



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

**A report on**

**Acorns Nursery  
Rhos-y-Fedwen Primary School  
Honeyfield Road  
Ebbw Vale  
Blaenau Gwent  
NP23 5TA**

**Date of inspection: November 2017**

**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:

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

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**Publication date: 15/01/2018**

## Context

Acorns Nursery is an English medium setting situated in Rassau, near Ebbw Vale in Blaenau Gwent local authority. It is privately run and based in a classroom in Rhos y Fedwyn Primary School.

The setting is registered for a maximum of 20 children aged between two and four years old. It is open on weekdays in term time and provides funded nursery education each morning and childcare in the afternoons. At the time of the inspection there were 29 children on roll. This includes a very few three-year-olds, none of whom are funded by the local authority.

All children speak English as their first language and a very few children have additional learning needs.

There are four appropriately qualified and experienced full-time practitioners, including the proprietors who were first appointed as the registered persons in 2011. The setting was re-registered in September 2015 following its relocation to a classroom in the primary school.

The setting was last inspected by the Care and Social Service Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) in November 2016 and by Estyn in May 2012.

## Summary

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| <b>The setting's current performance</b>       | <b>Good</b> |
| <b>The setting's prospects for improvement</b> | <b>Good</b> |

### Current performance

The current performance of the setting is good because:

- The setting provides an interesting range of activities that support children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills effectively
- Practitioners have a sound understanding of foundation phase requirements
- The setting provides purposeful activities that support children's learning well
- There is a strong emphasis on supporting children's wellbeing and sessions are structured well
- Practitioners build strong working relationships with the children
- There is a calm, happy and inclusive atmosphere in the setting
- There is a good range of interesting resources for children to use

### Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are good because:

- Leaders organise the setting well and share responsibility for different management roles effectively
- Practitioners work together effectively and form a strong team
- Partnerships with parents, the local authority and the community make a worthwhile contribution to children's learning
- The setting has sound procedures for self-evaluation and planning for improvement
- Leaders identify useful improvement targets that help the setting move forward
- The setting responds well to advice and support from the local authority

## Recommendations

- R1 Improve planning to identify the learning focus more clearly in adult led and free choice activities
- R2 Use assessments to plan the next steps in children's learning effectively
- R3 Implement improvement plans and monitor their impact effectively
- R4 Plan effectively for future expenditure to meet the setting's improvement targets and resource needs

### **What happens next?**

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

## Main findings

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| <b>Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?</b> | <b>n/a</b> |
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### **Standards: n/a**

There is no report on children's progress, standards in their skills development, Welsh language and wellbeing. This is because the number of relevant children present at the time of the inspection was too few to report on without identifying individual children.

### **Wellbeing: n/a**

There is no report on children's progress, standards in their skills development, Welsh language and wellbeing. This is because the number of relevant children present at the time of the inspection was too few to report on without identifying individual children.

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| <b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b> | <b>Good</b> |
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### **Learning experiences: Adequate**

The setting provides a range of suitably challenging and stimulating activities across all areas of learning. It implements the foundation phase with increasing success so that children can make effective choices and learn through their play independently.

The setting has begun to use a different planning format this term. This helps practitioners to focus more clearly on developing children's skills in both adult led and free choice activities. However, this new system is at an early stage of development. The information recorded about the learning focus for different activities is not detailed enough yet to be fully effective.

Practitioners work together to prepare fortnightly plans that take good account of children's interests. They plan imaginative activities linked to interesting themes based on popular children's books and implement these flexibly to respond to children's needs. As a result practitioners are beginning to focus more clearly on developing children's skills systematically. This is starting to have a positive impact on the development of children's communication, pre-reading, writing and counting skills. However, practitioners do not always identify clearly enough what skill they want the children to learn. This limits their ability to plan the most appropriate next steps effectively in order for children to make the best progress.

Provision to promote children's information and communication technology (ICT) skills is at an early stage of development. For example, children have good opportunities to use their thinking skills to direct a programmable toy and learn to take digital photographs. However, overall, the setting does not plan carefully enough to develop a broad range of ICT skills.

Learning activities promote children's independence and creativity successfully. As a result, most children choose tools and materials confidently, for example when they

create collage pictures. The setting uses the school grounds and outdoor classroom imaginatively in order to develop children's respect for the environment. For example, practitioners help children learn about the changing seasons in the school grounds.

