



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

A report on

**Abergele Playgroup "Little Stars"
Community Centre
Market St
Abergele
LL22 7BP**

Date of inspection: May 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

Abergele Playgroup 'Little Stars' is an English-medium setting in Abergele in Conwy local authority. The setting is registered for 35 children from the ages of two to four years. It offers early years education sessions from 9am to 11.30am and 12.30pm to 3.00pm during school term time, from January to July for four days each week and is closed on Tuesdays. At the time of the inspection, there were 18 children in receipt of funded early education. The setting also offers Flying Start provision to eligible children.

The setting has identified a very few children as having additional learning needs. No children have Welsh as their home language or learn English as an additional language.

There are six full-time and one part-time members of staff including the full-time setting leader. The leader took up her post in 2006.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspected the setting in November 2015 and Estyn last inspected it in December 2012.

Summary

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

Current performance

The setting's current performance is good because:

- Most children make good progress from their starting points
- Most children develop their numeracy and communication skills well
- Most children come into the setting confidently and happily and enjoy the activities
- The setting offers a range of worthwhile learning experiences that support children's learning effectively
- Practitioners know the children well and respond to their individual needs appropriately
- The setting supports children's physical and emotional health and wellbeing effectively
- There are valuable opportunities for children to their social skills
- Practitioners welcome all children warmly and provide equal access to all the activities

Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are good because:

- The setting leaders have a strong vision for establishing firm foundations for the next step in the children's education
- Leaders establish strong links with parents and carers and work well with other agencies
- Practitioners are clear about their roles and responsibilities and fulfil these well
- The setting has a good track record of continuous improvement
- Leaders act on advice and support provided by other agencies to improve the quality of the provision
- The setting benefits from a good range of partnerships that support the setting's work
- Leaders deploy practitioners effectively and use their individual expertise well
- Practitioners attend training regularly and use of what they learn well to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- Leaders ensure that the setting has plenty of good quality resources to support children's learning

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the pace of the sessions and the range of strategies used by practitioners to support children's involvement in all activities
- R2 Ensure that good quality activities are available consistently for children to access daily
- R3 Establish and implement an effective system for recording observations and tracking concerns
- R4 Monitor the quality of teaching and learning regularly in order to improve standards

What happens next?

The setting will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. The local authority will monitor the setting's progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

During their time in the setting, most children make good progress from their different starting points. In particular, they grow in confidence, and develop their speaking and listening skills and their numeracy skills well.

Most children apply their numeracy skills in different contexts effectively. They count up to five confidently and many count to at least ten with adult support, for example when they count how many children are lining up to go outside. A few children recognise numbers during a fishing game and most use positional language correctly to act out a 'Bear Hunt' outside. During adult-led tasks, most sort and match objects confidently and many think hard about which coloured bear to choose to follow a repeating pattern correctly.

Most children make themselves understood effectively and talk confidently to adults and their friends about what they are doing. They show that they understand the reason for writing and make marks purposefully in different contexts. They enjoy using different writing implements such as pens, pencils and chalk indoors and outside. A few are beginning to form recognisable letters and many use their fine motor skills to draw with control, such as to draw a dinosaur with a tail. Most children follow a story well when practitioners read to them. They join in enthusiastically with repeated phrases and enjoy learning new words such as 'millipede' and 'hazelnut'. However, few children choose to look at books on their own. Most children are beginning to recognise their names appropriately on their pegs and during register time.

Most children use a variety of information and communication technology (ICT) role play equipment confidently and show a good understanding of their purpose. This includes the washing machine, microwave and mobile phone. They are beginning to learn to use a tablet computer to take photographs competently. Nearly all children develop their physical skills well. They use a range of large and small equipment outdoors and inside confidently, such as when they complete an obstacle course and use their fingers to open the tops on bug viewers. Nearly all children enjoy experimenting with musical instruments and mixing different coloured paints. This helps develop their emerging creative skills well.

During their time in the setting, most children learn a few simple words and phrases in Welsh competently and sing Welsh songs enthusiastically. However, few children use Welsh words spontaneously in their play.

Wellbeing: Good

Most children come into the setting confidently and happily. They respond well to instructions and older children follow the setting's routines particularly effectively. In general, nearly all show interest and enjoyment in the activities provided for them and are eager to find new things out. For example, they are curious about why a snail's

shell is empty and they run away from the 'bear' in the outside area with great delight. Most children settle well to different activities either chosen for themselves or directed by adults and persevere for a suitable length of time. However, occasionally, a few children lose interest when the pace of the session is too slow, such as at register time or after their snack.

