

Section 2

Sector summaries: Non-school settings for children under five

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Context

All local authorities in Wales fund part-time education for three-year-olds, and occasionally for four-year-olds in settings as well as in schools. Although local authorities do not maintain these settings, they are responsible for ensuring that they provide good quality foundation phase education. This includes providing leaders and practitioners with advice and support. Settings that provide early education include day care and sessional care providers. Estyn is required to inspect early education, and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) has the duty to inspect the quality of care at these settings. In January 2019, Estyn and CIW began jointly to inspect non-school education settings for children under five using a new, joint inspection framework. These joint inspections consider the quality of care provided for all children up to the age of 12 and the education of three and four-year-old children that do not receive education in a maintained setting. The new inspection framework comprises of six themes in three key areas: themes 1 and 2 consider children's outcomes, themes 3 and 4 consider how well practitioners contribute towards these, and themes 5 and 6 consider the quality of leadership in ensuring good outcomes for children.

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The number of settings offering part-time education has again reduced. This year there were 569 providers of education in non-school settings for three or four-year-olds, a fall from 593 last year and from 737 in 2010. We inspected 26 settings during the autumn term under Estyn's 2010 inspection framework. Overall, the proportion of these settings judged good or better in the autumn term was similar to the proportion for 2017-2018. Of the 26 settings inspected, seven had an excellent judgement for at least one key question or quality indicator, with three settings judged as excellent across all key questions.

Joint inspections since spring 2019

During spring and summer, we inspected 66 settings under our new joint inspection framework with Care Inspectorate Wales. Around two-in-ten are small settings with fewer than six three-year-old children. In these settings, under the 2010 framework in order to avoid identifying individual children, inspectors reported on provision and leadership only. The same reporting principle applies in our joint inspection arrangements. Inspectors report on all themes with the exception of theme 2, which focuses on funded three or four-year-old children's learning.

Learning

Standards are good or better in around eight-in-ten settings. This is slightly lower than the percentage identified last year. In settings where standards are good or excellent, most children make strong progress in their learning from their starting points. They develop their literacy, numeracy, physical and personal and social skills effectively.

Where standards are excellent, most children make particularly strong progress from their starting points. They communicate clearly and enthusiastically, building an extensive and rich vocabulary. For example, they recall recent events and insert relevant detail well. They use mathematical vocabulary accurately in an increasing range of situations. For example, they compare their height to that of a sunflower, stating whether they are taller or shorter. They are confident to take managed risks and develop their physical skills to a high level. For example, when participating in daily physical activities they stretch like a giraffe and snap like a crocodile.

In settings where standards are good or better, most children speak confidently and make themselves understood when discussing their ideas or when telling adults what they already know. They listen well and follow instructions effectively, for example when creating a jungle scene using mud, jelly and broccoli. More able pupils use more mature language patterns and a greater range of sophisticated language purposefully. For example, when describing how to build a shelter for their dinosaur, they talk about its long skinny neck and thick spiky tail. In Welsh-medium settings where for most children Welsh is not the language of the home, many make good progress in developing strong oral skills.



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These pupils readily use basic sentence structures, common phrases and an increasing range of vocabulary well to converse and join in with songs and nursery rhymes. In a very few Welsh medium settings where standards are adequate, pupils who speak Welsh at home often do not make enough progress in developing their Welsh oral skills and frequently revert to speaking English during sessions. These children are not sufficiently confident when discussing in Welsh and, as a result, their extended responses in sentences are often limited.

In English and Welsh-medium settings, most children develop sound early reading skills and listen attentively to the stories read to them by adults. They show an interest in books and talk eagerly about their characters, for example by suggesting how to help the teddy bear that got lost in the snow. Most children enjoy mark making and experiment confidently using a range of equipment. They create marks purposefully and understand that writing has meaning, such as when 'writing' shopping lists in the farm shop or in the kitchen. More able pupils use recognisable letters when attempting to write their name, for example when they self-register or when writing their name on a picture they have drawn for a friend.

