



*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**  
**Mes Bach/Little Acorns**  
**Ysgol Dyffryn Trannon**  
**Trefeglwys**  
**Caersws**  
**Powys**  
**SY17 5PH**

**Date of inspection: June 2011**

**by**

**Michael T. Ridout**

**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:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>What the judgement means</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
<b>Good</b>	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
<b>Adequate</b>	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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## Context

Mes Bach/Little Acorns is an English-medium pre-school setting situated in the village of Trefeglwys, about five miles from Llanidloes and four miles from Caersws in Powys. It serves several rural communities of mostly Welsh families across a wide area. The setting opened in 2004 and meets in Ysgol Dyffryn Trannon.

The children who attend the setting come from a range of backgrounds. The locality is described as neither prosperous nor economically disadvantaged. Almost all children have English as their home language and a very few come from homes where some Welsh is spoken. A very few children have additional learning needs.

The setting is open four mornings each week during school terms. It is registered for 14 children between the age of two and a half and admission to school. At the time of the inspection there were 15 children on roll. The local authority (LA) funds places for eight children.

The Care and Social Service Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) last inspected the setting in October 2009. It is the setting's first inspection by Estyn.

## Summary

<b>The school's current performance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>The school's prospects for improvement</b>	<b>Good</b>

### Current performance

The setting is good because:

- children make good overall progress and achieve well;
- they are enthusiastic, happy learners;
- a wide range of learning experiences is provided;
- teaching is effective and reflective;
- high quality care, support and guidance ensures children's wellbeing; and
- relationships within the setting are excellent.

### Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are good because:

- the quality of day-to-day leadership of the setting is excellent;
- a strong ethos of teamwork is evident among practitioners;
- a reflective culture of self-improvement permeates the work of the setting;
- effective procedures identify strengths and areas for development;
- there is an established record of improvement in provision; and
- strategic planning is being developed.

## Recommendations

In order to improve further the setting should:

- maintain the emphasis on improving standards in Welsh language development and develop the skills of information and communications technology (ICT);
- sharpen the focus of weekly planning and strategies for assessment;
- continue to integrate use of the outdoors for continuous activities; and
- formalise strategic planning and procedures to monitor outcomes.

### ***What happens next?***

*The setting 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**

Nearly all children come to the setting with well developed skills for their age and stage of development. They make good and sometimes very good progress as they acquire new knowledge and successfully develop their skills. They are enthusiastic learners who confidently explore their surroundings and try out new experiences. All children apply their skills well to a wide range of structured play activities.

Nearly all children have very good communication skills. They listen attentively and use a rich vocabulary and simple sentences to express themselves clearly. Most are inquisitive and readily ask questions and initiate simple conversations. A few engage in extended dialogues. Most happily join in with songs and enjoy participating in singing games and imaginative role play. They handle books as readers, enjoy listening to stories and show good awareness that text and pictures convey the story. Nearly all recognise their name and a few identify letters and sounds. Most steadily develop early writing skills through mark making, for example when copying patterns modelled for them.

Children make good progress in early mathematical skills. Nearly all count confidently to ten, many count objects accurately to five and name shapes such as a triangle. They use mathematical language and skills correctly when sequencing objects, describing their position and comparing their size. Children's awareness of money also develops well, for example during role play in the 'garden centre.'

Progress in knowledge and understanding and in the creative and physical aspects of learning is generally very good, but children's skills in using a range of ICT are less well developed.

Overall standards in Welsh language are adequate. Most show increasing understanding of everyday words and phrases and enjoy singing songs, playing games and listening to stories in Welsh. Many count to ten, name colours and understand simple phrases. A few respond in Welsh spontaneously.

### **Wellbeing: Good**

Nearly all children enter the setting confidently and quickly become absorbed in the activities provided. For their ages almost all children show very good levels of independence. They have positive attitudes, sustain interest well and clearly enjoy learning. All are well motivated learners. Most readily make choices about how and what they learn within the setting, but their involvement in helping to plan and develop activities is underdeveloped.

In line with their age nearly all children have an appropriate understanding of the importance of eating healthily and taking exercise. They are aware of the need to wash their hands before eating and after using the toilet. Nearly all develop very good social skills, eat a range of healthy foods prepared for them and enthusiastically

participate in energetic activities.