The setting provides a good introduction to the Welsh language. Practitioners model simple Welsh phrases, ask questions and use Welsh vocabulary regularly around the setting. As a result, a few children are beginning to answer simple questions, such as 'pa liw?' confidently. Practitioners promote children's awareness of Welsh history and culture appropriately, for example they celebrate St David's Day and read Welsh stories regularly.

### **Teaching: Good**

Practitioners manage learning well and their approach is purposeful and enthusiastic. They interact positively with the children; they have high expectations and a sound knowledge of good foundation phase practice. All are good language role models in English and Welsh. This helps to improve children's speaking and listening skills and extends their vocabulary successfully.

Practitioners have an intuitive understanding of how children learn. They understand the purpose of activities and engage children's interest successfully, for example when reading stories. They give plenty of time for children to complete tasks and use questioning and praise well to encourage perseverance. Practitioners promote opportunities for incidental learning skilfully. For example, they encourage children to sort toy animals by size and to use appropriate vocabulary. Practitioners are reflective and review the impact of activities well as the children play. For instance, they strengthen children's knowledge of colours by asking them to jump into a particular coloured hoop.

There are appropriate procedures for assessment that practitioners follow conscientiously. Practitioners compile detailed records for each child and regularly record individual achievements. These observations provide a good basis to help plan children's next steps in learning. However, their use of ongoing assessments effectively to guide future planning is at an early stage.

Parents value informal communication with practitioners about their child's progress and receive an informative written report before their child transfers to school.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The setting promotes children's health and wellbeing successfully. In particular, practitioners support children's emotional wellbeing very effectively. They provide positive and well-structured experiences and, as a result, the children are happy, settle well and develop a good understanding of keeping healthy. For example, practitioners promote energetic outdoor play and dance sessions regularly.

Practitioners encourage children's sense of curiosity about the natural world effectively. They make good use of the school grounds to observe and marvel at a variety of plants and wildlife across the seasons. They foster positive values successfully, including respect for others, honesty and fairness. Practitioners

promote positive relationships and good behaviour well. For example, they read stories that show the ways children and adults should behave. This helps children learn about sharing resources and taking turns purposefully. The setting celebrates a range of customs from different countries, such as Chinese New Year, appropriately.

The setting provides suitable opportunities for children to develop their understanding of energy saving and recycling.

There are well-established procedures to support children who need additional care and support. The setting draws on the advice of a network of professionals regularly. Practitioners set useful improvement targets and review these regularly. They include parents well and share information about children's progress constructively using a helpful home to setting diary.

Practitioners implement appropriate procedures to ensure that the setting is safe and they carry out risk assessments regularly. The setting's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Learning environment: Good**

The setting is a calm, busy and purposeful environment. All the children are treated equally and they are included fully in the activities provided. Practitioners take good account of children's individual needs, which helps to ensure that they feel safe and free from undue anxiety. They encourage children to feel important and valued members of the group successfully. This has a significant impact on their confidence and levels of self-esteem. Practitioners use positive strategies to encourage understanding and tolerance towards others sensitively. The setting places appropriate emphasis on promoting and respecting diversity. For example, practitioners read stories from other cultures and encourage children to taste foods from different countries regularly.

The setting provides a good range of age appropriate resources that support children's learning well. The playroom is bright and colourful with a child friendly atmosphere. Practitioners ensure that well-resourced activities, organised in clearly defined areas, are easily accessible for the children. The setting has good facilities for outdoor learning and provides regular access to this provision.

The setting uses expertise in the community regularly to enrich children's experiences and the accommodation provides a safe and secure learning environment.

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| <b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b> | <b>Good</b> |
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### **Leadership: Good**

Leaders work together well; they share a positive vision for the setting and communicate this to all practitioners clearly. They share managerial responsibilities informally and effectively. This arrangement ensures that sessions run smoothly. The setting has clear aims and an appropriate range of policies that are implemented consistently well.

Leaders and practitioners are enthusiastic and work together well as a team. In particular, they demonstrate a shared sense of purpose in developing the setting's provision. Leaders have high expectations for children's learning and communicate this well to parents. Practitioners have a sound knowledge of the setting's policies and implement agreed strategies, for example to manage children's behaviour, consistently. They have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the setting.

Leaders are beginning to implement an operational plan that provides a clear framework for the setting's work. There are sound procedures in place to manage the day-to-day running of the setting. However, arrangements for monitoring the quality of the provision are too informal to be fully effective. Leaders support practitioners suitably through regular performance management reviews. This helps them provide good opportunities for practitioners to keep up to date with their professional learning, through regular training and development opportunities.

