



*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on**

**CM Mes Bach / Little Acorns  
Brongwinau  
Comins Coch  
Aberystwyth  
SY23 3BQ**

**Date of inspection: February 2013**

**by**

**Mr Eifion R Morgan**

**for**

**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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## Context

Mes Bach/Little Acorns playgroup is located in purpose built accommodation at the back of Ysgol Comins Coch. Comins Coch is a village some 2 miles from Aberystwyth, just off the A487 coast road.

The playgroup dates back to the 1980's when it met in a classroom in the school - mornings only. As numbers in the school increased and less room was available, the playgroup successfully applied for a grant and the present facility was built in 1999 on the grounds of Comins Coch school. From 2006, the playgroup opened both morning and afternoon and currently the setting opens between 8.30 a.m. and 6 p.m. during school term time.

A Welsh Assembly grant enabled the current provision to be built and this is an attractive learning environment with good outside facilities. The setting is a charitable organisation and the committee is to be congratulated on providing the present facility for young children. They are rightly proud of their achievement.

The setting has its own entrance with adequate parking space available close by. The setting is approached via a raised pathway which leads to the hallway. The locked door ensures that no-one can enter unannounced. The hallway has notice boards displaying useful information for parents. There is a toilet for the disabled here also. The door to the main teaching room is kept locked. The main room is spacious, warm and well-lit. It is set out to incorporate activity areas in keeping with the needs of the Foundation Phase. There is a small kitchen area suitably separated from the main working area. There are toilets and washing facilities to one side. Leading from the hallway is the manager's office and staffroom and to one end of the building a room that is used for the after school club. Nursery children use this room for small group activities such as physical activities and cooking. At the far end of the main room a door leads to the outside. This area is well set out for the children as a play and activity area. Overall, this is a good facility for children.

Most of the children are from English speaking backgrounds, but parents are supportive of the Welsh language. The setting is registered by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) to accommodate a maximum of 20 children. In total there are 23 children on the register aged between 2 and 4 years. There are ten 3 year olds, all of whom are funded. The playgroup welcomes children from different ethnic backgrounds and describes its children as not disadvantaged socio-economically, although the setting is situated adjacent to a less affluent area. None of the current children have been identified as having additional learning needs, although such children have been accommodated in the past. The setting allocates places for children with special needs and is involved in the local referral scheme.

The setting is registered to take Flying Start children although not in a Flying Start area. Children start at any time following their second birthday and move to the next phase in their education in the term following their fourth birthday.

The setting was previously inspected by Estyn in 2007 and by CSSIW in 2012. Since the last Estyn inspection the extension and changes mentioned above have taken place.

## Summary

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

### Current performance

Mes Bach/Little Acorns, is a good setting because:

- most children achieve good standards and make good progress;
- all children are well cared for and supported;
- safeguarding arrangements are well established;
- outside environment is immediately accessible to the children and provides them with a range of learning opportunities;
- it is well managed.

There are some areas for improvement including;

- improving assessment of children;
- planning activities well matched to children's differing abilities

### Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- the setting has a track record of improving the facilities for the benefit of the children;
- the setting is well managed;
- self-evaluation has identified strengths and areas for development;
- the management committee is an active committee and keen to see improvements made.

## **Recommendations**

R1. refine assessment procedures so as to identify the skills children have achieved and to plan the next steps in their learning.

R2. use the results of assessment in planning future activities so that tasks are well matched to children's differing abilities.

R3. ensure that each session provides children with a range of well differentiated activities that suitably challenges them and maintains their interest.

### **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

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

Most children achieve good standards and are making a realistic progress from their starting point. Most children, when motivated, persevere on their tasks. They think about what they are doing and are capable of working both independently and in small groups. However, there are a few children who are easily distracted and soon become disinterested when not actively involved in adult-led activities. These children are rather boisterous and inclined to disrupt other children.

All children have a good and developing vocabulary. The majority have good listening skills and respond positively and quickly to instructions. Children's listening skills are variable – many of the children listen attentively. Very good listening skills are evident when small groups of children are listening to stories in the book corner. All children are interested in books and many look at books independently. Most children enjoy mark-making activities and understand some of the purpose of writing.

