



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
Cylch Meithrin Cwm Derwen
Beech Grove
Oakdale
Caerphilly
NP12 0LJ

Date of inspection: May 2011

by

Mr Nicholas Jones

Reporting Inspector under contract to Estyn

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 school'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

Cylch Meithrin Cwm Derwen is a Welsh medium setting that is based in a cabin in the grounds of Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Derwen, Oakdale, Caerphilly. Children attending the cylch come from the local village and surrounding villages. The area is recognised as neither privileged nor socially or economically disadvantaged. The cylch has been in this location for the last three years and has sole use of the facilities and also some use of the school's outside play areas. The cylch is approached via a ramp that opens into a hallway. This provides for cloakroom facilities and a notice board that gives parents useful information about the cylch, including the week's activities. Convenient toilet and hand washing facilities are also located here for the children and staff.

The hallway opens into two large rooms, brightly decorated with wall displays and provides the children with an attractive learning environment. It is suitably differentiated into activity areas that are well organised and resourced to develop the learning outcomes identified in the Foundation Phase for children of this age. A small and well-equipped kitchen is located in one of the rooms where snacks are prepared. Outside is a secure and very useful area with very good resources. This area is accessible to the children and enables sand, water, gardening, painting and marking activities to take place. The cylch also has access to the local school's outside facilities including equipment, exploration areas and shelter from the rain and sun.

The cylch reports that nearly all of the children come from English speaking backgrounds and attend the cylch so as to benefit from Welsh language education before attending the Welsh medium primary school, located on the same site. Children represent the full range of ability and the cylch accepts children with additional learning needs. Whilst none of the present cohort has been identified with such needs, the cylch has, in the past, received support from outside agencies. No child attending at present is from a minority ethnic background and none are from socially disadvantaged homes. The cylch accepts children from two years old and are funded for children the term after their third birthday. They attend the local Welsh school from three years old, depending on their birthday and parental choice. During the inspection, seven children of three years old were present on both afternoons.

The cylch is led and managed by an experienced leader with suitable qualifications, assisted by two other permanent and enthusiastic members of staff. They also run Cylch Meithrin Coed Duon in the mornings. The cylch benefits from the support of the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the local authority and the community. The cylch is also active in organising fund raising activities. All this has resulted in a well-resourced facility for the children. All staff speak Welsh consistently with the children and have attended a good range of training courses.

There is an informative booklet available for parents and carers that provide them with details of the cylch. Parents and carers bring their children into the cylch each afternoon and this provides for a meeting with the staff. Children are eager to get involved in the activities set out for them. The cylch operates five afternoons a week

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during term time from 12.45 pm to 3 o' clock. It is registered with the Care and Social services Inspectorate Wales. It provides children with a safe environment where all children are supervised at all times. The cylch is supported by the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin and has adopted, and where necessary, amended its policies where appropriate. The cylch has also received valuable help and support from the Early Years Partnership and Family Support staff of the local authority, Caerphilly. The cylch also benefits significantly from the close association with the local Welsh school. The cylch's management committee oversees the work of the cylch. Self-evaluation has been undertaken regularly and relevant targets have been set and achieved in the past. Current targets for improvement are appropriate.

The cylch was last inspected by the Care and Social services Inspectorate Wales in January 2010 and received the 'Cylch Rhagorol' certificate in October 2009. Estyn has not previously inspected the cylch.

Summary

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

Current performance

The performance of the setting is good because:

- all children demonstrate good progress and achievement in all areas of learning;
- nearly all children enjoy and have positive attitudes to learning;
- nearly all children behave responsibly;
- on the whole, learning experiences are planned well;
- all children are supported well and benefit from a broad, balanced and interesting curriculum;
- the teaching is effective and concentrates well on Foundation Phase outcomes;
- very good resources are available, which includes the outdoor area;
- adults endeavour to speak Welsh and this has a positive effect on how children learn the language;
- the setting is led and managed well;
- there is a good relationship between adults and children;
- there are very strong links with the local Welsh school; and
- the staff work effectively together and everyone contributes purposefully to the success of the setting.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because:

