



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

**Little Rascals Playgroup
Cwm Golau
Integrated Children's Centre
Dyffryn Road
Pentrebach
Merthyr Tydfil
CF48 4BY**

Date of inspection: May 2011

By

Mrs Linda Vittle

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 school'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

Little Rascals Playgroup has been in existence for just over five years and became a limited company in 2009. It is an English medium playgroup located in the Integrated Children's Centre, Pentrebach. It is situated in Merthyr Tydfil, which is one of Wales most deprived areas, and children attend from a wide range of social backgrounds. The playgroup is open for 42 weeks of the year and provides sessions during the morning and afternoon with a short break between. It is managed by a management committee of three members and registered with the Wales Pre-School Providers Association (WPPA) and is currently working towards WPPA Quality Assured Accreditation.

The playgroup is managed on a day to day basis by a leader, supported by seven additional practitioners. All have appropriate early years qualifications and suitable experience working with young children. Recently, 5 members of staff achieved a Certificate of Higher Education in Welsh and Bilingual Practice. The playgroup, also, has been awarded the Merthyr Tydfil Healthy Snacks award. The playgroup trains students and currently has three full time and three part-time students in the setting.

The playgroup is accommodated in a purpose built room with direct access to a secure garden and play area. A Forest School provides opportunities for children to investigate and explore their environment.

The playgroup is registered for 24 children between the ages of two and five years and currently there are 64 children on the register. Children who attend the playgroup live in and around Merthyr Tydfil. All children speak English as their first language and of the 29 funded three year olds five have been identified with additional learning needs (ALN). Support for children with ALN is offered through Law yn Llaw. Some children are referred by the assisted place scheme with Early Years Partnership and can receive up to four free sessions. The playgroup has an equal opportunities policy and an admission procedure that welcomes all children.

The setting was last inspected by Care and Social Services Inspectorate in Wales in November 2010. This is the first Estyn inspection.

Summary

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

Current performance

- All children make good progress and achieve well
- A wide range of stimulating learning experiences is provided
- Planning engages all children and builds on existing knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Leadership promotes improvement.

Prospects for improvement

- The setting is well lead and practitioners work as an enthusiastic and effective team
- Planning and assessment arrangements have a positive impact on learning and teaching
- High quality learning experiences are stimulating and ensure progression of knowledge, understanding and skills.
- The reflective leader and staff share a vision to sustain improvement and achieve high standards

Recommendations

- Continue to develop self-evaluation to clearly identify areas that will lead to measurable improvements in standards.
- Provide more opportunities to develop Information Communication Technology skills.

What happens next?

The setting has gained an excellent judgement for Key Question 2 and will be invited to prepare a written case study describing how the planning and assessment positively impacts on learning and teaching.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

In relation to their starting points nearly all children achieve well and make good progress. Many children demonstrate an effective level of knowledge and understanding across the areas of learning and enjoy the challenge of varied activities. Nearly all are confident learners who readily explore their surroundings and try out new experiences.

All children apply their skills well to a wide range of structured play activities. Most have good communication skills which they develop through interacting with their peers and adults. They listen attentively to instructions and use a range of vocabulary and sentence structure to express themselves. Many are inquisitive, asking questions to help explore their immediate environment. Nearly all, enthusiastically, join in songs and rhymes and enjoy listening to stories and sharing books with adults. All children show an interest in books and handle them with care. Older children are beginning to understand that letters have sounds and words and pictures convey the story. Many children enjoy mark making activities in the role play area and writing area. They understand the purpose of the marks they make and hold a pencil correctly. Many recognise their name and a majority are able to write the initial letter of their name.

Most children correctly count objects, in English and in Welsh to five and older children, in English, to ten. They confidently order numbers and find missing numbers. They correctly sort by size and colour. They use mathematical language and skills correctly when comparing the size of the carrots and runner bean plants. They are developing an awareness of the purpose of money when buying items in the garden shop and of capacity when playing in the water tray.

A minority of children use information communication technology (ICT) confidently. They are beginning to develop computer skills and effectively use the telephone and microwave in their play. Children's skills in ICT are not fully developed.