All children are learning to count by rote to 10 in English, Welsh and French. Individually many count accurately. Many children match shapes correctly and recognise simple shapes, such as circles and triangles. All children have access to the computer in turn and are familiar with digital technology, such as mobile phones.

All children understand basic Welsh words and phrases and many can answer simple questions such as “Ble mae...” and “Enw pwy ydy hwn...” They repeat familiar words and enjoy singing Welsh songs and nursery rhymes. They particularly like action songs. Children are learning some of the Welsh traditions and celebrations such as St. David's Day.

### **Wellbeing: Good**

All children, when motivated, have a positive attitude to learning and show interest in their work. Many children sustain concentration and, at best, several are capable of working independently for significant periods of time. However, a minority of children are easily distracted and fail to engage in activities that are part of their continuous provision. In such circumstances they are less considerate and courteous to others and show some antisocial behaviour. In the main, however, children relate well to each other and to adults. They are capable of working together and to make decisions about their learning.

All children are developing an appropriate understanding of what they need to do to keep clean and healthy. They know they need to wash their hands before food and

that cleaning their teeth keeps them healthy. Children show that they feel safe and free from physical and verbal abuse in the setting.

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

Practitioners plan collaboratively and the learning experiences encourage children to progress towards meeting the Foundation Phase outcomes. Planning is flexible and responsive to the interests of children and, in the main, incorporates activities that interest children and enables them to access all areas of the curriculum. However, tasks, including focused tasks, lack sufficient differentiation. Activities are not always well matched to children's ability and previous achievement. Planning does not show how children's skills are to be developed progressively building on what children have learnt previously and extending their skills.

Most children form good relationships and many show respect and tolerance. Many children are developing their self-confidence that enables them to become independent learners. There are a few children however who are easily distracted when given freedom to choose activities.

All children develop good physical skills including the ability to ride three-wheeled toys. Their creative skills are well developed and well illustrated by their use of paint. The outside provides children with opportunities to grow plants and to care for them. Children are also involved in recycling and making compost.

Children's learning experiences include opportunities to develop their Welsh language and to develop their knowledge and understanding of the traditions and celebrations of the culture of Wales, such as on St. David's Day.

**Teaching: Adequate**

Practitioners have an understanding of the requirements of the Foundation Phase curriculum and are experienced in working with children. The planned curriculum includes both indoor and outdoor activities and involves the contribution of all adults. The setting uses a thematic approach and each practitioner assumes responsibility for one or two areas of learning. Day-to-day activities incorporate focused tasks and continuous provision. In the main, activities successfully capture most children's interests and the majority of children are actively involved.

Overall, however, the focused tasks do not cater well for the different ability children in that the tasks are not well matched to children's ability and prior attainment. The continuous provision available for children to choose, does not always interest or challenge them. These sessions lack pace and there are too many occasions when



children are not actively involved and on task. Consequently children are not always fully occupied and this adversely affects behaviour and their attitude to learning.

There is an adequate balance between child-directed and practitioner-led activities and staff use questioning to develop children's thinking.

Children are assessed regularly and observations recorded. Observations tend to be descriptive and do not focus sufficiently on children's skill development. The next steps in individual children's learning are not identified and assessment results are not used sufficiently in planning future activities so that tasks are well matched to children's differing needs and ability.

Parents receive a record of what children have done during the session.

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

The provision for developing children's health and wellbeing, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

The day-to-day activities foster values such as honesty, fairness and respect for the truth. Children understand the difference between right and wrong and act accordingly. Children have opportunities to take responsibility, such as when helping to serve food at snack time and to show initiative. Most children behave well, although a minority can be boisterous and show some lack of concern for others. This tends to be when children are not fully occupied on suitable tasks and activities.

The setting provides good support for children with additional learning needs. Specialist services are available and have been used. Good links exist with specialist agencies.

The setting has appropriate policies and procedures in place in respect of safeguarding children. The manager is the responsible person with responsibility for child protection and safeguarding issues. All staff have received recent and relevant training. Procedures reflect the All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008. The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meets requirements and gives no cause for concern.