Throughout the session, most children behave well towards one another and the practitioners. They work alongside each other effectively on the whole and are beginning to show courtesy and share appropriately. When it is their turn to be Helpwr Heddiw, they take their responsibility to share out the plates and cups seriously and with pride. Older children respond with appropriate suggestions when practitioners ask about the resources they would like in the different areas.

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

The setting offers a range of worthwhile learning experiences that support children's learning well. In general, planned activities engage children's interest successfully, particularly the activities that take place outdoors, such as shape hunts and a search for mini-beasts.

There is a focus on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills progressively and on planning activities that develop children's skills across all foundation phase areas of learning. Practitioners use the local authority's guidance document to plan regular focus tasks that move children's learning forward over time. This includes purposeful activities to build on what children have learned previously, such as helping children develop a thorough understanding of positional language through acting out a story using interesting props and energetic movements. The setting provides an appropriate balance between adult-led tasks and activities that children choose for themselves. However, the setting's planning to ensure that good quality continuous provision is available daily is less well developed.

Children benefit from regular opportunities to begin to develop their creative skills and there are good opportunities to develop their physical skills. Practitioners help children to learn about different cultures through worthwhile practical activities, such as learning to eat Chinese food with chopsticks. Through meaningful tasks, such as preparing bird food, practitioners help children begin to understand that they should treat living things with respect and concern. A programme of visitors to the setting and visits out into the local community enrich children's learning experiences.

The setting's ICT provision is developing appropriately overall and includes regular planned opportunities for children to learn to use ICT resources. On the whole, the setting focuses well on developing children's Welsh language skills. There are regular opportunities for children to hear and use simple words and phrases during circle times and to join in singing a good variety of Welsh songs. Practitioners encourage children to name colours and count in Welsh throughout the session, but using a greater range of words and phrases is at an early stage of development.

Teaching: Adequate

Practitioners work well together as a team. They understand the requirements of the foundation phase and constantly support children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. They are good language role models, know the children well and respond to their individual needs appropriately. This is particularly evident during focus tasks, where they adapt their expectations instinctively to challenge different children. However, practitioners do not always use a range of effective strategies to attract children's attention and support them to focus during large group activities. In general, practitioners establish strong routines and manage the behaviour of the large group of children well. However, the pace of the session is occasionally too slow to hold children's interest fully. Movement from one activity to another, such as at the end of snack time, is not always managed skilfully enough to keep all children engaged.

Practitioners understand the importance of providing opportunities for children to learn through play and active involvement and there are plenty of opportunities for children to choose freely from the activities on offer. However, at times, the indoor learning environment is not consistent or stimulating enough to support children's individual learning fully.

Practitioners use the foundation phase profile appropriately to establish children's starting points, to understand individual children's needs suitably and to track their progress at the setting. They evaluate children's achievements during regular focus tasks and share this information well during informal meetings. This helps to identify next steps appropriately and supports practitioners in moving children's learning forward competently. The setting keeps parents well informed about their children's progress through regular informal feedback.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The setting supports children's physical and emotional health and wellbeing effectively. There are plenty of opportunities for children to enjoy lively physical activities, both indoors and outside, that help children have fun as well as keeping fit. Practitioners teach children to wash their hands at appropriate times, and provide daily opportunities for them to brush their teeth. They encourage children to enjoy fruit at snack time. There are suitable policies to support children's emotional wellbeing and practitioners create a warm and welcoming atmosphere, which helps children to develop their confidence and to flourish.

Throughout the session, there are effective opportunities for children to develop worthwhile social skills, as practitioners encourage them to share, take turns and co-operate with one another. Practitioners develop children's spiritual, moral and cultural skills appropriately. For example, they act as good role models to help children develop a sense of right and wrong. The setting helps children to learn about acting sustainably through involving them purposefully in taking waste paper and plastic to the recycling bins at a nearby supermarket.

There are worthwhile arrangements to support children with additional learning needs in most respects. This includes working closely with parents and with appropriate specialist services. However, although practitioners observe children carefully and

get to know them well, they do not keep consistent records of their observations in order to identify and track emerging concerns effectively. The setting's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Learning environment: Good

There is a strongly inclusive ethos in the setting. Practitioners welcome all children warmly and provide equal access to all the activities.

