



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

A report on

**St Mary's Playgroup
St Mary's Catholic Church Hall
Regent Street
Wrexham
LL11 1RB**

Date of inspection: June 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

St Marys Pre-school Playgroup is an English-medium setting in Wrexham local authority. The setting is registered for up to 36 children from the ages of twenty months to four years. It offers early years education sessions from 9.30am to 12.00pm during school term time from January to July, for four days each week, and is closed on Fridays. At the time of the inspection, there were 12 children in receipt of funded early education.

The setting has identified a very few children as having additional learning needs. More than half are learning English as a second language and no children speak Welsh at home.

There are two full-time members of staff including the setting supervisor. The supervisor took up her post in May 2012.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspected the setting in July 2017 and Estyn last inspected it in January 2012.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of the setting is good because:

- Most children make consistent progress across all areas of learning
- Most children are eager to learn
- Nearly all children show good levels of concentration and engagement in their chosen activities
- Nearly all children behave well and most share equipment willingly
- The setting benefits from warm relationships where adults and children share mutual trust and respect
- Practitioners work closely together to provide a well-balanced and interesting curriculum that engages most children

Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are good because:

- The setting's supervisor provides clear vision and direction
- The management committee supports the setting effectively
- The setting's self evaluation process accurately identifies areas of strength and sets appropriate targets for development
- Practitioners work together constructively to bring about worthwhile improvements
- The setting benefits from the support and advice of the local authority
- The setting has positive links with parents and with the local community

Recommendations

- R1 Improve planning to enable children to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively
- R2 Plan purposefully for the development of children's thinking and problem solving skills

What happens next?

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

Main findings

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

Most children make good progress from their different starting points during their time in the setting. Most children, including children learning English as an additional language, develop their listening and speaking skills well. For example, they join in with group singing and take part in conversations with adults and with one another. Most children develop effective early reading skills. When listening to a story, nearly all children sit quietly and listen attentively, showing interest in what is happening. For example, they identify and count the fruits eaten in a popular story book, and talk about which foods they like and dislike. A few children choose to look at books independently. They handle them carefully and turn the pages correctly, and look at the pictures with interest and concentration.

Most children enjoy making marks in different ways using a range of implements such as painting or spraying water onto a wall, painting at the easel or making patterns in 'gloop' and shaving foam. Most develop increasing control and begin to understand the purpose of writing when they sign a card for mother's day and post them home. Many also understand the use of making a mark to record how many of each type of creature they found on their bug hunt.

As part of their morning welcome time, most children join in with adults to count the number of children present. During the session many count objects up to at least five, such as when counting how many woodlice they found on their bug hunt. Many use mathematical language accurately during their play. For example, they talk about the squirty water bottles being full or empty. Most recognise and match numerals to five when they park the vehicles in their correct bays outdoors.

Most children develop competent ICT skills. They use a tablet computer confidently to take photographs and film short videos of the activities taking place in their setting, which they enjoy sharing with their friends. Many operate a CD player independently and enjoy playing with a toy mobile phone and musical mat. However, they do not build on what they already know well enough over time.

Nearly all children make good progress in their use and understanding of the Welsh language from their different starting points. They join in singing familiar Welsh songs enthusiastically, count together to ten and respond to a 'bore da' song with 'yma'. Most children understand the Welsh words and phrases that adults use during the sessions and know the Welsh for three or four basic colours.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all children enjoy their time in the setting. They arrive happily and full of enthusiasm for what they are going to find. They settle quickly into the daily routines and engage fully in all the setting's activities. Most make clear and confident choices about what they want to do. For example, they choose an activity indoors when

everyone else has chosen to go outside. Most children concentrate well on their tasks and persevere for reasonable lengths of time.

Nearly all children develop good independent skills. For example, they put wellingtons on to go outside to play with water or help themselves to fruit using a fork at snack time. Most children play well together and their behaviour is good. They understand the setting's rules and show care and kindness towards one another, such as when older pupils help younger ones to put their shoes and socks back on.

