



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Little Stars Day Nursery
Mamhilad Park Estate
Pontypool
NP4 0HZ**

Date of inspection: October 2018

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the setting's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

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

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Context

Little Stars Day Nursery is a privately owned English-medium nursery in Pontypool, in Torfaen local authority. The setting is registered for 65 children between the ages of six weeks and four years. It offers early education sessions from Monday to Friday from 9.15 am until 11.45 am during school term time and full day care from 7:45 am until 18:00 pm. There are currently 20 children in receipt of funded early education.

At the time of the inspection there were a very few children identified as having additional learning needs. No children have Welsh as their home language.

There are seven members of staff including the management team. Five members of staff work with the three and four-year-old children. The two senior nursery managers have been in post since 2003 and the pre-school room leader since May 2018.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspected the setting in May 2016 and Estyn last inspected it in May 2012.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of the setting is excellent because:

- Nearly all children make outstanding progress from their differing starting points and develop a wide range of knowledge, understanding and skills
- Many children enjoy finding creative solutions to problems
- Most children show high levels of engagement and enjoyment in their learning
- A strong feature of the setting is children's independent learning skills and their willingness to take risks, persevere and to learn from their mistakes
- Practitioners plan high quality, stimulating and exciting learning activities which provide an excellent level of challenge for all children
- All practitioners have an outstanding knowledge and understanding of the foundation phase curriculum and how young children learn best.
- The setting provides superb opportunities for children to experiment, and facilitate learning highly effectively through purposeful play
- Practitioners use real life experiences to develop children's sense of awe and wonder in a meaningful way
- The setting is an inclusive and homely community where all children feel valued, are confident and happy, and enjoy talking about their learning experiences

Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- Leaders and managers have a very clear vision for providing exciting and inspiring activities for children, in an environment that is welcoming, stimulating and fun
- Managers empower others and the setting has a strong team that delivers exceptionally high quality teaching and learning experiences
- Leaders and managers have an outstanding knowledge of the setting's performance, its strengths and areas for development.
- Leaders create a culture of shared ownership, resulting in a strong drive for improvement
- Superb monitoring systems are highly successful in improving children's outcomes and ensuring consistently high quality provision
- Leaders regularly support other settings to develop good practice around teaching, learning and in developing the role of leaders
- The setting has well-established, wide ranging partnerships that make a positive contribution to the outcomes and wellbeing of children at the setting and beyond
- In view of the excellent standards, high quality teaching, provision and leadership, the setting provides excellent value for money

Recommendations

R1 Improve children's information and communication technology (ICT) skills

R2 Plan regular opportunities to develop children's thinking and problem solving skills systematically

What happens next?

The setting will draw up an action plan that shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will invite the setting to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

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

Nearly all children make outstanding progress from their differing starting points and develop a wide range of knowledge, understanding and skills that prepares them well for the next step in their education. Nearly all talk articulately to each other, staff and visitors. Most readily discuss recent events and recall details well, for example when recounting what they observe on their autumn walk.

Many children choose a story book independently and recite familiar phrases such as 'I will huff and I will puff' from the story of the Three Little Pigs, enthusiastically. They use information books to support their topic work confidently. For example, when researching autumn they name the animals such as squirrels, stating that they see these around the setting and that squirrels like eating acorns.

Nearly all children use mark making equipment confidently. Many are beginning to recognise and write individual letters, especially those in their name, after only a few weeks in the setting. Nearly all skilfully use paint brushes to make marks and draw pictures of the Little Red Hen with interesting detail. A few more able children enjoy working together to 'write' a story, drawing and mark making in pencil and felt tips. They read back their emergent writing enthusiastically.

Nearly all children count to ten in English and Welsh accurately, when counting the children at the start of the session. Most use mathematical language in an appropriate and relevant context. They understand the idea of full and empty when pouring water into a water wheel, and use taller and shorter than when measuring people against a sunflower. Most recognise simple shapes when building with blocks naming circles and triangles confidently. A few more able children identify cylinders when they build tall towers. Nearly all children join in enthusiastically with familiar number songs and rhymes such as five little currant buns, when playing in the role play café.

Most children use a range of ICT equipment with support, as part of their learning and play. Many control battery-operated toys well, programming them to change direction to search for different coloured autumn leaves. A few children use a camera with confidence to take photographs of their own and other's learning, and understand which button to press to print a copy to talk about with their friends. This extends children's oracy and numeracy skills highly effectively as they use them to recall and sequence events from their walks, discussing what came first, next and last.

Nearly all children make outstanding progress in developing their Welsh language skills. Many spontaneously count to six when printing with apples and most name the colours of paint they are using, accurately. Nearly all understand a wide range of instructions and respond eagerly.

