

A report on

Cylch Meithrin Thomastown

**Thomastown Community Centre
Thomastown
Tonyrefail
Porth
Rhondda Cynnon Taff
CF39 8ED**

T/039/10N

Date of inspection: December 2010

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:

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

Thomastown is a small village bordering Tonyrefail and to the north of Llantrisant. Cylch Meithrin Thomastown is located in the local community centre and is open for 4 mornings of the week (not Friday), for 39 weeks of the year. The Cylch was established some 26 years ago and the current leader has had responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Cylch since then.

Children attending the Cylch come mainly from the village – historically a mining community, now a Community First Area with areas of deprivation. A few children come from homes where Welsh is the predominant language but the majority attend the Cylch because their parents wish them to be educated in Welsh.

The Cylch is registered by CSSIW to accommodate up to 24 children aged 2½ to 5. Currently there are 9 on the register, two aged 3 years and none are funded. The Cylch welcomes children from ethnic communities or who have additional learning needs (ALN). Children attend the Cylch approaching 2½ years old and in the main leave for the next stage of their education in September following their third birthday.

The Cylch uses the main hall in the Community Centre and is accessed via a foyer which acts as a waiting area for parents. A notice board provides them with up to date information. There are adjacent toilets and cloakroom facilities.

The hall is a large room, well lit and warm. Each morning, due to the efforts of the staff, the hall is set out with a very good range of activities for the children. The staff are to be commended on their diligence since equipment and resources have to be brought down from upstairs storage areas. By the time the children arrive it provides them with a welcoming and attractive learning environment.

Adjacent to the hall is a purpose built kitchen where morning snacks are prepared. At the back of the Community Centre the Cylch has acquired and cleared an area of disused land which they have turned into an attractive outdoor area for the children. It has numerous attractive features that enhance children's learning. It is safe being fenced in with an outlook to the surrounding woodland.

The Cylch was recently inspected by CSSIW (May 2010) and all minor recommendations addressed. It has not been previously inspected by Estyn.

Summary

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

Current performance

Main evaluation

Excellent

- planning to meet the requirements of the Foundation Phase;
- assessment of children and the use made of assessment in planning future activities;
- the impact of leadership in developing the Cylch.

Good

- the provision to ensure care, support, guidance and wellbeing of the children;
- the ethos and inclusive nature of the Cylch;
- the effective team effort;
- the partnership established with parents;
- Cylch recognised as an exemplar of good practice;
- The development of the outside environment to enhance children's learning.

Prospects for improvement

Excellent

- The track record of the Cylch over the last few years in identifying areas for development and bringing about improvements for the benefit of the children
- The effective leadership.

Good

- The staff working together as a team and their attendance at training courses.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the setting needs to:

R1 maintain present standards and improve the provision where possible, such as developing children's IT skills.

What happens next?

The Cylch will endeavour to maintain the current standards and bring about improvements where possible.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

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?

Excellent

Learning experiences: Excellent

Planning is a collaborative exercise involving the key workers who all make their contribution and assume responsibility for aspects of the curriculum. Planning is very successful in engaging all children because their needs are met. The work is suitably differentiated and challenging building systematically on existing knowledge, understanding and skills. These are outstanding aspects of the work and the planning documentation identifies learning objectives, differentiated learning activities including enhanced provision, resources and detailed evaluations

Relationships are very good and each child is respected whatever their background or disability. There is an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding of the need to care for others.

The general sense of wellbeing and support encourages children to be confident individuals and to develop their self-esteem enabling them to become independent learners.

Scrutiny of children's work over the last year indicates that they are progressing very well and are very quickly acquiring basic skills. The planning ensures that there is the coherent provision of skills across all areas of learning. A notable and good feature is the way staff exploit opportunities to develop these skills during the play and other activities.

All children respect each other and treat each other with consideration. This is a notable feature, particularly since these were very young children during the inspection – the substantial majority yet to reach their third birthday. Children's self-confidence and their feeling of wellbeing enable them to be confident, independent learners yet happy to partake in group activities.

All children enjoy physical activity and show good physical skills. They know the different ways of moving including walking, jumping, skipping and running and show good balance when walking on a bench or riding their tricycles. Most children have good hand-eye co-ordination. Creative skills are well developed and all children enjoy mixing paints and using materials in their display work.

Regular work outside and visits to the locality develops very good understanding of seasonal change and the work around them. Visits to the farm develop children's understanding of the need to care for living things.

Planning for children's skill development, including their thinking skills is systematic. Learning experiences provide children with challenging tasks well matched to their capability.