Nearly all children have a good understanding of how they can stay healthy. They know it is important to wash their hands before they eat and after using the toilet. At snack time they enjoy a selection of healthy snacks and know that they must not use their fingers to take food from the serving plate.

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

Practitioners work together effectively to plan a good range of interesting activities, indoors and outdoors, that children enjoy. In general, they succeed in planning activities that meet children's needs well so that most make effective progress across the different areas of learning. Practitioners plan carefully to help children who are learning English as an additional language to develop their communication skills successfully. However, practitioners do not plan to develop children's thinking and problem-solving skills well enough.

There are good opportunities for children to develop their literacy skills. Practitioners encourage children to recognise their names during self-registration in the morning and again when they sit down at snack time. They plan worthwhile daily opportunities for children to develop their numeracy skills. For example, they count how many children are present and use number cards to help children learn to recognise numerals successfully. In the outdoor area, there are purposeful opportunities for children to develop their mathematical understanding further as they park vehicles in the correct numbered bays and fill and empty plant pots in the digging area.

The setting provides appropriate opportunities for children to develop appropriate ICT skills when they use resources such as a toy mobile phone in the 'ty bach twt and when they take photographs and videos on a tablet computer. However, practitioners do not plan specifically for children to develop their ICT skills progressively.

Practitioners use Welsh effectively throughout the sessions. They include simple Welsh songs during routines and encourage children to count and to name colours in Welsh during adult led activities. Children learn about Wales and Welsh traditions when they dress up, make daffodils and bake Welsh cakes to celebrate St David's Day.

Practitioners further enrich children's learning experiences through visitors to the setting such as a lollipop lady who talks about the importance of road safety. They also take the children out into the local community regularly to visit the library, shops and Wrexham museum.

Teaching: Good

Practitioners have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the foundation phase principles. There is a good balance between adult-led and child-selected activities and practitioners take appropriate note of children's interests when planning activities. They are fully involved with the children during the sessions and provide good quality support where needed, but also know when to stand back and allow children to explore and investigate for themselves. A particular strength is the attention practitioners pay towards supporting children whose first language is not English. They are good language models and make beneficial use of questioning to ensure children understand. As a result, most children make good progress. All practitioners manage children's behaviour well and provide a good balance of positive praise and encouragement.

Practitioners know the children well. They meet together regularly to evaluate how successfully children are progressing, and use this information effectively to inform future planning. This enables them to provide activities that meet children's needs and interests well.

Practitioners keep parents well informed about their children's progress through regular informal contacts and a formal meeting towards the end of the year.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The setting promotes children's understanding of healthy living successfully. It is a warm and caring community where practitioners give high priority to children's health and wellbeing. All practitioners treat the children with respect. They are good role models and encourage children to understand the importance of being kind to one another and to share and take turns. This supports the children's spiritual, moral and social development effectively.

There are worthwhile opportunities to develop children's sense of awe and wonder, such as when they hunt for bugs in the outdoor area or go to look at the snowdrops they have planted in a local park. Practitioners further support children's spiritual development by promoting a quiet moment before snack when they say a simple prayer of thanks together using sign language.

The setting provides beneficial opportunities for children to learn to act sustainably. Practitioners invited a visitor to speak to the children about recycling and now include recycling activities into the children's daily routines. There are containers for adults and children to recycle paper, cardboard and plastic within the setting, and children develop their understanding further when they help to take these to the large recycling containers in the cathedral car park.

The setting provides effective support for children with additional learning needs. When appropriate, they prepare individual play plans with appropriate personal targets. Practitioners share these with parents and review progress regularly. Beneficial links with external agencies such as speech and language support provide useful additional advice.

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

Learning environment: Good

Practitioners have established a highly inclusive and caring ethos where all children are valued and have equal access to all resources and activities. They value the diversity of children's backgrounds and act appropriately on this information, such as when they celebrate Polish festivals.

The hall used by the setting is large and spacious. Practitioners set the room up and tidy everything away every day. They provide good quality resources that meet children's needs effectively across all areas of learning. They display examples of children's work around the hall together with a range of bright and attractive signs and notices for the areas of learning. This creates a stimulating learning environment for the children.

