



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

A report on

**Meithrinfa Seren Fach
Brithdir
Dolgellau
LL40 2RP**

Date of inspection: March 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

Meithrinfa Seren Fach is a Welsh-medium setting that meets in an old chapel in the village of Brithdir, near Dolgellau, in Gwynedd local authority. The setting is registered to admit 34 children between three months and eight years old. Practitioners provide early years education for three children, who are funded, and there are 56 children on roll. The setting is open five mornings a week from 7.30am until 6pm.

Nearly all children are from white British backgrounds and a minority come from Welsh-speaking homes. Very few children have additional learning needs.

The setting employs 10 full-time practitioners, one part-time practitioner and a manager. The manager was appointed to the post in November 2005.

The setting was last inspected by the Care Inspectorate Wales in March 2016 and by Estyn in December 2011.

Summary

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

Current performance

The setting's current performance is good because:

- The setting is a happy and caring community in which practitioners are welcoming, respect children as individuals and are sensitive to their needs, in order to recognise and commend their individuality
- Learning experiences are based on children's interests and needs, which motivates them to learn, ignites their curiosity to discover, and develops them successfully as independent learners
- Literacy and numeracy tasks challenge many of the children consistently, in both indoor and outdoor activities, so that there is coherence in children's experiences across the curriculum
- Practitioners enable children to develop their skills, present ideas and solve new problems effectively by encouraging them to consider their work in order to try to improve it
- Practitioners develop children's oral Welsh skills very effectively through opportunities that are planned spontaneously during the session
- Practitioners promote children's awareness of Welsh traditions, celebrations and culture very successfully
- Children have regular access to the excellent outdoor learning area, which is used very effectively to develop children's literacy, numeracy, creative and physical skills

Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- The manager and board of directors know what works well and what can be developed further through excellent regular and concurrent evaluation and quality improvement arrangements
- The manager's masterful standard of leadership has a very positive effect over time on developing effective provision and raising children's outcomes
- The manager invests in practitioners' wellbeing and professional development in order to establish a team of energetic and enthusiastic practitioners
- The setting has a conscientious and knowledgeable senior management team that leads practitioners' work across departments in order to develop clear aims and objectives
- The board of directors is stable, knowledgeable and very active in the setting's life in managing its resources purposefully to support learning and make improvements at the setting
- Stakeholders feel ownership and accountability in order to move the setting forward

Recommendations

- R1 Use practitioners' assessments effectively in order to plan activities that challenge all children regularly, particularly those who are more able
- R2 Ensure that the aims and objectives of activities are clear so that they have a clear focus on developing children's skills coherently

What happens next?

The setting will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations.

Meithrinfa Seren Fach will prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice that was seen during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Standards:

Wellbeing:

There is no report on children's progress, standards in their skills development, the Welsh language or their wellbeing. This is because there were not enough relevant children present at the time of the inspection to report on without identifying individual children.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Good

Learning experiences: **Good**

The setting, which reflects the foundation phase ethos very successfully, provides a broad and balanced curriculum through a wide range of stimulating activities for children. Learning experiences are based on children's interests and needs, which motivates them to learn and ignites their curiosity to discover. Practitioners develop valuable opportunities for children to develop as independent learners by including them in planning and encouraging them to express their interests in the termly themes. Practitioners map children's ideas as a starting point and guide them skilfully to learn about their community and the wider world. For example, they are challenged appropriately to compare and create buildings from around the world, such as Harlech Castle and the Tower of Pisa, in addition to cooking and tasting different foods. The foundation phase leader plans in detail to develop children's literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and thinking skills increasingly.

Practitioners evaluate activities in weekly meetings in order to ensure that children are given beneficial opportunities to read, write and use numbers across the areas of learning. As a result, many children acquire their skills with increasing confidence and accuracy, in line with their age and ability.

Literacy and numeracy tasks challenge many of the children consistently, both in indoor and outdoor activities, so that there is coherence in children's experiences across the curriculum. For example, practitioners remind the children regularly about the numbers who work in the different areas by encouraging them to count and identify the numbers by the entrances.

Planning for making early writing marks and number tasks across all areas of learning is stimulating and attractive. These activities challenge many children appropriately to make marks and investigate the properties of numbers and shapes. For example, practitioners plan beneficial opportunities for children to record choices and use money when paying for holidays at the travel agent. This activity also provides valuable opportunities for children to learn about the culture, food, languages and main features of different countries, such as Spain and Germany.