The Welsh language provision is enhanced by adults who are fluent Welsh speakers and who themselves communicate in Welsh. There are a good proportion of children from Welsh speaking homes and this encourages others to use the language. By the time they leave the Cylch they are able to benefit from Welsh language education.

The traditions and celebrations of Wales figure prominently in the curriculum and this ensures that children are acquiring a good basic knowledge and understanding of Welsh culture. There are also good opportunities for children to learn about other cultures, such as the celebration of Divali and the Chinese New Year.

There are ample opportunities for children to learn about plant growth, such as the conditions necessary for seed germination and what plants need to grow to maturity. This helps children to understand about recycling waste and sustainability.

Teaching: Excellent

All staff have a very good understanding of the philosophy of the Foundation Phase and an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of child development. The day-to-day working of the Cylch reflects these principles.

A notable and good feature of the teaching is the well directed differentiated work so that tasks are well matched to children's ability and prior achievement, whether they are children with ALN or the more able and talented. Staff make very good use of questioning to encourage children's thinking and to develop their language skills. All staff are involved in the planning process and all contribute of their expertise.

Adults know when to intervene and consequently there is a good balance between child-selected and adult-led activities. Planning also highlights enrichment tasks where adults lead, but a strong feature of the Cylch is that such occasions are well directed, brief, and successfully capture children's attention. Consequently, each session is well paced and is well directed at keeping all children actively involved.

Behaviour is never an issue, staff adopt positive behaviour strategies and children react well to praise. During the inspection there were no occasions when staff had to intervene because of any antisocial behaviour.

Staff are good language models conversing with each other and with the children in Welsh. They are to be commended for learning and using the language purposefully in class.

The Cylch assess children regularly and comprehensively and record children's achievements. These observations are objective and dated and provide information

on children's progress. Key workers have responsibility for a small number of children and consequently know their ability and prior achievement very well. An outstanding aspect of assessment is the way the outcomes of assessment are used to plan activities that are well matched to children's needs and to identify the next steps in their learning. This is the advantage of the key worker system having responsibility for a small number of children.

Parents, in discussion, reported that through seeing the children's work and through informal discussions with staff they have a good understanding of their child's progress.

The Cylch keeps in close contact with parents and from time to time provides information on how they can support their child.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The Cylch's promotion of children's health and wellbeing is a major focus of its work. Children are very well cared for from the time they start at the Cylch and staff are well aware of their individual idiosyncrasies. They feel safe and know who to approach if they need help. The Cylch, through the day-to-day activities, fosters values such as honesty, fairness, respect and a sense of right and wrong.

Adults treat each child with respect and this helps to develop their self-confidence enabling them to confidently make choices, take responsibility and to show initiative. They are happy to play together and to share equipment and resources in their creative work and physical activities.

The Cylch has good relationships with specialist services and these are used as necessary. Staff are vigilant to note issues of concern and quick to organise support when required. This may well mean 1:1 support when necessary. Parents are fully involved in any such discussions.

There are appropriate policies and procedures in place in respect of safeguarding children. The leader is the named member of staff with responsibility for Child Protection. Her deputy is also fully trained and all staff are aware of their roles. The procedures reflect the All Wales Child Protection Procedures (2008). All staff have engaged in recent training.

The leader is also the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo)

Children attending the Cylch are kept under review and outside agencies consulted when necessary. Whatever children's ALN they have full access to all areas of the curriculum. Overall the Cylch ensures quality support for all children, whatever their background and difficulty.

Learning environment: Excellent

The Cylch has a strong inclusive ethos providing the children with a warm, friendly, calm and supportive working environment. Children, whatever their background, are part of the integrated family of the Cylch.

All children show a high degree of tolerance and show very good attitudes towards each other, adults and visitors. The Cylch is free from any form of oppressive behaviour, harassment or discrimination. Children with disabilities are fully integrated and very well supported.

The Cylch is generously staffed with highly committed, experienced and well qualified staff. During the inspection there were also students present undergoing their training.

Though it is an onerous task to set out and store equipment and resources for each session, this is done in good time for the arrival of the children. Staff are to be commended on their diligence and it reflects positively on children's achievement.

Resources are well matched to the needs of the Foundation Phase curriculum and the needs of the children. The accommodation is suitable and used effectively.

An outstanding and excellent facility is the outside play area that the Cylch has developed. This was identified in the 2008 development plan as a priority and consequently the area behind the Cylch was cleared of rubbish and brambles. With local help and parents it has now been developed into a well resourced enclosed area providing the children with a wide range of experiences from seed germination to wind activated musical chimes.