- the leadership and staff provide a clear direction for the work of the setting;
- changes and developments over time show that the setting has a good record of improving for the sake of the children;
- the leadership is self evaluative, with clear targets and a purposeful annual development plan for improvements;
- the whole staff have a positive and active attitude towards development and training;
- strong support links are used consistently;
- very good links exist with the local Welsh school; and
- the learning environment is stimulating.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the school needs to:

- R1 extend the established system of planning to ensure that individual children are challenged appropriately;
- R2 provide more opportunities for the children to investigate and enquire without too much adult interference;
- R3 set clear learning objectives and success criteria for the children at the start of every activity; and
- R4 continue to raise the staff's standards of Welsh.

What happens next?

The provider will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

All children achieve good standards of achievement and make appropriate progress in all areas of learning. There is no significant difference in the standards of different groups of children in the setting.

All children make positive progress in developing their literacy skills in the Welsh language. Whilst a few children are reluctant to use the language, nearly all the children have an adequate understanding of the language. Nearly all the children have well-developed listening skills and nearly all the children enjoy and are eager to contribute to stories that are read to them.

They all answer questions enthusiastically and this illustrates clearly their developing understanding of the language. Most children respond sensibly to group discussions and know the day and month. Another notable feature of their developing competence is that they respond in Welsh with very little prompting to colours and the weather.

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Many children choose to look at books independently. They hold books appropriately and study pictures and print with interest. They recognise the main characters in a story and discuss the content of a story enthusiastically with each other.

Most children are beginning to develop their writing skills and a notable feature of their early writing is that they understand the purpose of writing through practical tasks. They, therefore, see the purpose of mark making and of their early writing. A few children are beginning to form recognisable letters of the alphabet independently.

All children are developing their numeracy skills well through the practical use of number, using mathematical language such as 'smaller than' or 'larger than' and through using two and three-dimensional shapes. All children can group objects by colour or shape.

All children use electronic equipment appropriately. They use digital cameras for recording and use the computer with confidence through controlling the computer mouse.

All children enjoy participating in music making and dance. They have a good awareness of a store of Welsh songs and nursery rhymes, which they sing enthusiastically.

Nearly all children are fully engaged in every activity and concentrate and persevere for significant periods of time. They make decisions and work well independently inside and outside the building. All the children participate enthusiastically in the wide range of activities available to them that successfully develops their creative skills and the knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

Wellbeing: Good

All children, relative to their age, have an appropriate understanding of how they can keep healthy. They know, for example, when they need to wash their hands and do so with little prompting. Most children have the basic knowledge that a healthy diet incorporates fruit and vegetables.

Nearly all the children's attitude to learning is good. They show interest in their work and in the activities planned for them. All children sustain good concentration for significant periods of time and make decisions independently.

All children relate very well to each other, to adults and visitors. They are courteous and considerate and willing to share resources. All children take a full part in the life and activities of the cylch, through offering suggestions and challenges to adults. They have worthwhile opportunities to suggest their own ideas and these are, when possible, incorporated into children's tasks and activities.

Community links also draws children's attention to those people, such as fire fighters, police and others who look after them. Overall, all children display a sense of belonging to their community, where they are happy and well cared for and free from any form of harassment.

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

Time is set aside when all staff meet to plan the curriculum that provides the children with useful and interesting activities. The curriculum is flexible and is matched to the children's interests. However, there is not enough challenge at times for individual children according to their ability.

The curriculum is well planned to meet the philosophy of the Foundation Phase curriculum and to achieve the identified outcomes of children's learning. Overall, the curriculum builds on children's previous knowledge and experiences and incorporates good opportunities for the development of skills across the curriculum.

There are worthwhile opportunities incorporated into the day-to-day working of the cylch for children to develop their self-confidence and to become independent learners. Whilst specific activities are planned, children have freedom to select their own tasks and activities.

