

The inspection of educational provision for children before compulsory school age

Nursery report on Margaret Barnard Playgroup

Registered Nursery Education Inspector: Martin Cray

Date of inspection: 14/15 October 2009 (mornings)

Contract number: T/021/09N

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Report on the inspection of nursery settings in the non-maintained sector

Name of nursery: Margaret Barnard Playgroup

**Address: Trefeddyg Stables
Athelstan Road
Tywyn
Gwynedd**

Post code: LL36 9AN

Telephone: 01654 711151

Person responsible for day-to-day management: Anita Dowden

Position: Leader

About the inspection

This inspection took place as part of a national programme of inspections of the educational provision for children before compulsory school age in Wales. It was commissioned by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales.

The purpose of inspection is to identify good features and shortcomings so that providers can improve the quality of education offered and help children achieve their full potential. Another purpose is to inform parents and the public about the quality of nursery education. A copy of the inspection report must be given to all parents/carers with a child at the nursery and should be available on request to other people.

Inspectors have used a five-point scale to record all judgements. Grade definitions are:

- Grade 1** good with outstanding features
- Grade 2** good features and no important shortcomings
- Grade 3** good features outweigh shortcomings
- Grade 4** some good features, but shortcomings in important areas
- Grade 5** many important shortcomings

1.0 Context of the setting

Context of the nursery setting

This English medium setting was established over 60 years ago by Margaret Barnard, operating from her own home. Nowadays it is based in converted stables close to the centre of Tywyn, Gwynedd. The setting serves the area in and around the town, which is considered to be neither particularly prosperous nor socially disadvantaged. Children come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

The setting is run by a volunteer Management Committee and is an educational provider as a member of the Gwynedd Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership. It is also affiliated to Wales Pre-School Playgroup Association.

The setting provides for children between two and a half and four years of age and it is open for five days a week, both morning and afternoons. Afternoon sessions are in the main attended by the younger children. Out of a total of 36 children registered to attend various sessions, 11 are under three years of age and 23 have attained their third birthdays. A further two are four year olds. All the three and four year olds qualify for funded places.

The setting provides for children with additional learning needs, and also for those from ethnic minority backgrounds. English is the first language spoken in the homes of nearly all the children.

Activities are held in a good sized playroom, quiet room and craft area, with regular access to a secure outdoor area. Use is also made of the local leisure centre for physical and creative activities.

The setting is staffed by a leader who has a Level 3 CACHE Diploma, together with three full time assistants who all have Level 2 qualifications. The leader has worked at the setting for 13 years, but only recently taken on the most senior role. The other members of staff are fairly recent appointments. Three are Welsh speakers. The setting is also supported on a part time basis by a specialist dance teacher and an assistant for additional learning needs.

The setting was inspected by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales in March 2008 and previously by Estyn in 2002.

The inspection was held on the mornings of the 14th and 15th of October 2009.

2.0 Main findings of the report

2.1 The overall quality and standards of educational provision and whether or not the provision successfully promotes the goals for children's learning

The quality and standards of educational provision, taken overall, are appropriate and successfully promote the Foundation Phase Outcomes for children's learning.

2.2 Standards achieved by children in the seven areas of learning

Areas of learning	Grade for under-fives
Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity	2
Language, literacy and communication skills	2
Mathematical development	2
Welsh language development	2
Knowledge and understanding of the world	2
Physical development	2
Creative development	2

2.3 Inspection judgement on the quality of education provided by the setting

Quality of education	Grade for under-fives
Quality of provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
Quality of planning for children's learning	2
Quality of teaching	2
Quality of assessment and recording of children's progress, and reports for parents and carers	2
Quality of the relationships with parents, carers and the community	2
The extent to which the setting contributes to children's wellbeing	2
Quality of the leadership and management of the setting	2
The progress made by the setting in implementing the key issues for action identified in the last inspection report	2

3.0 The standards achieved by children in the seven areas of learning

Standards achieved by 3-4 year-olds and by 4-5 year-olds

3.1 Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity

Children achieve good standards in their personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity, and there are no important shortcomings.

