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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on
Sam's Learning Tree**

**159 Vale Road
Rhyl
LL16 2PH**

Date of inspection: April 2011

By

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and Training in Wales**



**INVESTORS | BUDDSODDWYR
IN PEOPLE | MEWN POBL**

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

Sam's Learning Tree is an English-medium day nursery situated in the town of Rhyl in Denbighshire. The setting was opened in 2001 and provides child care from 7 am to 6 pm, Monday to Friday for 50 weeks of the year. It is registered for 84 children between the ages of a few months old to the time they move on to their next stage of education. At the time of the inspection, 6 three year-olds were registered and received funding from the Early Years Partnership but only two were present.

The setting employs twenty two members of staff, both full time and part time, of which six work within the preschool team. All have suitable experience of working with young children. A link advisory teacher, who is appointed by the local authority education service, supports the setting on a regular basis.

The area itself is not considered to be disadvantaged, neither is it particularly prosperous. The children come from a range of socio – economic backgrounds.

The setting's facilities consist of separate areas for different age groups. In the Owls area, which is the area dedicated to children from the ages of three to five, Foundation Phase learning areas are provided for both inside and outside. Inside the room is separated into different areas of learning while there are opportunities for children to experience sand, water and large toy play activities outdoors.

Nearly all of the children attending the sessions come from the immediate area and most have English as their home language. The other children have English as an additional language. The playgroup is a wholly inclusive setting and welcomes children with additional learning needs and children from different ethnic backgrounds.

The setting was last inspected by the Care and Social Standards Inspectorate (CSSIW) in Wales in June 2010. This is the setting's first Estyn inspection.

Summary

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

Current performance

Current performance is good because:

- All children are cared for, guided and supported;
- Staff understand their roles and have participated in a range of training courses;
- The setting is well led and managed;
- There are warm caring relationships between children and practitioners; and
- The children are happy and safe in the setting.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- The new self evaluation procedures ensures that outcomes for children are improved;
- There are good induction and appraisal systems in place;
- There is evidence that improvements made recently are sustainable and likely to stimulate further improvements; and
- The management team have a clear vision for the future developments of the setting which is shared with all practitioners.

Recommendations

- R1 Provide more opportunities to develop the provision for Welsh language teaching.
- R2 Strengthen the planning and assessment documents to include the skills being developed and assessed.
- R3 Further develop the provision for ICT.

What happens next?

The setting will produce an action plan showing how it will address the above recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?	
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There is no report on children's progress, standards in the development of their skills, the Welsh language and welfare. This is because a 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?	Good
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Learning experiences: Adequate

The setting provides all children with an extensive range of stimulating activities across all areas of learning. Practitioners work very well together to plan a wide range of activities which enable the children to learn effectively. Planning is clearly based on Foundation Phase principles and incorporates activities linked closely to the expected areas of learning. This planning process would be strengthened if

A report on Sam's Learning Tree
April 2011

outcomes for children were more rigorous to include the progressive development of the children's skills.

Most of the children are becoming independent learners and they take advantage of the many opportunities offered to develop their physical skills linked to the outside area. Most have good hand eye coordination, can pedal or shuffle with confidence and are especially aware of the need to control their body speed as they move around the setting. While using the large wheeled toys nearly all the children know that they can only proceed along the road when the traffic lights are green. They are also aware of the need to stop when the lights are red. Practitioners know their children very well and as a result are able to foster positive relationships based on mutual respect.

There is a strong focus on promoting skills in literacy, numeracy and communication and the provision for creative skills is a particular strong feature. However provision for the development of the skills of information and control technology (ICT) need to be further developed.

Although practitioners use Welsh during their whole group activities such as circle time where children learn about colours and order numbers to ten, incidental Welsh is not used regularly by all practitioners. Children are not always encouraged to use Welsh. Good opportunities are provided for the children to learn about their own immediate area through pictures, maps and visits. Children celebrate and learn about Welsh festivals such as St David's day.

While shortcomings have been identified in the setting's skills provision there is evidence to suggest that these areas can be improved and built upon relatively quickly.

All children are beginning to appreciate customs from other cultures as they study multi cultural festivals such as Chinese New Year, Divali Christmas and Easter. Their understanding of global citizenship and sustainability is also developing well.

Teaching: Good

Practitioners have a sound understanding of the Foundation Phase, work well as a team and use a wide range of approaches to stimulate play and active learning. There is a good balance between child centered and adult led activities with tasks well suited to the different ability of the children.

Practitioners make learning fun, such as using the water area to explain to the children how water will travel from high to low. This was an activity which was thoroughly enjoyed by the children. The children are well supervised both in and outside the classroom.

Good quality adult support extends the learning throughout the day. Overall staff have good intervention techniques as they skilfully and sensitively manage the needs of individuals.

A report on Sam's Learning Tree
April 2011

A good feature of the setting is the assessment of learning. Staff note children's achievements on 'post it notes' and these are collated in individual files on a weekly basis. These notes are dated and signed and provide a good record of children's progress. A recent development has been the introduction of a whole group tracking system. This system appears to be working well and is beginning to provide practitioners with a good record of what the children can or can't do and as a result the planning is then adjusted accordingly. Practitioners provide children with helpful oral feedback as they learn.

