



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

A report on

**Argoed Playgroup
Youth Wing
Argoed High School
Bryn Y Baal
Flintshire
CH7 6RY**

Date of inspection: April 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:

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

Argoed playgroup meets in a room in the youth wing of Argoed High School, in Mynydd Isa, near Mold, in Flintshire local authority. It opens from Monday to Thursday from 9:15am to 11:45am for 39 weeks of the year. The setting is registered to take up to 25 children aged between two and four years old. There are currently 17 children on the register, and a very few are funded by the local authority to receive early years' education.

English is the home language of nearly all the children attending the setting, and very few of the children have additional learning needs.

The setting employs two full-time supervisors who took up their posts in November 2016. They are suitably qualified and experienced to work with young children. The setting recruited two additional part-time members of staff in April 2017.

The setting was last inspected by Estyn in March 2012 and by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) in June 2015.

Summary

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

Current performance

The setting's current performance is adequate because:

- The setting leaders plan a suitable range of learning experiences linked to topics that interest the children
- There is a strong focus on developing children's literacy, communication and numeracy skills
- Practitioners support the children purposefully during their play
- Practitioners model use of language well
- There are good opportunities for children to learn about healthy living
- The setting supports children's wellbeing effectively in a caring and supportive environment
- The indoor space is attractive and welcoming

However:

- Activities do not always extend the learning of more able children well enough
- Opportunities for children to develop their skills in the outdoors are underdeveloped
- There are limited opportunities for children to develop their Welsh language skills throughout the session
- Practitioners do not use a sufficient range of teaching strategies confidently enough to enable children to make the best progress

Prospects for improvement

The setting's prospects for improvement are adequate because:

- The joint supervisors have a strong sense of purpose
- The setting benefits from strong support from its management committee
- Leaders respond well to advice and support from other agencies and are committed to improving their practice continuously
- The setting has established useful partnerships that benefit the children
- Leaders make the most of opportunities to attend training and develop their professional understanding
- The setting ensures that children benefit from access to good quality learning resources

However:

- Practitioners' roles and responsibilities are not defined and balanced clearly enough

- The setting's self-evaluation processes and planning for improvement are at an early stage of development

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that activities are sufficiently stimulating and challenging to meet all children's learning needs
- R2 Plan and provide regular opportunities for children to develop their skills in the outdoors
- R3 Improve provision to develop children's use of Welsh
- R4 Develop teaching strategies that engage and involve all children effectively
- R5 Define roles and responsibilities clearly and effectively
- R6 Strengthen and embed self-evaluation and improvement planning procedures

What happens next?

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

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?	n/a
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Standards:

Wellbeing:

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.

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

The setting leaders work together to plan a suitable range of learning experiences that most children enjoy. They link these to appropriate topics that interest the children. The setting uses the local authority's planning and tracking documents well to ensure that they cover a good range of skills across all areas of learning over time. Practitioners are beginning to use assessment information to help them build systematically on children's existing knowledge, understanding and skills. However, this is at a very early stage of development, and activities do not always extend the learning of more able children well enough.

There are many suitable opportunities for children to develop their physical, thinking and creative skills during their free play. For example, they use large blocks to make a walkway and then balance carefully on it. Setting staff made the most of a recent opportunity to show the children tadpoles, helping them learn about treating living things with care and respect. They develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them well, for example through a topic about mini beasts. The setting is beginning to introduce children to traditions from different cultures and to provide opportunities for experimenting with new experiences. However, there are few opportunities for children to develop their skills systematically outdoors.

The setting focuses well on developing children's literacy, communication and numeracy skills throughout the session. There are good opportunities for children to practise their mark-making skills in a variety of ways, such as writing pretend shopping lists. Practitioners provide a good range of books for children to look at independently and with adults, helping them to develop pre-reading skills appropriately. They encourage children to count objects such as beads and blocks regularly to develop their understanding of number. Throughout the session, there are good opportunities for children to practise sorting and matching resources by colour and shape, to learn about size and height and to begin to make comparisons. Practitioners are beginning to introduce suitable resources to help children develop communication technology (ICT) skills. However, planning to support this is at a very early stage.