Provision to develop children's ICT skills is robust. Children are given good opportunities to use computers, electronic tablets, cameras, compact disc players and headphones. Practitioners provide beneficial opportunities for children to control electronic toys, for example by encouraging them to take Mr Urdd on a journey to reach the Eisteddfod safely. As a result of these activities, many children develop very good ICT skills. Practitioners develop children's physical, thinking and creative skills intelligently. For example, they provide beneficial opportunities for them to perform on the stage in the outdoor area.

The setting's provision to develop Welsh oracy skills is very good. All practitioners are excellent language models. They encourage children to use the Welsh language as much as possible in their learning by ensuring that the language flows and can be heard throughout the sessions. The Welsh dimension is given a prominent place in the setting's curriculum and activities. Practitioners promote children's awareness of Welsh traditions, celebrations and culture very successfully, which includes competing in a local eisteddfod and agricultural show, and celebrating St David's Day and St Dwynwen's Day. Practitioners also provide beneficial learning opportunities that encourage children to treat people from different cultural backgrounds with respect and tolerance. This includes celebrating the Chinese New Year and playing musical instruments from Africa.

The setting makes suitable use of visits and visitors to enrich children's learning experiences positively. This includes walks through the fields and visiting the shop to buy food for the kitchen.

Teaching: Good

Practitioners have high expectations of the children and themselves. They are very skilful in allowing children to take risks and discover independently, before intervening in order to offer further support and guidance when necessary. They enable children to develop their skills, present ideas and solve new problems effectively by encouraging them to consider their work in order to try to improve it. All practitioners are highly motivated and enthusiastic about children's achievements.

Practitioners have good knowledge of child development and of the requirements of the foundation phase, in addition to a sound understanding of how children learn. A range of beneficial activities and learning experiences provides an effective challenge for many children. Practitioners make creative and imaginative use of resources to maintain their interest so that they concentrate on a task. As a result, most children have a good level of commitment and many persevere for extended periods. An effective example of this is the activities to identify patterns by using different coloured pegs. However, the aims and objectives of activities are not always clear enough to ensure a clear focus on developing children's skills coherently.

All practitioners are aware of their role and use a range of teaching styles effectively, particularly when developing children's oral skills successfully. Practitioners have effective questioning skills, which has a positive effect on developing most children's thinking skills successfully.

Practitioners develop children's Welsh skills very effectively through opportunities that are planned spontaneously during the session. This is one of the setting's

strengths and, as a result, most children are very confident and eloquent communicators. Practitioners use circle time highly effectively to share stories, develop thinking skills, discuss children's achievements and consider what they will do during the day.

All practitioners work very well as a team. They review and evaluate their practice and children's achievements regularly during the session. Practitioners record useful comments about the children, which include purposeful details about what they achieve. This is effective and, as a result, practitioners are beginning to adapt activities continuously in order to extend individuals' achievement. However, they do not yet use the outcomes of these assessments effectively enough to plan further activities that challenge more able children to develop their skills further.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The setting is a happy and caring community, and practitioners ensure that children feel safe. Practitioners are welcoming, respect children as individuals and are sensitive to their needs. As a result, children are very content in the company of adults and are willing to ask for help and support, when necessary. All children are treated fairly and are given an equal opportunity to develop socially and emotionally. Children are encouraged to care for themselves and their friends and to help each other. Practitioners provide beneficial opportunities that challenge children to consider dangers, by encouraging them to conduct their own risk assessments, particularly when working in the outdoor area. There are robust arrangements to support children's health and wellbeing. The setting provides positive opportunities to promote children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These arrangements contribute well to children's overall development and wellbeing, and support their learning effectively.

Practitioners nurture values such as honesty, fairness and respect sensibly. For example, children are given beneficial opportunities to discuss their feelings and say thank you. This is evident as they take turns politely while eating snacks and drinking drinks around the table. The setting has appropriate arrangements to promote eating and drinking healthily.

Practitioners provide valuable opportunities for children to play an active part in environmental projects, such as recycling paper, cardboard, plastic and food. This is beginning to develop children's understanding of sustainability efficiently.