Standards of Welsh in English-medium settings continue to improve. In many of these settings, children respond appropriately to basic instructions in Welsh. They understand simple questions during daily routines and repeat single words or simple phrases, such as the weather, confidently. They sing a wide variety of action songs well at group time and name a few colours and numbers in Welsh. Even so, in two-in-ten of these settings, children's use of Welsh is limited.

In settings where standards are good, most children develop their numeracy skills well. They make good progress in their counting skills. For example, they say numbers in order to ten and count objects to five accurately when counting cups at snack time. Most children use mathematical vocabulary appropriately across a range of learning experiences, for example using 'taller' and 'shorter' when building a tower from pegs and then measuring it against a giraffe. Many apply their numeracy skills well in other learning areas, for example when sorting different coloured toy animals into groups and then counting the number in each group with accuracy. They begin to recognise and use two and simple three dimensional shapes in their learning, for example when building a rocket. In a few settings, where standards are excellent, more able children add simple numbers together correctly, such as three and six to make nine, usually by using appropriate equipment to help them. Children in around one-in-ten settings do not use their problem-solving skills effectively enough in their learning.

In many settings, children use information and communication technology (ICT) well to enhance their learning and to develop their communication skills effectively. They access and use a range of ICT equipment such as tablet computers confidently. For example, they take a photograph of a slug in the outdoor area to record what they have found and to prompt discussion. Most children use battery operated toys effectively to enhance their play, such as a toy till when pretending to be a shopkeeper.



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However, in three-in-ten settings, children do not always use the ICT equipment independently or with the support of an adult to enhance their learning. Their access to ICT equipment is limited and they do not use it to develop their communication skills sufficiently.

In many settings, children develop their physical skills well using both the indoor and outdoor learning areas effectively. They demonstrate good gross motor skills when crawling under arches or throwing large balls into containers in the outdoor area. Most children develop sound fine motor skills, for example when gripping shells with tweezers and when using a small paint brush with care to make 'sheep shapes' in shaving foam.

Standards are adequate in around two-in-ten settings. In these settings, a minority of children, particularly the most able, do not make enough progress in line with their stage of development. They do not always focus well enough on what adults say and are easily distracted by what is happening around them. Although the majority of children in these settings make suitable progress in literacy, a minority do not develop their mark making skills in line with their stage of development. Children's numeracy skills are often less well developed and the majority do not make enough progress over time. In addition, these children do not apply their skills well enough in other areas of learning and their problem-solving skills are often underdeveloped.

When settings plan well for the development of children's creative skills, many children enjoy opportunities to express themselves through music, dance and other art. However, in many settings, children's creativity skills are often limited due to constraints of provision. For example, everyone paints the same painting or makes the same clay model under adult direction. This inhibits their ability to think for themselves and use their imagination freely.

Wellbeing

Standards of wellbeing are a strength in this sector. In most settings, standards of wellbeing are at least good and are excellent in a very few settings. In these settings, nearly all children show exceptional motivation, enjoyment and interest in their learning, and most concentrate very diligently during tasks. They demonstrate high levels of engagement and are extremely confident when making choices as they move between adult-focused and child-led learning tasks. For example, children choose from a wide-range of resources in the creative area independently to recreate a scene from a fireworks display. Where wellbeing is good, nearly all children settle well as soon as they arrive at the setting and behave well. Most enjoy taking part in a range of learning experiences and have fun when tackling tasks independently. They sustain interest in activities and move confidently to another activity when ready.

In most settings, children understand the importance of good hygiene and how to stay fit and healthy. Most children develop their independence well, such as selecting fruit and pouring their drink at snack time. They also develop their independence further by taking on responsibilities such as 'Helpwr y dydd' and tidying up after activities.

In the very few settings where standards of wellbeing are adequate, a few children have difficulty persevering and lose interest quickly. They become restless and this disrupts other children.

Cylch Meithrin Hermon

Staff at Cylch Meithrin Hermon use puppets to help children understand their emotions. The puppets allow the children to develop their personal and social skills by thinking about how their actions affect the feelings of the other children.

For more information, please read our [case study](#).