The purposeful provision includes opportunities for all children to develop respect for each other; opportunities to form good relationships with each other and with adults; and to become tolerant of each other.

High quality opportunities are provided for children to develop their basic and key skills of literacy, numeracy, understanding of the world, and physical and creative skills. A notable and very good aspect of children's learning experiences is the provision made for children to acquire the Welsh language. Welsh is the natural language of communication between adults and children. Through coherent opportunities, nearly all children, whatever their background, display enjoyment in speaking the language through looking at Welsh story books a diary of activities and the weather.

Children have ample opportunities to develop their thinking skills through inspiring activities like cooking, which focus on numeracy skills, science and wellbeing.

The traditions and celebrations of the culture of Wales are given due emphasis, like celebrating of St. David's Day. Good opportunities are also provided for children to acquire knowledge and understanding of other cultures and traditions, such as during their study of the Chinese New Year and other customs such as Diwali. Such activities help children to develop an understanding of the wider world and raise their awareness of age appropriate global citizenship.

All children have opportunities to plant seeds and look after plants and so begin their understanding of plant growth and sustainability.

Teaching: Good

The quality of teaching shows that the staff have a good, practical knowledge of children's development and a clear understanding of the requirements of the Foundation Phase.

The staff have high expectations of the children and these expectations are put into practice well. The staff's active role in planning the curriculum ensures that all know their roles well and best use is made of their expertise. However, when an activity is introduced, there is not enough reference made to the activity's learning objective and its success criteria.

The system of sharing responsibilities means that staff have a detailed knowledge of a small number of children and as such are well aware of their achievements and progress.

There is a good balance between adult directed and child selected activities, both indoors and out of doors. Children are free to select from either independent or adult led activities. However, at times, adults interfere too much, which reduces the opportunities for children to enquire and investigate independently.

Staff model language well to the children's development levels and use questioning well to develop children's thinking and communication skills. The standard of the staff's Welsh is continuing to develop and they are endeavouring to raise their standards further through courses like 'Geiriau Bach'. Practitioners provide a stimulating environment that successfully ensures children's involvement and enjoyment.

Assessment procedures and recording children's achievements are completed efficiently. There are comprehensive records of children's achievements and these are made available to parents. Staff know their children well and are able to plan the next steps in their learning.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The cylch's provision for ensuring children's health and wellbeing is good. All children enjoy their time at the cylch. They arrive showing a sense of anticipation and are keen to get involved. They partake enthusiastically in activities set out for them. The broad curriculum, which consists of visits and visitors, further develops and extends children's experiences and their sense of curiosity.

Follow-up work in their classrooms shows the wide range of experiences that arise from their activities and the children's sense of wonder. Visits to the community and visitors to the cylch develop children's knowledge and understanding of their own community well.

The cylch's provision for ensuring children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Children experience a well-planned curriculum designed to extend their sense of curiosity about the world they live in. The cylch is an organised unit, where children value each other and the staff, in turn, values them.

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Values, such as honesty, fairness, respect and an understanding of what is right and wrong, are fostered through the day-to-day activities and accepted without question. Children know and accept the social norms of living together, sharing and accepting the views of others and being members of a community. Individual children, in turn, accept specific responsibilities like 'Today's Helper' that develops their self-esteem.

Children's cultural development is good, which incorporates Welsh customs and traditions and is extended to other cultures when children celebrate the Chinese New Year and Diwali.

The cylch's staff are vigilant in identifying children requiring specialist help. They make use of professional help and guidance. The setting has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding. Staff have received regular and appropriate training. Staff undertake risk assessments routinely.

The cylch is safe and secure, where the entrance door is locked and only opened by a member of staff, consequently no one can enter or a child leave unaccompanied. Good care is taken when children are being collected to ensure they are in the care of their parents or of a known carer.

Regular reviews of children's progress ensure that any child suspected of requiring additional help is noted and their progress is monitored closely. The cylch's leader is the special educational needs co-ordinator and is familiar with the necessary procedures for supporting such a child.

Where necessary external agencies are involved and one-to-one support is provided if needed. At present no child has additional learning needs.