All children demonstrate high levels of confidence and self-esteem. The quality of relationships within the setting is excellent and the development of children's collaborative skills during play activities is a notable feature. The positive role models set by adults helps children to feel safe and secure. They participate enthusiastically in structured games and their behaviour is very good. Nearly all show developing courtesy and appropriate consideration for others. They take turns, share equipment, look after resources and develop responsibility, for example by helping to tidy-up at the end of sessions.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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### **Learning experiences: Good**

The setting is successful in engaging children in a broad range of imaginative and stimulating learning experiences that meet their needs well. Planning is securely based on Foundation Phase Child Development Profile and Skills Framework and links activities closely to the required areas of learning. Practitioners work very well together to implement activities that engage and challenge children to learn effectively. Weekly planning ensures an appropriate balance across the different areas of learning and builds well on children's prior knowledge and skills. There is good emphasis on promoting skills in literacy and numeracy. The provision to promote skills in ICT is less well developed.

Planning reflects a good understanding of the Foundation Phase Outcomes and provides a good basis to ensure the progressive development of children's skills. Although practitioners develop children's learning well, too few details of the expected learning outcomes are identified to guide them.

Practitioners plan many opportunities for children to encounter new experiences, solve problems and encourage them to think for themselves. They know the children very well and increasingly tailor focused activities to match children's differing needs and abilities. The learning experiences foster positive relationships, nurture respect and tolerance and promote awareness of other cultures, such as through celebrating festivals. There is a good balance between indoor and outdoor activities. The use of visits and visitors to encourage wider awareness of the world and to learn about sustainability, recycling and the impact we have on the environment is developing well.

Good provision is made to promote awareness of the culture and traditions of Wales and practitioners, who are all learners of Welsh, successfully promote use of the language.

### **Teaching: Good**

Teaching is reflective and practitioners skillfully promote a wide range of learning experiences. They have a secure knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Phase and use a range of strategies well to stimulate play and structure the learning activities in ways that the children clearly enjoy. Adults give children enough time to

complete a task and develop their ideas. They observe and intervene appropriately. Practitioners encourage children to make choices and use questioning well to develop their thinking skills. Teaching is most effective when the focus is to challenge children to extend their learning and positive oral feedback is given. The teaching of the setting leader provides an exemplar in this regard. Planning provides sound guidance for teaching, but details of the expected steps in learning for different groups of children are not always clearly enough defined.

There are good arrangements for the assessment of learning. Day-to-day observations are recorded and used well to praise children's achievements. Practitioners are skillfully adapting procedures to match the needs of the setting. More focused assessments are being developed to evaluate individual progress; these provide a good basis to link assessments more closely to the learning objectives for different activities and also to help plan the next steps of learning. Practitioners make time, on an informal basis, to be available for parents or carers to discuss their child's progress before and after sessions. A detailed report of progress is provided when children leave the setting.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The setting provides high quality care, support and guidance. The arrangements to ensure children's health and wellbeing, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. This provision contributes particularly well to children's personal and social development. It nurtures a sense of curiosity about the world, fosters the values of honesty and fairness, promotes good behaviour and enables children to engage in a range of community and cultural activities.

There are appropriate induction and transition arrangements for children joining or leaving the setting. Liaison with the primary school is sound.

Appropriate arrangements to provide children with personal and specialist support when required are evident, with the primary school and relevant LA services. This includes arrangements to support and integrate children with additional learning needs. The provision to support more able children is sound, but opportunities to tailor provision to their particular needs are not always fully developed.

Systematic procedures ensure the setting is safe and secure. Appropriate risk assessments are implemented and members of staff and regular volunteers have valid criminal records bureau checks. The setting has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

### **Learning environment: Good**

The setting has an inclusive ethos that values individual qualities. It is a high quality warm, friendly and supportive environment for children. The excellent quality of relationships within the setting ensures children are safe from undue anxiety. Practitioners promote awareness of diversity and foster sensitivity and understanding towards others. They successfully encourage positive behaviour and ensure equal access to all areas of provision. Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that any children with disabilities do not suffer disadvantage.