Cylch Meithrin Ynyshir & Wattstown

Children at Cylch Meithrin Ynyshir & Wattstown are allowed to choose when they had their snack break to help improve their wellbeing and behaviour. They also encouraged the children to serve themselves independently, so they learn about the importance of hygiene and gain responsibility for clearing up and recycling.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Provision

Provision is good or better in three-quarters of settings inspected this year. There is excellent practice in a very few settings. In these good or better settings, practitioners plan a wide variety of purposeful learning experiences, which stimulate children's interests and build successfully on prior learning. They make good use of children's ideas when planning topics and activities, which motivates them to learn. Many of these settings provide worthwhile opportunities for children to develop their communication skills through a range of interesting learning activities both indoors and outdoors. In particular, practitioners encourage children to join conversations and pose searching questions such as 'How do worms see if they don't have eyes?' They also provide a range of exciting opportunities for children to develop their understanding of writing for different purposes, such as when recording appointments in a veterinary practice. Many settings build on children's numeracy skills well through a suitable range of stimulating practical experiences that allow them to develop a strong understanding of mathematical concepts. A good example of this is when children were asked to rebuild Babushka dolls and place them in order of size. In settings where planning for literacy and numeracy is not as strong, practitioners do not plan the development of these skills progressively enough. In addition, in around one in seven settings, practitioners do not plan to develop children's problem-solving skills effectively enough. As a result, children in these settings do not always build on prior learning effectively or receive enough opportunities to reinforce their skills and knowledge.

Most Welsh-medium settings plan well for the development of children's Welsh language skills and support those who are new to the language effectively. In a very few settings, practitioners do not always encourage children who speak Welsh at home to practise their Welsh throughout the session or reinforce language patterns and vocabulary rigorously enough. In English-medium settings, the development of children's Welsh language skills continues to improve. Many practitioners support children's Welsh language development by singing songs and using Welsh words and phrases throughout the session. In around one in ten settings, practitioners do not plan well enough to develop children's Welsh language skills or encourage its use outside formal group situations effectively enough.

Planning for purposeful use of ICT to develop children's communication skills remains an area for development in around three-in-ten settings. In these settings, practitioners focus on providing equipment for children to use rather than considering how it can be used to enhance learning. Where practitioners develop children's ICT skills well, they focus on how it can be used to develop children's communication skills. They ensure purposeful opportunities for children to use ICT equipment across areas of learning to enhance their experiences and to allow them to talk about their learning. For example, practitioners planned a series of activities that enabled children to photograph wildlife at a local pond and to discuss the features of insects and how they made them feel. This then provided the inspiration for creative work on insects.

Cylch Meithrin Crymych

Cylch Meithrin Crymych has forged close links with partners from the local area. They visit local shops, which allows children to develop their oracy and social skills. Visits also improve awareness of using money for real purposes and shows the children that many goods are available locally.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup

Practitioners at Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup use routine activities to introduce Welsh language and phrases. This helps children to develop their understanding and responses progressively.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Cydnabod
Rhagoriaeth
Recognising
Excellence

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Generally, planning for developing children's creative skills is not given a high enough priority in many settings. Activities tend to be overly directed by practitioners and this leads to children producing similar pieces of work. Too often there are only limited opportunities for children to explore and experiment with a range of resources when working creatively.

Many settings provide suitable opportunities to develop children's physical skills, for example by providing equipment such as balance trails and hard surfaces to ride bicycles and large toys. But practitioners do not always consider the different stages of children's development when planning physical activities or value the importance of young children developing good gross motor skills before they can master fine motor skills.

In settings where teaching is extremely effective, practitioners have exceptionally high expectations of children and have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the foundation phase curriculum and how young children learn best. They provide superb opportunities for children to experiment, and facilitate creative learning through purposeful play. Where teaching is good, practitioners understand when to intervene in children's learning and when to allow them to experiment with their own ideas. In the best examples, practitioners model play in the role play corner to help the children learn, for example when pretending to board and fly an aeroplane. They ask questions that encourage children to think for themselves and move their learning on. Practitioners in these settings use effective assessment methods to assess children's development and progress and plan the next steps in their learning. However, in around one in six settings where teaching is not as effective, practitioners do not identify children's needs well enough to plan suitably for their learning. As a result, too many learning experiences do not challenge or support them effectively enough, nor do they build sufficiently on their skills and knowledge. In a few settings, practitioners dominate and control learning experiences and activities too much, which limits the opportunities for children to become fully engaged in their play, try new things out, and develop their own ideas.