Setting leaders help children to learn a few Welsh words, phrases and songs during registration time. However, in general, there are limited opportunities for them to learn Welsh throughout the session. The setting provides suitable opportunities for children to learn about their Welsh heritage, including when they celebrate St David's Day.

Teaching: Adequate

Practitioners have a good understanding of child development. With support from the local authority and the link teacher, they are developing their understanding of Foundation Phase requirements well. They work instinctively alongside the children, following their interests supportively. This contributes effectively to children's wellbeing, builds their confidence and consolidates their learning appropriately. The setting's routine provides many opportunities for children to choose where they want to play and to learn through active involvement. However, adults do not always use their time purposefully enough to ensure that all children make the best progress. In general, practitioners provide an interesting and engaging indoor environment.

All practitioners are good language role models. They talk purposefully to the children, introducing new vocabulary, checking understanding and asking questions that prompt them to think. The setting supervisors are beginning to develop appropriate strategies to help children learn and to support good behaviour. For example, they use interesting props to help children count back effectively while singing about five speckled frogs. However, in general, they do not use a wide enough range of teaching strategies, or apply these confidently enough. As a result, children do not always engage well enough in group activities to get the most out of the learning opportunities.

The setting uses the Foundation Phase Profile and the local authority's assessment booklet appropriately to record children's starting points. Practitioners make regular observations and this helps them get to know the children well. They are beginning to use the information to help them plan appropriately for children's next steps, but this is at an early stage of development.

Practitioners communicate well with parents and share information informally about children's progress at the end of the sessions.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate

The setting helps children to learn about healthy living well. Practitioners encourage children to eat fruit, to drink milk and water and to exercise regularly. Washing hands is part of the daily routine and this helps children to develop good hygiene habits. The setting's ethos supports children's wellbeing effectively, providing a caring and supportive environment. However, provision for helping children to learn about sustainability is at a very early stage of development.

The setting supports children's spiritual, moral and social development appropriately. For example, there is a strong emphasis on teaching children to understand about the importance of sharing toys and respecting each other and their work. Practitioners expect children to help tidy resources away, and many do this

independently. The setting is beginning to provide meaningful opportunities for children's cultural development. This includes teaching the children traditional rhymes and about traditional celebrations including Christmas and Easter.

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

There are suitable arrangements for supporting children with identified additional needs. Practitioners operate a key worker system and observe children carefully. This helps them to identify emerging concerns appropriately. They are beginning to act on these by communicating with parents and seeking advice from other agencies to help them move forward. However, the setting does not keep formal records of additional observations to help them to track progress with specific concerns effectively.

Learning environment: Good

In a relatively short time, the supervisors have succeeded in establishing a warm, welcoming and inclusive ethos in the setting. They ensure that all children have equal access to the activities and encourage them to treat each other respectfully and kindly.

Practitioners make the most of the indoor environment available to them and succeed in creating an attractive space where children feel comfortable. They have thought carefully about the lay out of the room and they set up a full range of interesting learning areas daily. They provide children with many good quality resources that support their learning successfully. These include interesting resources to help them develop their creative skills such as colourful pipe cleaners and dough. There is an attractive display of numbers and shapes on the wall in the circle time area, which supports children's mathematical development well. Practitioners display children's mark-making and creative skills on other wall space available to them, celebrating their achievements constructively. The setting has direct access to a suitable enclosed outdoor area, which has been made secure very recently. The indoor environment is secure and generally maintained well.

The setting is taking positive steps towards using the local environment to extend children's experiences. For example, they recently visited the local community centre to take part in a sports activity raising money for a national charity.

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

The two joint supervisors have a strong sense of purpose. They aim to provide high quality early years provision to serve the local community. They share this vision well with parents and with the committee, helping to build confidence and strong working relationships. Leaders have begun to share management roles between them. However, they have not worked on this strategically yet, to ensure that responsibilities are evenly balanced. All the staff are relatively new in their posts. Leaders and the committee have ensured that there are thorough induction

procedures in place. However, it is too soon to assess the impact of these or to judge whether practitioners fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively.