Nearly all children show very good levels of independence in relation to their age. They confidently choose tools and resources for themselves, pour their own drinks, visit the toilet unaided and wash their hands afterwards. They confidently explore and experiment when playing outside and when in Forest school, looking for flowers for their magic potion. They work together well when building a house with blocks and when flower arranging. They concentrate well on focused tasks and are thoughtful in their responses to questions.

All children make good progress in creative development. They keenly experiment with a range of resources and techniques. They mix paints, cut out shapes and choose from a variety of materials to create bees. All children respond positively to music, singing with enthusiasm, and joining in with appropriate actions to songs and

rhymes. They enjoy role play in the home corner and talk appropriately about their visits to the garden shop.

Children's progress in Welsh is good. A majority show an understanding of familiar phrases and understand simple instructions. They confidently count to five and name colours. They use Welsh in different contexts throughout the day.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all children are well motivated and enjoy their learning. They enthusiastically enter the setting, engaging immediately with activities and are eager to talk to adults. Most children show high levels of self esteem and independence. They are happy to attempt new experiences and show pleasure with their achievement.

Behaviour is good. Most children co-operate well during play activities and demonstrate consideration for others. They concentrate well in focused tasks, most taking turns and sharing resources appropriately. They eagerly assist the adults in tidy-up sessions.

Nearly all children are aware of the need for personal hygiene such as washing hands after toileting and before eating food. They develop good social skills during snack-time and eat a variety of healthy fruit. Most children name the fruits and understand that eating fruit and drinking milk and water helps to keep them healthy. They are aware of the importance of cleaning their teeth after having food and do this with much enthusiasm. They enjoy exercising their bodies when taking part in "Busy Feet", using the equipment outside and exploring in Forest School. They dress up for charity and donate their own items for various appeals.

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

An excellent aspect of the work in the setting is the planning of learning experiences. The setting provides all children with a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities in all areas of learning. Excellent quality planning and organisation is firmly based on Foundation Phase principles. Planning details clear skill based learning targets, focused, continuous and enhanced activities. Planned activities ensure high quality learning experiences are provided to stimulate children and ensure progression of knowledge, understanding and skills. There is a very good balance of child led and adult led experiences both inside and outdoors. Learning experiences are further enhanced by excellent Forest school experiences where children are encouraged to explore and develop their understanding of the world in which they live. The setting makes very good use of the outside area to encourage involvement and enjoyment and extends children's experiences through visits to the supermarket, farm and sorting office. Planning caters for the needs of all learners and is differentiated and challenging. All key workers make a valuable contribution to planning and their assessments clearly feed into future planning, ensuring children's understanding, knowledge and skills are improved.

Planning ensures that children have many opportunities to become independent and encounter new experiences. Practitioners know the children well and encourage them to think for themselves and provide them with the confidence to take risks. Time is planned for children to tell each other what they have found out during their activities. Focused activities are used effectively to develop literacy, communication and mathematical skills and children use these skills during continuous provision and in their play. Organisation and planning for the development of information communication technology skills (ICT) are less effective. Positive relationships and respect for others is encouraged and practitioners make every effort to support those with low self esteem. Pictures of children with “warm” comments are displayed on the walls and practitioners reinforce how valued and loved the children are.

There is good provision to develop children’s Welsh language skills. Adults encourage children to count in Welsh in various contexts and name colours. Practitioners use Welsh throughout the day and encourage children to respond to simple questions. In the wigwam they ask “What is your name” and when asking the name of fruit “What is it? Activities promote awareness of the culture and traditions of Wales.

The children’s understanding of sustainability is good. Activities such as recycling of paper, cardboard and plastic and the collection of rain water to use when watering plants encourage children to think about minimising waste. They use thrown away items in their “junk” modelling. Their involvement in such activities helps children to develop their knowledge and understanding, skills and values of sustainability. The setting provides opportunities for children to learn about the wider world.

