with additional needs are welcomed and at least one place is reserved for this purpose although there were none at the time of the inspection.

The setting was last inspected by the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales in January 2013 and by Estyn in May 2007.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current provision of the setting is good because:

- All children make good progress and play happily together;
- Practitioners plan activities that engage children's interest and encourage them to participate;
- Teaching is good and supports children's learning; and
- Most children behave well and all form positive relationships with their peer and with the adults who care for them.

However:

- Planning does not indicate provision to extend the learning of more able children; and
- Parents are not sufficiently informed about their child's progress and how they can help them to improve.

Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are good because:

- All practitioners are fully committed to providing high quality learning experiences for the children;
- The self-evaluation process is well established and current areas for improvement are relevant and appropriate; and
- There is evidence that the setting is working toward meeting targets for improvement and that progress has been made.

Recommendations

R1. Provide parents with more information about how their children are doing and how they can help them to improve

R2. Ensure that planned activities challenge and extend the skills of all children, particularly the more able.

R3. Review current arrangements to ensure that children have regular opportunities to extend their learning experiences outdoors

What happens next?

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

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

All children achieve well according to their starting points and stage of development and make good progress in all the areas of learning of the Foundation Phase. Most children speak in complete sentences and are able to express their feelings. During the course of their play many interact with their peers and communicate well to devise games and activities of their own. Most children are developing good mark making skills and careful control of writing implements and a few are beginning to write their names independently. All children listen with interest to stories and show their enjoyment by concentrating and asking questions. They join in with songs and rhymes and musical activities with great enthusiasm. Many enjoy opportunities to browse through books, which they choose to do voluntarily, and all handle them correctly like readers.

Almost all children count confidently to ten by rote and many are able to count objects accurately to at least five. Most also use mathematical language correctly in the course of their play when they compare the size of a tower they have built or talk about containers being nearly full. All children are developing their knowledge and understanding of information and communications technology through their play with electronic toys such as a pop-up toaster, bubbling kettle, steaming iron and a telephone handset and when they use the camera to record what they have been doing.

All children answer the register in Welsh and understand the simple words and phrases used by adults in the setting. All join in with familiar Welsh songs and stories, count in Welsh to at least five and know the names of colours in Welsh. Very few, however, use the Welsh they have learned spontaneously in their play.

Wellbeing: Good

Standards of wellbeing are good. All children are relaxed and happy in the setting and are eager to try new experiences. They understand that they need to wash their hands after using the toilet and before eating to get rid of germs and know that a healthy diet includes fruit and vegetables. All children interact positively with one another and with adults and their behaviour is generally good. Children are polite to each other and to adults. Most children understand the need to take turns and share toys and objects and generally manage to do so. They willingly help to put things away when it is time to tidy up. During free choice sessions all children are fully engaged in the activities on offer and often use the equipment imaginatively to

develop games and investigations of their own. Many are keen to talk about their experiences and are confident to ask for help from adults.

Many children show an appropriate understanding for their age and stage of development of the importance of eating healthily. They enjoy snack- time, eating a range of fresh, healthy food and are aware of the need to wash their hands before eating or after using the toilet.

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

The playgroup provides children with a good range of interesting and stimulating activities. Planning is done collaboratively and, although children are not directly consulted for their ideas, practitioners take into account the children's interests when discussing plans and will include spontaneous suggestions in future plans. Planning takes into account the use of skills ladders to ensure coverage of the range of skills based on the Foundation Phase areas of learning but occasionally the learning intentions for planned adult led activities are not sufficiently clear and focussed.

Welsh is used during group times and all practitioners use Welsh words incidentally throughout the sessions. Children count in Welsh when prompted and a majority know some colours in Welsh when asked. All children celebrate and learn about Welsh culture and traditions when they celebrate St David's Day.

All children help to recycle paper from their craft activities and learn about waste and recycling through specific planned activities. There are many opportunities for children to learn about other cultures and communities through the range of multicultural resources in the setting and through celebration of a range of festivals.

Teaching: Good

Practitioners are all experienced and have a sound understanding of the principles of the Foundation Phase and they implement their ideas imaginatively to suit the needs of the children. All staff interact very positively with the children. The learning environment they provide is stimulating and there are good opportunities for children to engage in activities that they can develop and extend themselves.

All practitioners have a good understanding of the developing needs of each child and they direct their questioning appropriately. There is a good balance between adult intervention and allowing children to follow their own ideas to develop their decision making skills. Children are free to select from either adult led or independent activities but are not yet involved in planning future activities.

Practitioners assess by observing the children while they are engaged in their learning experiences. The information gathered informs the next steps in planning and contributes to the local authority's assessment document. Parents and carers receive this document when their child moves on to the next step in their education. There are no arrangements for parents to receive information of how their child is doing or how they can help them to improve although parents who help on a rota basis do have the opportunity to observe their child in the setting.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Good arrangements exist to promote healthy living and to ensure children's emotional and physical wellbeing. Daily access to physical activities and healthy snacks supports good physical development. The setting has recently become the first non-maintained setting in Flintshire to gain the Eating Well for Preschool Children Tiny Tums award from the Betsi Cadwallader University Health Board.