Many children enjoy finding creative solutions to problems. For example, in the block play they wanted to work out how to make the twigs and bark stay upright when making a home and slide for a beaver. However, practitioners do not always provide enough opportunities for children to develop their thinking and problem solving skills independently enough.

Most children manipulate small tools like scissors and glue sticks well when making autumn leaf collages. They move nimbly across an obstacle course, demonstrating good levels of balance and control.

Wellbeing: Excellent

Nearly all children are enthusiastic and show very positive attitudes towards their learning. They demonstrate high levels of engagement and are extremely confident when making choices as they move between adult-focused and child led learning tasks. Most children show high levels of independence and engagement in their learning.

Nearly all children show respect and demonstrate good manners, happily taking turns when playing. They clearly enjoy each other's company and show a willingness to listen to, and act on, their peers ideas and suggestions. A strong feature of the setting is the exceptionally high level of independence that children demonstrate. Most are active and confident learners, willing to take risks, to persevere and to learn from their mistakes. Nearly all take on new challenges readily. For example, when navigating an obstacle course, balancing, hopping and jumping with good levels of co-ordination and spacial awareness, and working out how to make a car roll faster down a cardboard tube.

Standards of behaviour are exemplary. Nearly all pupils have high levels of self-control and understand the concept of taking turns. They readily undertake simple day-to-day jobs and tasks, such as acting as dinner time monitor, helping to set the table.

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

Practitioners plan high quality, stimulating and exciting learning activities. These provide an excellent level of challenge for all children, building successfully on their existing knowledge and skills. There are plentiful opportunities for children to partake in practical, fun and engaging activities, both indoors and outside. Practitioners encourage children to move between areas seamlessly. For example, following a story on the Little Red Hen, children painted pictures outside and rolled and kneaded playdough just like the hen did when making her bread.

Practitioners take excellent account of new curriculum changes and place the child at the centre of all learning. They provide outstanding opportunities for children to learn new skills, and to practise and embed them in a variety of 'hands on', interactive activities. Literacy and numeracy tasks are evident in all areas. This challenges and supports children in the regular use and application of these skills exceptionally well.

There are worthwhile opportunities for children to experiment and problem solve. However, practitioners do not always plan for these opportunities systematically enough.

Practitioners work closely with the children to map their ideas at the start of every topic, which motivates them highly effectively. They develop children's independence, resilience and sense of curiosity successfully. For example, as part of the autumn topic children wanted to find out more about pumpkins and to cut them open to see what was inside. They were curious to see if they could print and make patterns with dried fruits, so practitioners adapted planning to enable this to happen.

Practitioners plan for a broad range of ICT skills, including the daily use of a tablet computer. This allows children develop a suitable range of ICT skills, for example taking videos of each other as they learn and then playing them back independently.

The setting promotes children's physical development both indoors and outside successfully. Children have daily access to outdoor activities, and enjoy pedalling bikes. Practitioners develop children's hand eye co-ordination in creative ways. For example, they encourage children to drive plastic golf tees into a pumpkin, using a small wooden hammer, which they do with skill and accuracy, and a great deal of enjoyment.

The setting makes very effective use of their locality and visitors to enrich children's learning. A parent who is a vet spoke to the children about her job and how to care for animals. As a result, children take great pride in caring for their two pet fish.

Practitioners develop children's understanding of the Welsh language extremely well through the use of songs and by modelling phrases. As a result, children use Welsh naturally in their play when naming colours and counting objects. There are worthwhile opportunities for children to learn about the culture and traditions of Wales, when celebrating St David's Day and making Welsh cakes. A visit from a Welsh Paralympian athlete develops children's pride in being Welsh and understanding that they live in Wales successfully.

Teaching: Excellent

All practitioners 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. Practitioners have exceptionally high expectations of the children. The robust 'key worker' system ensures that practitioners have a thorough knowledge of the individual needs of specific children that they monitor. All practitioners use questioning skilfully to assess children's understanding, and to challenge and move their learning on successfully. As a result, nearly all children develop valuable literacy, numeracy and social skills and the ability to work independently.

Practitioners use 'together time' to share stories, introduce learning activities and to re-cap on the session, purposefully. There is a good balance of adult directed and

child led activities. Practitioners make excellent use of spontaneous experiences. For example, when finding and studying a beetle living inside a corn cob on the harvest table. Children then released it outside so that it could find its home and be happy.

Nearly all practitioners are highly skilled at knowing when to intervene in children's play and when to let them discover independently. However, on a very few occasions they are a little too quick to make suggestions about how children could resolve something, limiting children's independent problem solving skills.