Most settings ensure good standards of care, support and guidance for their children. Practitioners support their independent and self-help skills well through a range of useful daily routines and activities. For example, snack time teaches children how to take responsibility for preparing and serving refreshments as well as helping them to socialise and interact with others. They ensure that children develop a good awareness about their own community, culture and beliefs as well as those of others across the world. Many settings now recognise the importance of providing an exciting and stimulating outdoor learning environment for their children. This allows practitioners to plan purposeful learning experiences and play opportunities to develop their skills across all areas of learning. Even in settings with limited outdoor areas, practitioners are becoming ever more resourceful in their approach to overcoming this, for example by using the local beaches or parks to allow children to explore and develop their physical skills. As a result, practitioners now plan for outdoor learning more effectively to develop children's skills and to make learning fun and exciting.

Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup

Practitioners at Aberporth Bilingual Playgroup provide fun, stimulating activities that build upon children's interests and questions. A performance area was introduced to develop children's language and confidence when talking to others or when singing and using musical instruments.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



Open Door Family Centre

Staff at the Open Door Family Centre wanted to encourage children to become independent learners and develop their resilience and confidence by making their own decisions and taking risks. They have created a safe environment for the children to try new things out independently.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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This year again, inspectors identified important shortcomings relating to safeguarding in a few settings. In these settings, practitioners and leaders do not follow safeguarding policies and procedures well enough. Leaders in one-in-ten settings do not ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place to safeguard children and staff. In a very few settings, leaders do not always adhere to safe recruitment practices when employing staff. We write to settings with important shortcomings relating to safeguarding to ensure that they address them.

Leadership and management

Standards of leadership and management are good or better in a majority of settings and excellent in a very few inspected this year. In settings where leadership is good, leaders set high expectations and convey a clear understanding of what they want to achieve. They communicate effectively with staff, establish a strong team spirit and ensure that everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities. A common feature among the very few excellent settings inspected this year is that leaders create a culture of shared ownership, resulting in a strong drive for improvement and very high expectations. As a result, all staff take responsibility for improving children's standards and wellbeing.

In effective settings, leaders listen to the advice and opinions of others like parents and advisory teachers effectively to help them reflect on their performance and practice. This ensures that leaders have a better understanding of the setting's performance, its strengths and areas for development. In the very few settings where leadership and management are excellent, leaders focus on monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and encourage all practitioners to take responsibility for improving their own performance. However, self-evaluation procedures needed to improve in around three-in-ten settings inspected this year. In these settings, although leaders understand the role of these processes in bringing about improvement, monitoring procedures are weak and leaders do not always review progress against agreed outcomes effectively enough. As a result, they are not always able to identify key strengths and areas for improvement within their settings.

Many leaders support practitioners to improve the performance of their staff through appraisal and supervision policies and practices. In the more successful settings where inspectors highlighted excellent practice, leaders ensure that all practitioners have access to a wide range of training opportunities that link closely to the setting's priorities for improvement and personal development needs. Leaders in these settings assess the impact of the training regularly. This ensures that all practitioners make the best use of what they have learnt to improve provision, and to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. In addition, leaders value the importance of strong induction practices to ensure that any initial training that may be required is implemented as soon as possible. For example, they initiate training to upskill practitioners who are less confident, using Welsh to help them teach basic vocabulary and speech patterns to children in English-medium settings. In less successful settings, leaders do not implement their performance management policies effectively enough.



Open Door Family Centre

Leaders at the Open Door Family Centre worked together to establish clear managerial roles and new strategies. This helped staff to understand their own roles and responsibilities, and work together to achieve their goals.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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As a result, these leaders do not identify targets for improvement for all staff or review their performance in a timely manner. This impacts negatively on the quality of support and training provided to staff and the quality of provision at these settings.