Good procedures are in place to ensure that children settle well when they start. The setting provides a warm and welcoming environment for the children. Almost all children behave well and understand the need to treat one another with respect. Most children attending the setting move on to the adjacent primary school and practitioners work closely with staff from the Early Years department to ensure a smooth transition.

Although there are currently no children with identified additional learning needs, the setting has supported children in the past and there is evidence to show appropriate individual play plans which were regularly reviewed and good links with other agencies.

The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meet requirements and give no reason for concern. Practitioners have received up to date training and understand their roles and responsibilities. Other policies are appropriately detailed and relevant. Learning experiences promote children's personal development well, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Learning environment: Good

The setting is an inclusive community where all children have equal access to all activities. Practitioners are suitably qualified and very experienced in working with young children. Although arrangements with the community centre do not make it possible for many permanent displays, practitioners do their best to make the environment bright and cheerful and provide a caring ethos where children are enabled to pursue their learning in a stimulating and supportive environment.

The outdoor area accessible from the doors of the playgroup does not have fixed fencing but the group has recently had the opportunity to acquire movable temporary fencing which will provide more regular outdoor access than has been previously possible. When they are able to go outdoors children behave well and make full use of the resources provided for them. There are currently no opportunities for children to grow plants or vegetables outdoors.

The setting employs sufficient well-trained practitioners to meet the needs of all children. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Phase. All practitioners are committed to improving their knowledge, understanding and skills through relevant training. A wide range of resources, including natural, recycled and man-made, are carefully selected for their quality and effectiveness in supporting the children's learning needs

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

The playgroup supervisors have a clear sense of purpose and vision for improvement. They share a commitment to offering good provision that helps children to achieve their potential in all areas of learning and have created a positive ethos where both staff and children are valued and respected. Practitioners work well together and regular meetings ensure that good communication is maintained. All practitioners have opportunities to lead group times and focussed adult led activities and this is helpful for their professional development.

There is a good range of policies to ensure the children's safety and appropriate risk assessments have been carried out. Procedures are in place for the annual review of performance of practitioners but this lacks continuity due to the annual changes in the structure of the management committee. Systems have changed annually and have often been more complicated than helpful.

Supervisors work together effectively with their staff to deliver the Foundation Phase and the setting has taken good account of Welsh Assembly Government and Local Authority initiatives such as language and literacy and healthy eating.

Improving quality: Good

Self-evaluation has been part of the life of the setting for several years. Supervisors complete a Self Evaluation for Improvement review from the local authority which they then use to set targets for the next year. The current self-evaluation identifies

appropriate areas for improvement with success criteria and practitioners are actively working towards meeting these. The views of parents and children are not currently sought to inform the self-evaluation process.

Practitioners regularly attend training provided by the Early Entitlement team from the local authority and reflect on how this can be used to improve provision in their setting. They have not yet had opportunity to visit other settings.

Partnership working: Good

A range of partnership activities contributes positively to children's progress and well being. The setting has good relationships with the parents and carers of children in their care and staff are always available to discuss any questions or concerns parents may have. Parents bring their children into the quiet room in the morning and stay for registration. This gives practitioners an opportunity to share information about any special events or activities that are taking place and there is a list of the main activities for each week displayed on the wall.

Parents, when necessary, are fully involved in decisions about their children. A good relationship with the link advisory teacher from the Local authority's Early Entitlement team provides regular support and advice. Practitioners reported positively about this support and there is good evidence that they have acted on the advice received to good effect. The playgroup is developing good links with the school to which most children move.

Resource management: Good

The setting has a good range of high quality resources which are well used to support the planned learning activities. Practitioners are effectively deployed to maximise children's learning and independence both indoors and out. Practitioners all take part in leading focussed adult led activities which supports them in developing their own knowledge and expertise.

The management committee manages the playgroup finances. Supervisors organise the receipt of fees and have access to a monthly float for day to day spending. They take requests to the committee and are mindful of the impact of spending on the quality of provision and the progress children make. Overall, the setting gives value for money.

Appendix 1

Responses to parent questionnaires

There is no commentary on the parent questionnaires due to the small number of responses received.

Responses to discussions with children

All children thoroughly enjoy their sessions in the setting. They say that they like the things they do there and also like playing with their friends.

Appendix 2

The reporting inspector – delete as appropriate

Mary Dyas	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)

If available, the data report can be found on our website alongside this report.

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.

National Childminding Association (NCMA)	This is a professional membership association working with registered childminders to ensure local high quality home-based childcare, play, learning and family support.
National (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.