A strength of teaching is the way in which practitioners promote exemplary social skills and behaviour. As a consequence, nearly all children co-operate exceptionally well and take turns with their peers willingly. Supportive working relationships between practitioners and children develop children's confidence and self-worth effectively. Nearly all children are happy to take calculated risks in their learning. For example, when building structures with blocks, they persevere well to rebuild and refine them when they collapse.

The setting has robust procedures for observing and assessing children. Through regular observations practitioners gain a thorough understanding of what children are able to do and what they need to develop. They use this information to plan for children's next steps in learning and to track children's progress robustly. Reports to parents are informative and outline what the children have achieved, identify targets for improvement and how parents can help at home.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The setting promotes children's health and wellbeing extremely successfully. There are extensive procedures to develop the children's understanding of health and hygiene. For example, there are numerous opportunities for children to improve their fitness levels through weekly walks around the grounds, negotiating challenging obstacle courses, and using bikes regularly. Practitioners bake wholemeal bread with the children and encourage them taste healthy foods after reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* story. All children know to wash their hands before eating food or after playing outside.

Practitioners value children's views and opinions, and adapt the learning environment to provide exciting opportunities for children to experiment. This fosters children's confidence very successfully. Nearly all children are curious, enjoy asking questions, and demonstrate exceptionally high levels of independence. The setting uses real life experiences expertly to develop children's sense of awe and wonder in a meaningful way. For example, children hatch chicks and watch caterpillars change into butterflies. There are practical opportunities for children to learn about sustainability when they recycle paper and plastic from the setting.

Planned activities place a strong emphasis on fostering positive values including, honesty and fairness. As a result, nearly all children have a strong sense of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This supports their awareness of being caring and kind friends very successfully. Practitioners encourage children to tidy up, and to say please and thank you. The impact is clearly evident in the exceptionally kind and caring way children interact with each other and adults.

There are effective arrangements to support children with additional learning needs. Individual play plans are of good quality and practitioners involve parents successfully in evaluating progress and developing new plans. Staff provide very effective support for children who need extra help with their learning. There are well-established links with professional support services to provide children with specialist support when required.

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

Learning environment: Good

The setting is an inclusive and homely community where all children have equal access to activities. As a consequence, all children feel valued, are confident and happy, and enjoy talking about their learning experiences.

Practitioners provide worthwhile opportunities to find out about other cultures, when learning about Diwali and reading stories such as The Old Lady and the Pumpkin, which is set in India.

There is a plentiful supply of high quality resources to enhance children's learning and sense of curiosity, and these match children's needs closely. Practitioners use of all available space well and this enables children to move between these areas seamlessly and to access all resources easily. The environment is bright and stimulating, with good quality displays celebrating children's work effectively.

The setting has access to a wide range of outdoor areas, including an enclosed playground and use of the sites' extensive grounds for nature walks. Practitioners use these successfully to support a range of skills, particularly children's oracy and numeracy skills.

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

Leaders have a very clear vision for providing exciting and inspiring activities for children, in an environment that is welcoming, stimulating and fun. They communicate their vision exceptionally well to all practitioners and parents. Leaders create a culture of shared ownership, resulting in a strong drive for improvement and very high expectations.

Leaders ensure that all practitioners have clear and current job descriptions and that they all understand their roles and responsibilities clearly. There are robust processes for managing staff performance. Appraisals identify training needs successfully and help to inform targets for improvement. These feed the setting's improvement plan and personal development needs highly effectively. Practitioners make good use of regular meetings to discuss children's achievements, and know, and adapt to, the individual needs of children exceptionally well.

Leaders challenge and support all practitioners robustly. This results in performance of a very high standard by all staff. Leaders use a skills matrix very effectively to

identify practitioner's training needs, or their potential to mentor other team members. The mentoring and development of practitioners is a strength of the setting and new members to the team develop quickly and refine their leadership skills very well. All practitioners strive to improve the performance of others. This ensures a seamless transference of skills, and a consistency of approach across the whole setting. As a result of managers empowering others, the setting has a very strong team that delivers outstanding teaching and learning experiences.

The setting considers local and national priorities very well. Leaders are actively involved with working parties on shaping the new curriculum. They use the latest developments in education to prepare a curriculum that is developing their children into independent and inquisitive individuals successfully.