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

A notable and outstanding aspect of the Cylch is the way the staff work as a team under the direction of the leader. The leader's contribution is fundamental to the working of the Cylch and ensures high standards. The onerous task of setting up the resources and equipment is done methodically and a wide range of activities are available for the children in preparation for their arrival.

A sense of purpose pervades the Cylch with each team member playing their part very effectively. This sustains high standards but the team are not complacent and are always seeking ways to improve and promote improvements.

A good and notable aspect of the team is their shared values based on providing the best provision for the children. All team members contribute to the curriculum planning and take responsibility for specific aspects of the work.

All staff have, over the years, taken advantage of numerous training courses and these have very effectively added to the curriculum and the professionalism of the staff, resulting in the high expectations and standards.

A particularly good feature of the leader's leadership style is her calm presence and her excellent organisational skills that enable her to assume a quiet supervisory presence. This is fundamental in maintain the effectiveness of the Cylch. The leader's management and administrative skills have been recognised locally.

Effective links with the parents are in place and this ensures their support for children's learning.

The Cylch has taken account of relevant legislation and guidance and has adapted the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin policies as necessary. It fulfils its legal duties. The Cylch works closely with the Committee Hall committee – the presence of the Cylch leader on this committee is useful in ensuring that it works closely with the Cylch. The Cylch has also responded positively to national initiatives such as developing the Foundation Phase curriculum.

Improving quality: Excellent

The self-evaluation document is detailed and based on evidence. It covers all areas of learning and the provision and links well into the setting's development planning. The development planning documents show clearly the priorities identified for development over the last 4 years, the personnel involved, success criteria, financial implications and an end of year evaluation. Review of previous development plans shows that the Cylch has achieved all the targets for improvement. Of particular note is the development of the outside play area which is an excellent addition to the Cylch and is a positive gain for the children. It also shows the co-operation between the Cylch, the parents and the community. Overall, the planning has secured improvement based on prioritising areas for improvement, strategies for improvement and the support of all involved with the Cylch.

Staff have attended a wide range of professional development training courses and the whole setting has benefited and this is well represented in children's progress. The leader is well respected and has been influential in advising other settings within the Local Authority.

Partnership working: Excellent

The Cylch has very good links with parents who, in discussion, are fully supportive and appreciative of the Cylch. Apart from informal contacts with the staff, the Cylch regularly provides information for parents via its newsletter. The parents have also had opportunities to comment and respond to the questionnaires distributed last year. Parents are also consulted if any child is considered as having ALN and the provision required.

Good and developing links exist between the Cylch and the primary schools to which most children transfer. Children visit the local school prior to transfer and also on other occasions, such as for concerts.

The Cylch is recognised by the Local Authority as having practices that are worth disseminating and have been identified as exemplars of good practice within the authority and warrant wider dissemination.

These include:

- (i) planning for children's learning;
- (ii) use of assessment in planning activities;
- (iii) leadership;

- (iv) planning for improvement;
- (v) organising activity areas;
- (vi) pre CSSIW discussion.

This illustrates that the work of the Cylch is an exemplar of high quality provision and has been influential within the sector. Such expertise has been shared locally to good effect within the Local Authority and by the Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin.

Resource management: Good

All staff know their roles and responsibilities very well and undertake their tasks with a sense of enjoyment. Staff are fully committed to their roles and using a good range of resources successfully motivate children to learn. The staff always seek ways of challenging the children and make the best use of events and occurrences, such as during the inspection an outside visit was arranged to view ice formation and icicles.

Overall resources are well used to motivate the children, to extend their experiences and to develop their thinking skills. The Cylch gives good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Only one response was received that indicated total agreement with all the statements made. However, discussion took place with a sample of parents during the inspection. All parents spoke to express their complete satisfaction with the Cylch. They particularly valued the “open door” policy, the approachability of the staff, the information that was provided for them and the support their children received. All parents commented on the very good progress their children were making, particularly with their Welsh language development.

Several parents were very pleased with their children’s behaviour once they began at the Cylch and the support children with ALN received. Parents spoke of the Cylch’s high expectations of the children both in terms of attitude and behaviour.

Response to discussions with children

Many children were happy to talk to the visitor and expressed their enjoyment of the work they were doing. They enjoyed the free choices they were given and particularly liked going outside. They enjoyed meeting with their friends and in one instance was disappointed that the Cylch was not open on Fridays.

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)

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