Children benefit from a wide range of interesting resources that meet their needs and the requirements of the foundation phase curriculum well. For example, the setting provides good quality dough to develop children's fine motor, sensory and creative skills. There is a good supply of mark-making equipment, interesting books and resources to encourage physical play. Practitioners set up the room daily, and generally use the large indoor space available to them effectively. For example, they make good use of additional space to provide a separate story session for the older children. There are colourful displays that celebrate the children's work well and create an attractive environment. Practitioners display numbers and letters on the walls to help children become familiar with them. However, these are often too small for the children to see properly.

Practitioners use the small outdoor area well. They set up interesting and challenging activities there for the children, making the most of the available space. Practitioners plan worthwhile visits in the local area that enhance children's learning experiences. These include visits to a nearby residential home. Overall, the accommodation is safe and well maintained.

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

The setting leaders have a strong vision for establishing firm foundations for the next step in children's education. They share this effectively and succeed in creating a close-knit team of practitioners who work together well. Leaders establish strong links with parents and carers and work effectively with other agencies. This leads to a positive ethos in the setting where children and staff feel valued.

The leader and her deputy share responsibilities successfully to ensure that the setting runs smoothly. Practitioners are clear about their roles and responsibilities and fulfil these well. For example, they set out the provision daily and lead focus tasks purposefully, following the plans prepared by the deputy. There is an established system for carrying out regular appraisals, and practitioners discuss and evaluate their work regularly through informal discussions. This helps to establish high standards and leads to regular improvements over time. However, leaders do not monitor the overall quality of the provision well enough yet to identify a few shortcomings, such as in the pace of the sessions.

The setting focuses well on meeting national and local priorities. For example, there is a clear emphasis on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills effectively as well as on improving the provision for helping children to learn Welsh.

The leader has worked purposefully to ensure that there is a management committee in place and that it is informed regularly about issues affecting the setting.

Improving quality: Good

Setting leaders and practitioners review the quality of the provision regularly, both formally and informally. For example, practitioners evaluate how successfully focus activities meet children's needs. They share feedback during informal discussions and this helps to shape the plans and provision for the following fortnight appropriately. Leaders work well with other agencies and act on advice and support provided to improve the quality of the provision. For example, following advice from the local authority link teacher, the deputy leader has improved the quality of planning to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills.

The setting uses the local authority format to carry out a formal review of its work each year. This is generally honest and identifies suitable areas for improvement. Practitioners consult parents through an annual questionnaire. They act quickly on any suggestions made, such as ensuring that all children have a peg to hang their coats. The setting development plan is well set out. It includes five suitable targets that link closely with the findings of the setting's review. Practitioners have made good progress towards meeting four out of the five targets. This includes improving children's mark-making skills and providing more opportunities to develop children's physical skills.

Partnership working: Good

The setting benefits from a good range of partnerships that support the setting's work well. It communicates effectively with parents through regular informal contact at the end of sessions, written newsletters and electronic communication. There are useful opportunities for parents to become involved in the life of the setting through attending special events, such as a charity coffee morning and coming to see their children take part in an obstacle course. This close partnership supports children's wellbeing successfully.

The setting benefits from advice and training provided through the local authority and from Welsh Government initiatives such as the healthy pre-school scheme. There are useful links with health professionals that support individual children's needs well.

The setting has strong links with the local primary school that help prepare children for moving on to the next step in their education. Practitioners arrange useful visits to the school during the summer term for children to begin to become familiar with the building and the teachers. Partnerships with the local community enrich children's learning, such as through visits from the community police officer as part of the 'People who help us' theme.

Resource management: Good

The setting is appropriately staffed to teach the foundation phase curriculum effectively. Leaders deploy practitioners carefully and use their individual expertise well. Practitioners attend training regularly and make good use of what they learn to improve the quality of teaching and learning. For example, the setting has recently

improved provision for developing children's communication skills using active story telling techniques. Practitioners learned these during training funded from the early years development grant. Practitioners are beginning to extend their understanding of good foundation phase practice further through networking meetings set up by the local authority. However, at present, there are very few opportunities for them to share good practice through visits to other settings.

Leaders ensure that there are plenty of good quality resources to support children's learning effectively. They identify gaps in the provision efficiently and put plans in place to raise money to buy extra resources. For example, the setting is currently working towards buying a new tablet computer to improve opportunities for developing children's ICT skills. The setting leader has a clear understanding of the costs of running the group and reviews these regularly.

In view of the standards achieved by the children and the quality of the learning experiences and leadership, the setting provides good 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