Parents are able to meet with the practitioners at any time, such as when they bring their child to the setting in the morning to discuss and highlight specific issues. The parents also receive a daily written record of what the children have achieved, eaten and enjoyed during the day. This is a good record and keeps the parents fully informed.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The arrangements for ensuring children's health and wellbeing are effective and make a significant contribution towards their development.

The setting successfully fosters values such as honesty, fairness, respect and helps children to distinguish between right and wrong. All children learn to share, help one another and respect other living creatures when they play with toys or talk about the guinea pig. Nearly all children in their everyday behaviour show they can appreciate right and wrong.

Every care is taken to ensure children's wellbeing. Practitioners continually remind the children of the need to wash their hands after they go to the toilet or before they eat their snack. Good procedures are in place to encourage children to brush their teeth correctly as part of the local health board's Design to Smile Scheme. All children are aware of the need to brush their teeth regularly especially after meals.

The setting has good arrangements in place for supporting children with additional learning needs (ALN). The staff deal effectively with outside agencies in order to support these children when necessary.

There are appropriate policies and procedures in place for ensuring the safety of the children. All staff have received appropriate training and are aware of the named person with responsibility for child protection. The outside play area is totally secure with the only access through the main entrance door, which is always locked.

There are good induction arrangements throughout the setting and parents have ample opportunities to meet the staff and discuss any matters of concern. The close partnership with the local primary schools ensures a smooth transition for the children moving on to their next stage in their education.

Learning experiences which promote and foster children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. There are appropriate risk assessments in place.

Learning environment: Good

The setting provides a welcoming environment for all children where they feel valued and free from any harassment or oppressive behaviour. All children, irrespective of their background have equality of access to all aspects of the curriculum.

In nearly all areas good quality resources are matched to children's individual needs and adequately support learning. The accommodation is warm and functional allowing a wide range of activities indoors. Appropriate clothing is available for children to wear during inclement weather. The use made of the outdoor area is a strength of the setting and fully supports learning.

There is a generous allocation of trained practitioners to meet the needs of all children. They are very aware of the needs of the Foundation Phase curriculum and highly committed to their continued professional development.

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

The current proprietor took over her role two years ago and set about creating a setting which truly reflected the ethos of the Foundation Phase curriculum for the children. She has succeeded in creating this environment and as a result has an effective setting which ensures that all children develop according to their needs.

The management team of the setting display a commitment to improve. They provide clear direction and have been successful in creating a highly effective team of well qualified practitioners. High expectations are evident and all share values, aims and objectives focusing on providing the best possible provision for all children. Good links exist with the parents who are kept informed through regular newsletters and informal chats. Parents are very supportive and appreciate the work done in the setting.

Staff appraisal takes place annually and training needs identified and addressed. There are good arrangements for the induction of new staff. These arrangements have enabled staff to respond positively to local and national priorities.

Improving quality: Good

Self evaluation is undertaken regularly. It is detailed, comprehensive and clearly identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Shortcomings identified in the self evaluations have been included as areas for development on the settings development plan. This plan has appropriate targets linked to children's outcomes and suitable timeframes. Improvements undertaken have resulted in improved provision and positive gains for children.

All practitioners contribute well to the self evaluation process with whole setting meetings held every six weeks with more regular meetings held in the various different rooms. These meetings provide useful feedback to the management team on past, current or future practice.

Parents are circulated with questionnaires on an annual basis and the information gained helps to build up a whole picture of the setting. The setting positively encourages staff to visit other settings in order to gain experience of best practice. This is being further developed to include the local schools.

The proprietor is chairperson of the local National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) and attends meetings on a regular basis in order to share good practice.

Partnership working: Good

Strong links have been established with all partners involved with the development of the children. The setting works closely with the parents and provides them with regular updates on their children's achievements and progress. An annual summer fair is held to foster stronger links with the parents / carers. This activity is particularly effective and provides staff with useful oral feedback.

Good partnerships exist between the setting and local schools and further education colleges. The setting provides good support for students from secondary schools on work experience and older students on work placements.

The work of the Foundation Phase advisory teacher, who works with the setting on a regular basis, is highly valued and practitioners are always keen to respond to advice and guidance.

Visitors from the community are used effectively to support children's learning and understanding of the community.

Resource management: Good

The leadership team manages the setting well, making best use of staff and available resources. All practitioners are effectively deployed and regularly appraised.

Practitioners in the Owls area (preschool room) work well together and ensure daily routines, which provide an appropriate range of activities, have a direct impact on children's learning.

The purchase of resources is carefully undertaken to ensure quality and durability and good use is made of both the inside and outside areas. This ensures that the setting provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Six replies were received to the parent questionnaire and all stated they agreed with all aspects of the work of the setting. All felt their child / children enjoyed coming to the setting and felt safe and secure in their surroundings.

Responses to discussions with children

Nearly all children were confident while talking to a stranger. They spoke clearly and most had good vocabulary. They liked coming to the setting and enjoyed the activities especially outdoor activities. All felt happy and knew what to do if they felt sad or needed help.

Appendix 2

The Reporting Inspector

Peter Roach	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)