The leaders have responded positively to advice and support from the local authority advisory teacher to plan appropriate activities for the children, helping them work towards meeting Foundation Phase outcomes. They have put their own stamp on the setting's routine, ensuring that children have worthwhile opportunities to learn through play and active involvement. However, they have been less successful at developing strategies for managing group activities effectively and ensuring that activities are stimulating enough to meet the needs of all the children. Leaders work effectively towards national priorities, focusing well on developing children's literacy and numeracy skills, and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

The setting benefits from strong support from its management committee. This has been particularly helpful recently in securing grant funding that has enabled them to employ additional staff to meet the needs of the children and to ensure that they can sustain the full provision if staff are off work.

Improving quality: Adequate

The setting leaders are committed to improving their practice continuously and aim to provide high quality Foundation Phase education. They are developing a suitable understanding of areas for development, and have made appropriate progress in a short time. They respond well to advice and support from other agencies, which has helped them to move forward. For example, they have updated their policies and made these available to all staff electronically. This is strengthening accountability and teamwork in the setting. They have reviewed the indoor provision and worked productively towards creating an attractive and inviting learning environment. However, it is too soon to judge the full impact of these changes on the setting's work.

With the guidance of the local authority advisory teacher, leaders have begun to reflect more formally on the setting's strengths and areas for development. Using the local authority's format, they have identified suitable priorities for improvement and included them in an appropriate action plan. However, this strategic approach to planning for improvement is at a very early stage. It tends to focus on what the setting is providing rather than how well the children are progressing. As a result, leaders miss a few important areas from improvement, such as ensuring that activities provide enough challenge and stimulation for the more able children. The setting has not yet taken account of the views of all stakeholders, including parents, when evaluating the quality of the service it provides.

Partnership working: Good

The setting has worked hard to establish useful partnerships that benefit the children. There is a strong partnership with parents. They support the group well by providing extra support through the parent rota. This helps sessions run smoothly. Leaders share information effectively about the settings policies, procedures and activities through regular newsletters, social media and an attractive and informative website. Parents appreciate this and the regular informal contact with practitioners at the beginning and end of the sessions, which keeps them well informed.

Leaders make the most of support from the local authority, developing their understanding of good Foundation Phase practice through attending training offered. The constructive relationship with the local authority advisory teacher has helped to build strong links with the local primary school, as well as contributing to regular improvements in the learning environment. Leaders have welcomed support and advice from the Wales Pre-school Providers Association (WalesPPA) to help the setting move forward. For example, leaders recently benefited from advice and support from the WalesPPA while recruiting new members of staff.

The setting has taken positive steps towards creating a partnership with another local playgroup, by organising a shared activity. This is working helpfully towards providing mutual support and sharing good practice.

Resource management: Adequate

Both leaders are appropriately qualified and experienced to provide suitable early years education. They are open to new ideas and make the most of opportunities to attend training and develop their professional understanding further. Recent training has helped them to develop suitable systems for recording observations and assessments, and for supporting children's language development more effectively. With help from the advisory teacher, leaders are beginning to reflect on their practice and recognise areas for improvement. However, they have not had opportunities to extend their understanding of good Foundation Phase practice through visits to other settings. Performance management systems are at an early stage of development and have not yet had a positive impact on the setting's work. The setting has very recently addressed the serious issue of ensuring that it employs sufficient practitioners to teach the curriculum effectively.

With support from the local authority and the committee, setting leaders ensure that children benefit from good quality resources that support their learning well. The committee has a clear understanding of the costs of running the playgroup and keep these under regular review. However, in view of the current shortcomings in provision and leadership, the setting provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

The number of responses received were fewer than 10. No data will be shown.

Appendix 2

The reporting inspector

Sheila Margaret Birkhead	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)

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
CSSIW	<p>Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) 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 3 to 7 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 which 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)	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 which 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.