Teaching: Excellent

Practitioners have a secure knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Phase and have high expectations for all children’s learning. They provide exciting, stimulating, experiences across all areas of learning which motivate and challenge their young learners. Their enthusiasm and involvement with the children’s learning is outstanding and has a positive impact on standards. They make very good use of open ended questions to encourage children’s thinking and to develop language skills. They plan a good balance of child-selected activities and skilfully intervene to ensure children’s knowledge, understanding and skills are fully developed. Varied teaching strategies are used very effectively to engage and interest children of all abilities. Practitioners know their children very well and differentiate tasks to match the needs of the individual’s ability and prior attainment. Practitioners provide time for children to describe what they have been doing and check if learning intentions have been achieved. They make very good use of a wide range of age appropriate resources to enhance learning. ICT provision is adequate.

The arrangements for assessment are excellent and the outcomes are used to plan future activities and improve standards. Children’s progress and well-being is assessed on entry and thoroughly tracked during their time in the setting. Entry assessments are entered onto a data base and results analysed. Areas of concern are transferred to a Child Development Plan and these determine individual target areas. These are used when planning and individual progress can be tracked and used to show progression and improvement. All practitioners carry out daily observations and record their findings. Key workers are responsible for a group of

children and know well their ability and prior achievement. All practitioners are engaged with the process of assessment and use the outcomes to ensure children make good progress. The system of assessment has evolved to become a very effective tool to track progress and plan for future learning which is well matched to the needs of the children.

Parents and carers are kept well informed of their child's progress. Key-workers have daily contact and regularly discuss progress. The setting also provides a detailed report of progress when children leave the setting.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Very effective arrangements exist to ensure children's health and well being and these contribute positively to children's general development. There are good transition arrangements for children joining or leaving the setting. Children are very well cared for from the time they enter the setting and settle quickly. Practitioners form strong relationships with their parents/carers and are aware of and address any issues that might affect children's ability to settle and learn. The setting provides a safe, caring and happy environment for children to enjoy learning. Policies and procedures are in place to promote healthy living and well-being. The setting has the local Healthy Snacks award and children are encouraged to eat fruit and drink milk. A range of nutritious snacks is provided and children are encouraged to clean their teeth after eating. Play and active learning ensure children exercise daily. Well-being is developed through day-to-day activities and is closely monitored by the key-workers.

Children's learning needs are identified when they join and the setting has good arrangements for providing children with personal and specialist support. The setting liaises with outside agencies, the local authority and the co-ordinator in the school nearby to ensure plans are in place to meet the full range of their needs. Parents speak about the good support and guidance they receive from the setting and the positive impact it has on their child's progress and self-esteem. All children with additional learning needs have full access to all activities in the setting.

Learning experiences promote children's personal development well, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They promote a sense of curiosity about the world, fosters honesty, fairness and respect, encourages good behaviour and provides opportunities for children to engage in a wide range of community and cultural activities.

Procedures to ensure the setting is safe and secure are effective. Practitioners know how to respond appropriately if challenges arise in relation to poor behaviour, bullying and safeguarding. Appropriate risk assessments are in place and the leader is the named person with responsibility for Child Protection. All practitioners have engaged in training. The setting has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Excellent

The setting provides a stimulating, inclusive and welcoming environment for all children. The well maintained accommodation is bright with a variety of stimulating

displays of children's work and photographic evidence of children taking part in activities. Excellent use is made of the enclosed outside area. It is well resourced and provides children with a variety of experiences on a paved and grass surface. Direct access from the inside area encourages children to move independently from one area to another. The setting benefits from an excellent, onsite Forest School. All adults value children as individuals and sensitively encourage them to respect one another. All children have equal access to all areas of provision and diversity is actively promoted through activities and resources.

The setting is well staffed with highly committed, experienced and well qualified staff. Students undergoing training provide extra support. The leader places great emphasis on training and development resulting in practitioners having very good understanding of the Foundation Phase. An excellent variety of resources is well matched to the age and stage of the children and meets the requirements of the Foundation Phase curriculum. ICT resources are adequate.