Improving quality: Excellent

Leaders have an in depth knowledge of the setting's performance, its strengths and areas for development. They implement a very thorough and robust system of continuous self-review and reflection. All staff have an important role to play in this process, creating shared ownership and a strong drive for improvement. Each practitioner has individual objectives that are specific, measurable and time-sensitive. They are based around important day-to-day functions that impact directly on the quality of teaching and learning within the setting. These are reviewed monthly by the room leader, who together with the member of staff, adapts and changes them as the need arises. This enables the setting to be flexible and to adapt and react to situations to ensure the best outcomes for their children.

Room leaders regularly monitor different age groups in order to share positive practice across the setting and to identify possible areas for improvement in teaching, wellbeing and provision. This is highly successful in improving outcomes and ensuring consistently high quality provision. All practitioners review each other's practice in order to maintain this excellent progress. This outstanding practise enables the setting to develop a strong track record of bringing about improvements.

Leaders and practitioners review the setting's improvement plan regularly. They discuss strengths and areas for further development openly and professionally, evaluating progress against agreed objectives robustly. Leaders collect views and ideas from children successfully using happy and sad emojis placed in areas of learning, and through child-friendly questionnaires. They also regularly seek children's views on what they would like to learn and act upon suggestions quickly. These processes ensure that children have a strong voice in decisions that affect their learning.

The setting shares what it does well with other settings. For example, leaders support other settings well through their work with national working parties to improve children's oracy skills. This project links the use of ICT to take photographs in order to record children's learning and to promote quality talk. The setting also regularly supports other settings to develop good practice in teaching and learning and in the development of leaders. For example, leaders provide purposeful training and encourage staff from other settings to visit in order to observe excellent practise.

The setting has addressed the recommendations from the previous inspection successfully, especially in relation to the recording of spontaneous observations. There are robust systems for ensuring that observations of play and learning are recorded regularly. Practitioners now use these to ensure plan very successfully for children's next steps in their learning.

Partnership working: Good

The setting has well established, wide ranging partnerships that make a positive contribution to the outcomes and wellbeing of children at the setting and beyond. Practitioners communicate closely with parents, keeping them well informed. Parents receive useful information through the setting's social media activity, noticeboard, newsletters and daily personal contact. Practitioners share useful information about the current topic with parents and carers, and encourage them to take an active role in their child's learning. For example, they send small paper bags home for parents and children to collect items relating to autumn. The children bring these in to discuss and then decide what they want to find out more about. As a result, parents feel well informed about the settings day-to-day work, the progress their child is making and how best they can support them at home.

The setting works well with the consortium of local authorities to support other settings and to improve their own practice. They welcome other providers to observe teaching and learning at the setting and support them further to help develop leadership roles in their own settings.

Leaders work closely with local primary schools to ensure that the children settle quickly and with ease in their new environment. Children visit the schools on several occasions to watch concerts and Welsh theatre groups, and to meet their new teacher during the last term. Teachers from the schools visit the setting to read stories to the children. Practitioners work effectively with specialised agencies such as the Educational Psychology service to obtain timely advice in order to access the best support possible for individuals when necessary.

The setting's links with its immediate locality are very effective in supporting children to feel part of their community. They enjoy interacting with other people on the site during their regular walks and trips. For example, an ambulance driver, fireman and the cook who provides dinners to the setting, when they visit the cafe to say hello. This helps children to understand different people's roles and jobs and develops their social skills successfully.

Resource management: Excellent

Leaders make excellent use of staffing and resources to provide exceptionally high quality education for all children. They ensure that all practitioners have access to a wide range of beneficial training opportunities that link closely to the setting's priorities for improvement and their personal development needs. Leaders assess

the impact of the training regularly. This ensures that all practitioners are making the best use of what they have learnt to improve provision, and to ensure the best possible outcomes for children. Leaders are highly qualified trainers who can deliver valuable intervention strategies. This ensures that new staff can be upskilled quickly and efficiently when they join the setting. This is a very effective way of ensuring high quality provision for the children and is very good use of money and resources.

Leaders monitor the budget carefully in order to maintain and improve on the setting's high quality learning environment. For example, they have recently created an outdoor garden area and are resurfacing a play area in order to further enhance the children's learning experiences. Leaders use all grant funding wisely to target individual children in need of additional support. They employ additional personnel in order to release trained staff to deliver bespoke educational interventions with targeted children, resulting in improved outcomes for nearly all of them.

In view of the excellent standards, exceptionally high quality teaching, provision and leadership, the setting provides excellent value for money.

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
CIW	Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) 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 partnerships 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 three to seven 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 that provide education for three and four-year-olds.
Mudiad Meithrin	A voluntary organisation, which aims to give every young child in Wales the opportunity to benefit from early years services and experiences through the medium of Welsh
Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)	This is a professional membership association working with registered childminders to ensure local high quality home-based childcare, play, learning and family support.

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)	This organisation 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