The setting takes forward national and local priorities well. Practitioners embrace the foundation phase philosophy and approach enthusiastically. There is a strong emphasis on tackling disadvantage and improving basic skills in literacy and numeracy.

### **Improving quality: Adequate**

The setting implements sound procedures for self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Leaders are developing a culture of self-improvement successfully. They involve practitioners informally in the process and seek the views of parents and stakeholders regularly, for example when implementing an annual review of the quality of care it provides.

The self-evaluation report accurately identifies strengths and areas in need of improvement. The setting's improvement plan prioritises relevant targets that link well to the areas identified. However, planning for improvement does not indicate how these plans will be implemented, resourced or monitored clearly enough.

Practitioners work closely with the local authority to improve provision. This has led to useful improvements in how well practitioners organise learning activities and use their resources.

The setting has made strong progress, especially in developing provision for Welsh and improving resources for literacy and numeracy, since moving to its new location.

### **Partnership working: Good**

The setting has strong partnerships with parents, the school and community organisations that enhance children's wellbeing and learning effectively. Practitioners encourage parents' involvement in their child's education well. For example, they offer the parents of the funded three-year-old children home packs to help develop children's skills in language and mathematics. Parents receive a good range of information through an induction pack, notices, social media and day-to-day contact with practitioners. This helps parents to feel comfortable in approaching the setting about any concerns and keeps them informed about daily activities successfully.

There are established arrangements for children's induction into the setting and smooth transition to the school. Practitioners share relevant information about children's progress effectively, enabling them to settle in quickly. The setting has positive links with a range of community organisations. It receives occasional visitors, such as a dental nurse, and makes effective use of the school grounds to enrich children's learning experiences.

Practitioners share good practice regularly with other settings through training events and visits to other settings. For example, they visited two nearby settings to see how they organise outdoor provision. These visits helped practitioners to reorganise their outdoor provision successfully.

The setting has a constructive relationship with the local authority advisory teacher. Practitioners benefit from guidance in implementing strategies to improve children's learning and the use and organisation of learning resources.

### **Resource management: Good**

The setting has enough qualified and experienced practitioners for the number of children. Leaders deploy practitioners effectively and support them well. Practitioners attend professional development courses and meetings regularly and share good practice with other settings. They reflect on what they learn and implement strategies to improve provision in the setting thoughtfully. For example, they have reorganised the indoor and outdoor provision to improve the activities they offer across the different areas of learning. As a result, children are well motivated and develop a worthwhile range of skills confidently.

Leaders review the impact of resources informally and monitor the setting's income and expenditure systematically. However, the setting's plans for future spending to meet its improvement targets and resource needs are not well enough defined.

The setting is resourceful in ensuring the efficient use of all available funding and learning resources. This has a positive impact on children's outcomes. In view of the worthwhile quality of the provision and strong leadership, the setting provides good value for money.

## Appendix 1

### The reporting inspector

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| Michael Thomas Ridout | Reporting Inspector |
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### Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the setting and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

## Glossary of terms

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| <b>Areas of Learning</b>  | <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"> <li>• personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity</li> <li>• language, literacy and communications skills</li> <li>• mathematical development</li> <li>• Welsh language development</li> <li>• knowledge and understanding of the world</li> <li>• physical development</li> <li>• creative development</li> </ul> |
| <b>CSSIW</b>  | <p>Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) is a division of the Department of Public Services and Performance in the Welsh Government.</p>   |
| <b>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP)</b>      | <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>   |
| <b>Foundation Phase</b>   | <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>  |
| <b>Foundation Phase child development assessment profile (CDAP)</b>   | <p>Foundation Phase on-entry assessment profile; a statutory requirement in schools from September 2011 and settings from September 2012</p>   |
| <b>Local authority advisory teacher</b>                               | <p>These teachers provide regular support, guidance and training to non-maintained settings that provide education for three and four-year-olds.</p>   |
| <b>Mudiad Meithrin</b>  | <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>  |
| <b>Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY)</b> | <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>  |

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| <b>National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)</b>     | This organisation aims to improve the development and education of children in their early years, by providing support services to members. |
| <b>Wales Pre-school Providers Association (WPPA)</b> | An independent voluntary organisation providing community based pre-school childcare and education.   |