The setting uses positive and consistent behaviour strategies, which eliminate any disruption or unacceptable behaviour. The setting uses practitioners' expertise well when teaching and supervising activities. As a result, children are very familiar with the setting's routine and rules, and nearly all behave excellently. Practitioners have suitable qualifications and extensive experience.

The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. The setting is secure, doors are locked and only practitioners are able to open them. Practitioners are careful when children are collected, and ensure that they are in the care of their parents or a familiar carer at the end of each session.

The setting has suitable arrangements to identify children's additional learning needs when they join the setting, and they respond successfully to cater for them. The additional learning needs co-ordinator is very familiar with the necessary procedures in order to support these children. She conducts regular reviews of children's progress with parents and intervention agencies in order to ensure that individuals make sound progress.

Learning environment: Excellent

The setting is an inclusive community in which children have equal access to all learning areas and equipment. Practitioners know the children very well, and their individuality is recognised and commended. All children have equal access to an interesting, stimulating and broad curriculum, both inside and outside the building. Schemes of work place a clear emphasis on recognising, appreciating and celebrating diversity. Practitioners use dolls and artefacts, such as traditional masks and costumes from different ethnic backgrounds, to promote cultural differences effectively. Practitioners also develop children as knowledgeable global citizens by teaching them about food from foreign countries, celebrating different national festivals, such as the Chinese New Year, and sharing fables from Africa.

The setting uses its resources purposefully to meet the requirements of the foundation phase and children's needs. The extensive resources are accessible to children, which promotes their sense of responsibility successfully. Continuous activities, focus tasks and enhancement opportunities share learning resources effectively. Their use by the children has a positive effect on their development and ensures that nearly all children make at least good progress in their learning.

Children have regular access to the excellent outdoor area, come rain or shine. This resource is used very effectively to develop children's creative and physical skills. Children are encouraged to move freely around the learning areas and to take part in various activities. Practitioners provide regular opportunities to interact with children in order to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in the outdoor learning areas. For example, they provide valuable opportunities for children to post letters through numbered post boxes and park their bicycles in specific places in the car park. This ensures that children develop their numeracy skills particularly well. The outdoor area also includes growing areas and resources that enable children to conduct environmental investigations, such as insect hunts and opportunities to feed the birds. The 'quarry', the performance stage and the mud kitchen ensure that children's creative skills are reinforced very soundly and transferred successfully from the indoor learning areas. Practitioners use the facilities in the local area very purposefully, and take advantage of the wildlife and magnificent rural views that surround the setting to nurture children's appreciation of their habitat. The building and grounds are of an exceptional quality, are well maintained and safe.

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

Arrangements for managing the setting, which have a very clear focus on developing robust provision, are excellent. The standard of this masterful leadership has been maintained for a long time and has a very positive effect on children's outcomes.

One of the manager's strengths is her exceptional understanding of the need to develop conscientious and knowledgeable employees. She does so successfully by investing in their wellbeing and professional development. As a result, she has established a team of energetic and enthusiastic practitioners.

The setting has a senior management team that leads the work of practitioners across the departments at Meithrin Seren Fach skilfully and develops clear aims and objectives. Purposeful use of departmental meetings and whole staff meetings to discuss the priorities in the development plan ensure that provision has a very good effect on provision and children's outcomes. Leaders ensure that everyone shares agreed values and has a particular understanding of their responsibilities in order to fulfil their roles highly effectively while meeting children's needs.

The setting has a clear direction, a sense of purpose and very robust daily practices. There is a clear order and smooth pace in teaching sessions and during snack time and lunchtime.

Practitioners' supervision sessions include observations by the manager and members of the board of directors. This activity informs annual evaluations, which highlight practitioners' training needs successfully. As a result, practitioners update their knowledge regularly and know what to do in order to improve. For example, the setting's assistant manager has undertaken beneficial training on how to use the outdoor area. This has had an excellent effect on most children's outcomes by providing them with very valuable outdoor experiences. The manager has also established effective procedures to induct new practitioners.

The board of directors, which has been stable for over ten years, is very knowledgeable and active in the setting's life. Members have fostered a very close relationship with practitioners and undertake their responsibilities with conviction.