Good arrangements are in place for supporting children with additional learning needs. In instances, in the past, children have received support, both within the setting and from specialist agencies. Parents have been fully involved and children have had their own individual educational plans.

### **Learning environment: Good**

The ethos of the setting is fully inclusive and all children have equal access to all aspects of the curriculum. Children, whatever their background, play a full part in the

life of the playgroup. Children and staff are free from any form of harassment or oppressive behaviour. The setting is well designed to accommodate anyone with physical disabilities. There is a well established procedure for dealing with complaints, although none have been received in recent years.

The setting provides very good facilities for the children. There are sufficient resources and are immediately available to the children. The playgroup is appropriately staffed with experienced practitioners.

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

The setting has a well established and effective management structure in place. Individual roles are clearly defined and the staff work well as a team. All understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities. They have, over the last few years, successfully promoted and sustained improvements to the setting. The setting displays a positive ethos and the work is focused on children's needs and wellbeing. Effective links with parents are in place.

The volunteer management committee are well informed about the work of the setting. The committee is elected at an annual meeting and meet termly or more frequently as required. Over the last few years the committee has worked very efficiently in bringing about improvements to the provision. The playgroup has taken good account of National and local priorities including establishing the Foundation Phase curriculum.

### **Improving quality: Good**

The setting has produced a detailed and well constructed self-evaluation document. Strengths are clearly identified with appropriate reference to the evidence base. Areas for improvement are included under the three key questions identified in the Estyn "Framework of Inspections". The setting has a very good track record of improving the provision well focused on the needs of the children. Self-evaluation, however, does not always involve all the staff.

The development plan identified how improvements are to be undertaken. Staff have attended a wide range of appropriate professional courses. The impact of such training in terms of children's progress and wellbeing it not always evaluated.

### **Partnership working: Good**

Good links are in place with parents, based on trust and clear communication. Parents receive a useful handbook when children start at the playgroup which

itemises the administrative arrangements, aims and objects of the setting and gives a brief overview of policies and procedures. A regular newsletter also alerts parents to forthcoming events.

Records of children's achievement accompany the children when they move on to the receiving primary school. Staff visit the receiving primary school to meet the Reception class teacher. Overall, however, links with the receiving primary school are underdeveloped and this represents lost opportunities for professional dialogue and advice.

The playgroup benefits from visits by the local authority advisory teacher.

### **Resource management: Good**

Practitioners are well deployed and fulfil their roles efficiently. The setting is well resourced and resources are readily accessible to children. A good and noteworthy feature of the setting is the outdoor provision for the children. This is immediately accessible to them and provides them with both a hard surface for play as well as a grassed area. The grassed area includes areas for experimenting and observing minibeasts as well as areas for growing seeds and bulbs. This is a well used facility for developing children's skills across all areas of learning.

The setting has used its funding well and provides good value for money.

## Appendix 1

### Parents

There is no commentary on the parents questionnaires due to the small number of responses received (less than 10).

### Children

In conversation, children said they enjoyed coming to the playgroup. They enjoyed meeting with their friends and the painting activities. They enjoyed playing on large toys outside.

## Appendix 2

### The reporting inspector

Mr Eifion R Morgan	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.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk))

If available, the data report can be found on our website alongside this report.

## Glossary of terms

<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>	Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) is a division of the Department of Public Services and Performance in the Welsh Government.
<b>Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP)</b>	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 partnership's conditions of registration.
<b>Foundation Phase</b>	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.
<b>Foundation Phase child development assessment profile (CDAP)</b>	Foundation Phase on-entry assessment profile; a statutory requirement in schools from September 2011 and settings from September 2012.
<b>Local authority advisory teacher</b>	These teachers provide regular support, guidance and training to non-maintained settings which provide education for three and four year olds.
<b>Mudiad Meithrin</b>	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.

<b>National Childminding Association (NCMA)</b>	This is a professional membership association working with registered childminders to ensure local high quality home-based childcare, play, learning and family support.
<b>National (NDNA)</b>	This organisation which 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.