Practitioners have worked hard to develop the outdoor area. They make the most of the space available to provide a full range of activities that extend children's experiences well. For example, children put the tops of a range of fruit and vegetables such as carrots and pineapples into shallow water in a large tray outside to see if they will sprout. Practitioners ensure that children use the outdoor area daily and that both indoor and outdoor learning environments are safe and secure.

Practitioners use the local community effectively to support children's learning. They take children on regular visits to the local park and museum, to the shops and to look around the cathedral.

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

The setting leader has a clear vision to provide high quality learning experiences for all children and sensitive support for children with English as an additional language. She shares this successfully with her deputy and they work closely together to create a happy and engaging learning environment for the children. They work together effectively to bring about improvements and take good account of advice from outside agencies.

There are sound processes in place to manage the performance of staff. Targets focus appropriately on training needs and these support practitioners well in their professional development. As a result, practitioners have successfully developed the outdoor area to provide children with a wealth of interesting and exciting areas to explore and learn.

The setting takes good account of national and local authority priorities. For example, practitioners have undergone specific training on providing children with a healthy diet. As a result, they ensure that the children's morning snacks are healthy and nutritious.

Improving quality: Good

Practitioners follow set procedures for self-evaluation and planning for improvement, using the local authority's template. The supervisor works closely with her deputy to conduct an efficient annual self-evaluation of the work of the setting and to identify priorities for further improvement.

The current development plan sets relevant priorities that identify the persons responsible, together with achievable timescales and costings. The setting leader works closely with the chair and treasurer of the management committee to prioritise expenditure sensibly in line with these priorities. The setting leader monitors progress towards meeting these targets regularly and this enables the setting to move forward effectively.

The setting consults parents annually through a questionnaire and uses advice and guidance from external agencies well, such as the local authority link teacher and the Wales Pre-school Providers Association, to help it move forward.

Partnership working: Good

Practitioners involve parents and carers in supporting their children successfully. There is a useful parent rota. This provides helpful support for practitioners, builds a sense of community and allows parents to see at first hand the progress their child is making and how they interact with others. Practitioners keep parents well informed about the life of the setting through newsletters and an information board.

Transition arrangements into the setting are effective. These allow parents to stay with their child to help them to settle. This is particularly beneficial for those children who have very little English when they start at the setting. Strong links with the school to which most children transfer prepare children well for when they move on to the next stage in their education.

The setting benefits from the constructive partnership with the local authority link teacher. This has led to positive improvements, such as the development of an effective system of observing and recording children's progress in order to identify their next steps in learning.

Practitioners make good use of the local community to extend children's experiences. For example, visits to the local shop to buy items for their morning snack enable children to learn about the purpose of money and staff from a nearby supermarket come to talk to the children about the importance of healthy eating.

Resource management: Good

The setting has enough staff to support teaching and learning well. An appropriate supply of good quality resources supports children's progress effectively across most areas of learning.

Practitioners access a worthwhile range of training and focus effectively on putting into practice what they learn. For example, following recent training, practitioners improved opportunities for children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills by providing exciting opportunities in the outdoor area, such as mark making on the walls with water in squirty bottles.

The treasurer oversees the budget efficiently. The setting leader manages the limited funds carefully to meet the setting's needs within the constraints of the available finances.

In view of the quality of the learning environment and the good progress achieved by the children, the setting offers 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	<p>Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) is a division of the Department of Public Services and Performance in the Welsh Government.</p>
Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP)	<p>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.</p>
Foundation Phase	<p>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</p>
Foundation Phase child development assessment profile (CDAP)	<p>Foundation Phase on-entry assessment profile; a statutory requirement in schools from September 2011 and settings from September 2012</p>
Local authority advisory teacher	<p>These teachers provide regular support, guidance and training to non-maintained settings that provide education for three and four-year-olds.</p>
Mudiad Meithrin	<p>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</p>
Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)	<p>This is a professional membership association working with registered childminders to ensure local high quality home-based childcare, play, learning and family support.</p>

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