Learning environment: Good

The cylch, through its day-to-day activities and the approach adopted by the staff promotes a positive ethos. Staff know their children well and their individuality is recognised. All children have equal access to a stimulating curriculum enriched by a very good and interesting outside area.

The homely atmosphere and the friendship provided by the staff ensures that a tolerant attitude pervades the setting. The cylch employs positive behaviour strategies that have successfully eliminated any form of harassment or oppressive behaviour. All children enjoy equality of opportunity.

The cylch's staff are well qualified and experienced and there is a favourable child-adult ratio. Staff expertise is well used both in planning and in supervising activities. The cylch is well resourced to meet the requirements of the Foundation Phase curriculum and the needs of the children. This is a very good aspect. The resources are accessible to children and this promotes children's sense of independence and responsibility.

The local environment and the school's resources are used well on a regular basis and they contribute well to children's understanding of the world around them.

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

Staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities and work together well as a team, sharing values, aims and objectives. The leader involves all staff in planning and this ensures the best use of their expertise. The leader is actively involved giving clear directions and a sense of purpose to the work of the cylch. There is a positive ethos and a commitment to provide the best possible experiences for the children.

The leadership and all staff are well focused on children's needs and the cylch successfully achieves this aim in practice. Recently, staff have received relevant and appropriate training and this has impacted well on the quality of provision provided. Effective links with the parents are in place. Parents are kept well informed of their children's achievement and progress and this helps them to support their children's learning.

There is a well-established management structure in place with clear definition of duties. The management has taken good account of relevant legislation and guidance meet legal requirements in full.

The cylch has taken good account of National priorities, including implementing the Foundation Phase curriculum. It has also made good use of opportunities to visit the Welsh school that shares the same site and work with them to ensure extremely useful and solid links.

Improving quality: Good

The cylch is self-evaluative and has recently identified areas for improvement and implemented them for the benefit of the children. This has included useful additions to the outside area, such as gardening areas and internal changes that broaden children's experiences and develop the children's independence.

Areas for improvement have been identified and prioritised, including further developments of the outside area focused on improved provision. Future plans focus on the development of the Welsh language and working the parents on planning. The cylch also plans better links with the local community.

Staff have made very good use of training opportunities and the professional learning experiences are impacting well on children's learning and wellbeing. Staff have attended 'Geiriau Bach' training to improve their standards in Welsh. This has developed from their self-evaluation that noted the need to improve as language models for the children.

Partnership working: Good

Parents, in the questionnaire replies and in discussion expressed their total satisfaction with the cylch and are highly appreciative of the standards of care and the quality of education available. They appreciate the open door policy and the opportunities they have to meet staff on a daily basis.

By the time children leave the cylch, parents feel that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education, especially in Welsh. The link with the local Welsh primary school, where the setting is located, is extremely good.

The support provided by the local authority staff and the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin benefits the setting. Their advice and suggestions have helped in developing the cylch and has contributed to the current high standards of provision.

Resource management: Good

Staff work together very effectively. Planning is completed collaboratively and this results in individual expertise being well used.

The cylch is well resourced and resources are well used to further the aims of the Foundation Phase curriculum. Resources are also accessible to the children and this encourages independence and has a positive impact on their learning.

The cylch provides very good outdoor experiences for the children through regular use of the very good outdoor areas.

The setting has identified areas for development including resources that need to be acquired and they are aware of how to move the setting forward.

Overall, the cylch provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Eight questionnaires were returned. Discussion with a sample of parents during the inspection indicated their strong support for the setting. Parents and carers were particularly pleased with all aspects of the cylch, especially the care provided, children's progress and their competence in the Welsh language.

Responses to learner questionnaires

All children are happy in the cylch. Their enthusiasm is evident when they arrive and meet with their peers. Most of them are self-confident from knowing that they are well supported and that they have interesting and challenging tasks.

Appendix 2

The reporting inspector

Mr Nick Jones

Reporting Inspector

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)