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

An outstanding aspect of the setting is the leader's sense of purpose to promote and sustain improvement. She is committed to achieving high standards and has created a positive ethos where children and staff feel valued. A particularly good feature of her leadership is her excellent organisational skills and her ability to take the lead. Planning and assessment arrangements are excellent and have a positive impact on learning and teaching. Her thoughtful, reflective approach and monitoring of outcomes result in changes to ensure improvement. She motivates her team and all respond positively, seeking ways to promote improvements. All practitioners contribute to planning and assessment and time is given for administration. Effective appraisal results in staff development and comprehensive training. The varied and good quality training has increased confidence and raised standards. Relationships with parents/carers are excellent. Parents speak highly of all the adults and feel they are well informed about their children's progress and general well-being. The leader and the management work closely to ensure legal requirements are addressed and development plans are effective. The setting works closely with the local authority and responds positively to national and local initiatives. Development of the Foundation Phase has been well supported by the advisory teacher and ESIS.

Improving quality: Good

The setting has good procedures to evaluate its strengths and areas for improvement and the leader has made very good use of Foundation Phase training to improve curriculum planning and organisation. Parents, carers and children are consulted and their views are valued and used effectively to bring about improvements. The self-evaluation is thorough and honest and generally of a good quality although there is not enough emphasis on improving standards. The outcomes of self-evaluation feed into a development plan with well-focused action plans for improvement. There is evidence of improvement, for example, in consulting with children about their learning and developing links with the community and schools. The leader is reflective and

practitioners are open to new ideas, evaluating standards and provision on a daily basis. A positive culture of self-evaluation is evident in the setting.

Liaison with the Local Authority is very effective in improving quality. The advisory teacher is on site and is a regular visitor to the setting. She has worked very closely with all the adults in the setting to help promote "best practice" and develop effective procedures, such as planning and assessment, to improve learning and teaching. Practitioners value the support and are keen to respond to advice and guidance. They attend a wide range of training within their authority and with other authorities. This enables them to acquire new knowledge and skills and innovative approaches. Professional support from ESIS has given guidance to the leader in terms of improving standards. Last year the setting piloted the All Wales Continuum Assessment and attend regional and local Wales Pre-school Playgroup Association meetings.

Partnership working: Good

Partnership working contributes effectively to children's progress and well-being. Practitioners have very good relationships with parents and carers. The outcomes of the questionnaires indicate a high level of satisfaction with the progress that their children are making and the standards they achieve. Discussions with parents during the inspection support this view. Parents have daily contact with their child's key worker and newsletters and information on the notice board keep them up to date with important dates and information.

Links with the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership are beneficial to the work of the setting. Being part of the integrated centre fosters close relationships with a variety of supporting agencies. The Foundation Phase support team provide very good guidance and is close at hand providing support and guidance. Links with the co-ordinator in a neighbouring school and professionals from Law yn Llaw have enabled the setting to provide good support to children with ALN. Partnership with two other authorities, provide opportunities for practitioners to share good practice and improve skills. The setting enriches its provision through its use of visitors from the community, such as local fire officers. Visits to the sorting office and the garden centre enhance children's learning experiences. The setting also provides placements for students undertaking vocational courses.

Resource management: Good

There are sufficient well-qualified and experienced practitioners to meet the needs of the children and the curriculum. Practitioners are deployed effectively to make best use of their expertise and experience. Very good appraisal systems are in place to identify and address the development needs of the adults in the setting.

Accommodation is of a very high standard providing children with a clean, well maintained, pleasant environment to learn. Good use is made of the outside area to provide a wide range of interesting activities to encourage children to investigate and develop their skills. Budget and financial matters are dealt with efficiently and effectively by the leader. The management committee evaluate decisions to ensure they positively impact on improving provision and standards. Overall the setting achieves good outcomes for children and provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Responses from parent questionnaires indicate a high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the setting. These positive comments confirm that their children enjoy playgroup and parents feel they are safe and well supported. Nearly all agreed there is a good range of activities including trips and visits and that they understood the procedure for dealing with complaints. Positive comments highlight the care and support and praise the professional, supportive and highly regarded staff. The support given to children with ALN was praised during a conversation with a parent at the time of inspection.

Responses to discussions with children

Children spoken to during inspection said they enjoyed coming to playgroup. They have developed a very strong bond with their key worker and approach her if they need help or are anxious in any way. Nearly all had established friendships and most said their favourite activity was playing outdoors but some were more precise and said playing in the water or digging.

Appendix 2

Reporting inspector

Linda Vittle	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)