Policies are comprehensive and relevant to the setting's work. Excellent consideration is given to national and local priorities, such as eating healthily and nurturing independent and confident learners. The leadership's focus on developing children's Welsh language skills is exceptional and is a prominent strength across the setting.

Improving quality: Excellent

The manager has excellent consistent and concurrent arrangements for evaluating and improving quality, which provides a robust direction and structure for the setting's work. These arrangements have been expanded gradually to include the views of practitioners, parents and carers, and the local authority, and have continued to focus on children's outcomes in order to ensure that they achieve to the best of their ability. As a result, stakeholders feel ownership and accountability in order to move the setting forward.

The manager and board of directors know what works well and what can be improved further over time, by adopting robust strategies and accepting valuable advice from others. This includes developing the outdoor area significantly in order to plan excellent learning experiences.

All practitioners are knowledgeable about the setting's current work. The manager, with the support of the board of directors, has established rigorous arrangements to monitor the standards of children and provision. Effective co-operation between practitioners from day-to-day achieves this very successfully. Practitioners evaluate the setting's work conscientiously and share ideas sensibly. The manager uses funding very efficiently in order to support priorities for improvement by ensuring beneficial training, good quality resources and high levels of staffing.

The manager responds very well to self-evaluation outcomes. She identifies the main areas for development and takes robust steps to maintain effective practices and implement changes. Practitioners monitor and evaluate progress effectively in teams to develop children's skills and improve provision. There are excellent links between self-evaluation and the targets in the development plan, which focus on improvements at the setting. This includes giving very good consideration to success criteria, funding and specific responsibilities, in addition to allowing a practical timescale for actions to have an effect.

Members of the board of directors evaluate progress against the development plan's priorities regularly. Representatives conduct monitoring visits and observe teaching formally in order to report back to the other members. These written reports form a firm basis for further planning for improvement.

Practitioners and members of the board of directors are open to new ideas and keen to experiment with different ways of working. Practitioners are very willing to embrace ideas that are suggested by the local authority's advisory teachers and officers from Mudiad Meithrin. This has a positive effect on children's learning and wellbeing.

Partnership working: Good

A wide range of partnerships contributes strongly to children's good achievements and wellbeing. The setting has a very positive relationship with parents, and it shares information with them effectively through information leaflets and social media. The daily informal and friendly opportunities ensure that parents receive appropriate information about their children's development. Parents and carers appreciate the open-door policy and opportunities to meet with key workers, as required. This arrangement encourages parents to play an active part in their children's education successfully. A good example of the partnership is the parents' willingness to build resources for the outdoor area by using recycled wood. All parents appreciate the practitioners' efforts, particularly the high standards of care and the quality of education. This relationship begins long before the children start at the setting, as the manager holds useful open days for prospective parents.

The setting has established robust links with the local school. There are effective arrangements for transferring information about individual children. The support that is provided by the local authority and Mudiad Meithrin benefits the setting appropriately, by implementing training and advising practitioners. Advice and suggestions help to move the setting forward and contribute towards purposeful provision and very effective leadership.

Practitioners work with other diligently, share information about children and know whom to contact and when, should they need additional support. The setting uses the extensive community links very well to support children's learning. For example, as part of celebrating the setting's ten-year anniversary, children worked with a local author to create a book about a character called 'Seren Fach', in addition to publishing a stylish book of the children's favourite recipes.

Resource management: Excellent

The setting is a strong learning community with an established culture of co-operation between practitioners and other partners. This includes positive links with the local authority, the local community and the schools that admit children for full-time education.

The leadership is positive and aims consistently to improve all aspects of the setting's work. Performance management procedures are rigorous and lead to purposeful training, and effective teaching and learning. This enables practitioners to develop and share their professional knowledge successfully. Strategic planning supports the effective teaching of all practitioners. The board of directors ensures that the setting has enough qualified practitioners who have regular access to suitable training.

The manager has a very good understanding of the budget and prioritises expenditure effectively, in line with the planned actions for improvement. The board of directors supports the setting well in order to manage its resources purposefully to support learning and make improvements at the setting. It ensures that the use of funding has a direct effect on children's achievements and wellbeing. This leads to high standards in terms of teaching, children's outcomes, the building and the setting's resources.

The setting provides excellent value for money because of the practitioners' effective provision, the stimulating learning experiences and the excellent leadership.

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