The setting is very well staffed for the number of children on roll. It is also well

resourced to meet the needs of the Foundation Phase curriculum in most areas of learning. The setting benefits from well designed accommodation that provides well for indoor and outdoor learning. Learning opportunities are considerably enhanced by regular use of the school grounds and occasional visits to local places of interest.

<b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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### **Leadership: Good**

The setting leader provides excellent day-to-day leadership. This results in a positive ethos where children and practitioners are valued and respected as individuals. A clear sense of purpose and direction is evident within the setting and a range of clear policies and procedures are implemented well. The governing body and acting headteacher are appropriately involved in managing the setting, but key elements of strategic planning are not sufficiently formalised.

The setting leader articulates clear vision for improvement, sets high expectations and is successful in ensuring practitioners have a good understanding of their roles. A strong culture of self-improvement and teamwork permeates the life and work of the setting. This is a particularly strong feature that helps develop and maintain the good work of the setting. There is effective liaison with the acting headteacher and a recently appointed link governor is at an early stage in developing her role.

The setting is well managed. Arrangements for performance management and appraisal are implemented and regarded as effective by all those concerned. Practitioners respond positively to professional advice and readily embrace national and local priorities. The provision incorporates the Foundation Phase principles very well.

### **Improving quality: Good**

A reflective culture of self-improvement is well established within the setting. Practitioners endeavour to take account of the views of parents, carers and children as much as possible. There are effective procedures to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The self-evaluation report is a useful document that links closely with the goals identified in the setting's improvement plan. The annual audit of provision and evaluations of progress towards the setting's goals are good features. However, longer term strategic planning identifying how further improvements will be secured and resourced is not sufficiently formalised.

Networks of professional practice support practitioners' professional development well. The setting has beneficial links with other settings and networking within the local cluster successfully encourages the sharing of good practice.

### **Partnership working: Good**

Practitioners maintain very positive relationships with parents and carers and informal day-to-day communication is effective. This partnership contributes well to children's progress and wellbeing. A handbook, newsletters and the parents' notice board keep parents up to date with important information. However, in response to



the views expressed by a few parents in questionnaires, the setting recognises opportunities to share details about the curriculum and how children are progressing are insufficiently structured.

Partnership working between practitioners is very effective in developing high quality provision. Appropriate links ensure a smooth transition to primary school. However, both the school and the setting plan to formalise procedures. The setting is to provide placements for students undertaking vocational courses and makes increasingly effective use of resources in the local community, including visits and visitors to enhance provision. For example, children worked with an artist and visited a farm.

The partnership with the LA provides effective professional support and challenge. Practitioners value the support they receive from a range of external agencies. They are keen to respond to advice and benefit from attending training organised by the LA.

### **Resource management: Good**

The provision of qualified and experienced practitioners to meet the needs of children and the curriculum is good. They are well deployed and good organisation ensures that the wide range of good quality learning resources available is used well.

Regular use is made of the 'outdoor classroom' and the school grounds, but some opportunities to integrate indoor and outdoor continuous activities are less well developed.

The governing body exercises appropriate oversight of the setting's finances. Sound procedures are being implemented to manage all aspects of funding through the school budget. Currently, strategic planning lacks sufficient clarity in the allocation of funding to match the targets identified in the setting's improvement plan. This makes it difficult for practitioners to plan further improvements over the medium term.

The effective use and deployment of resources results in high quality learning experiences that impact well on standards. This represents good value for money.

## Appendix 1

### Stakeholder satisfaction report

#### Responses to parent questionnaires

Nine questionnaires and five written comments were received. Nearly all responses were positive. There was strong agreement that children are helped to settle in well, they are well prepared for moving on to school, teaching is good and the setting is well run. Parents also agree their child feels safe, members of staff are approachable, children behave well and there is a good range of activities. They state children receive appropriate additional support, staff treat children fairly, their child is encouraged to be healthy and indicate they are well satisfied with the provision. However, a few say they are not kept well enough informed about their child's progress.

#### Responses to discussions with children

During the sessions observed children settled happily in the setting. They have excellent relationships with their peers and with the adults. An inclusive ethos ensures children feel safe and secure. This was clearly evident in children's confidence to initiate conversations. All children demonstrate a strong sense of trust and know that practitioners provide them with care and guidance.

## Appendix 2

### Reporting inspector

Michael T. Ridout	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](http://www.estyn.gov.uk))

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