Most settings communicate clearly with parents and guardians and support them well to become more involved in their children's learning and to have a better understanding about their care and development. Leaders in these settings work well with a range of partners, including local authority advisory teachers and representatives of organisations they are affiliated too. They use their advice and expertise well to help review the work of the setting and to support practitioners in their work. There continue to be many useful partnerships between settings and the local community, mainly through the use of visitors and visits to places of interest. This has a positive effect on the children's learning experiences and enables them to learn about their local community, for example by visiting the emergency services to learn about people who help us and when planting flowers in the village with the help of a community group. In the most effective settings, leaders ensure strong links with local schools to help children when they move on to the next stage of their education. Children visit the schools on several occasions to watch concerts and take part in singing sessions, and to meet their new teacher during their last term in the setting. Teachers from the schools also visit the settings regularly, for example to read stories to the children and to discuss their needs with practitioners.

In most settings, leaders provide children with a wide range of interesting and stimulating resources to support their learning. Practitioners plan exciting and purposeful outdoor learning experiences increasingly well to allow children to explore and discover for themselves as well as developing their physical skills. Most settings manage their finances well and are becoming more resourceful in how they fund their work, for example by applying for grants and through organising events with parents and the local community. Again this year, in the majority of settings inspected, local authorities continue to retain the Early Years Development Grant to fund training and resources. However, the funding is not always targeted well enough to develop the needs of individual settings. As a result, practitioners do not always receive training that meets their professional needs or the setting's priorities for improvement.

Little Stars Day Nursery

Leaders at Little Stars Day Nursery use a skills matrix to identify individual and group training needs. This ensures a consistent approach across the nursery.

For more information, please read our [case study](#)



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Follow-up activity

During autumn 2018 (the final term of the Estyn 2010 framework, prior to joint inspection commencing), we identified excellent practice in around a quarter of settings. This is substantially more than over the same period last year. In particular, we saw exceptional leadership with a strong focus on professional development, leading to consistently high standards of learning and wellbeing.

Around three-in-ten settings inspected during this final period need a follow-up visit from the local authority or from Estyn, including a very few settings that require focused improvement. This is a slight decrease on last year. We will monitor their progress against recommendations from the core inspections following procedures prior to joint working. In settings requiring monitoring by Estyn, leaders generally did not have high enough expectations to ensure that children make good progress and benefit from stimulating learning experiences. In the very few settings requiring focused improvement, leaders did not act on their development plans appropriately or use advice effectively to improve standards and provision.

This year, nearly all settings that required monitoring by the local authority at the beginning of the year progressed well against their recommendations and we removed them from the follow-up category. All settings monitored by Estyn and the three settings in the focused improvement category at the beginning of the year made good progress and no longer need follow-up activity.

In joint inspections with CIW, inspectors identified excellent practice in a very few settings. In these settings, highly effective leadership was an outstanding feature, leading to especially high standards of care and development and effective teaching and learning.

Since January 2019, we have changed our arrangements for follow-up as part of our joint working with CIW. There are now two categories of follow-up – these are ‘progress review’ and ‘focused improvement’. Under these new arrangements, inspectors found that around three-in-ten settings need a follow-up inspection visit. Most of these settings require monitoring by inspectors (progress review) and a very few are in need of focused improvement. Of the settings in need of monitoring by inspectors, around six-in-ten do not have strong enough procedures for bringing about improvements in standards and provision, or for ensuring that their policies and procedures support the setting’s work well enough. Where there was a judgement on standards, children in around six-in-ten settings do not make good enough progress in developing their skills. This is often because practitioners do not succeed in meeting all children’s needs well enough when they plan, and particularly the needs of older and more able children. In the very few settings requiring focused improvement this year, leaders do not ensure that important policies and procedures to keep children safe are in place and that all practitioners follow these consistently. They do not provide enough support for practitioners so that they have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities and develop their professional expertise effectively.