Good features

All children settle in well and have familiarised themselves early with the setting's procedures and daily routines, effectively promoting their skills.

Most children converse easily together and with adults, showing increasing confidence and asking for support if required. They have a good understanding of what is fair and unfair and are prepared to wait their turn. Behaviour is consistently good throughout and children are very mindful of one another when undertaking physical activities. The happy relationship which the setting has established is based on trust, respect and affection.

Most children display a willingness to venture as they work within the learning areas and out of doors. Levels of concentration are developing well. Children are happy to experiment with programmable toys and use the computer with the minimum of assistance.

Children have been well taught to appreciate that living things they study and care for should be treated with care, respect and concern.

They show increasing independence in terms of personal hygiene.

Children's awareness of the traditions of Wales is developing effectively as is their awareness of other cultures.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings.

3.2 Language, literacy and communication skills

Children achieve good standards in the development of their language, literacy and communication skills and there are no important shortcomings.

Good features

Nearly all children listen attentively to a good range of theme-related stories and understand the instructions and presentations given to them by adults.

They show good recall of a range of rhymes and simple songs, and learn how to pronounce them correctly. They use an increasing range of words and simple sentences in the right context. A good number are quite capable of holding extended conversations with adults. In role-play situations, children consistently discuss their play effectively, offering opinions and making appropriate choices.

Children enjoy browsing through books. They handle them correctly and are beginning to understand that words and pictures carry meaning. They come to recognise their own names when they self-register at the beginning of each session.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings, but at times children do not take full enough advantage of marking and pre-writing opportunities.

3.3 Mathematical development

Children achieve good standards in their mathematical development and there are no important shortcomings.

Good features

Most children engage confidently in a good range of activities relating to number. They are able to correctly count objects that are familiar to them such as milk bottles, candles on a birthday cake, and theme related toys. They reinforce their understanding by singing a range of number songs and rhymes. In due course, they come to be able to recognise and name numerals up to ten. They sort, match and order objects such as sea shells and socks correctly, and are able to recreate basic patterns.

Most children are able to correctly recognise some of the most common two-dimensional shapes seen around them.

All the children participate enthusiastically in sand and water activities thereby developing their understanding of capacity and mass. They develop a good understanding of terminology such as *heavy/light; large/small; full, half full and empty*.

Most children's awareness of the purpose of money is developing well through role-play activities undertaken in the setting's shop.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings.

3.4 Welsh language development

Children achieve good standards in their Welsh language development and there are no important shortcomings.

Good features

Children have a good, developing understanding of Welsh as it is used consistently in the setting's daily routines. A good level of enthusiasm is evident as they learn new words and phrases. The presence of theme-related labelling in Welsh makes an effective contribution towards extending children's vocabulary.

Most children listen well and respond correctly to basic commands and greet each other in Welsh at the beginning of each session. When asked questions about the weather, children make a determined effort, showing a good range of vocabulary and sentence patterns. They participate regularly in counting activities in Welsh and are able to identify colours correctly, displaying good pronunciation skills. Welsh action songs and rhymes are a particularly evident feature of children's learning.

Children are introduced to Welsh books through the stories they are told by staff members and have learned how to handle them with respect, recognising that words have meaning.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings, but more theme-related Welsh books on display would further enhance children's interest in the Welsh Language.

3.5 Knowledge and understanding of the world

Children's knowledge and understanding of the world is good and there are no important shortcomings.

Good features

All children have good opportunities to appreciate the environment and its importance. Their study of the seashore has helped to effectively develop their awareness in this respect. Children have a sound understanding of the seasons and their characteristics, knowing that autumn is a time of change. Most are able to correctly describe features of the day's weather and know what clothes are appropriate to wear according to circumstances at the time. They are familiar with planting and taking care of a variety of seeds and plants.

Children's investigative skills are developing well and they are able to correctly categorise different objects made of metal, glass, wood and plastic. Previous work indicates that they have investigated materials that either float or sink.

All children are able to recognise a variety of farm animals and the sounds they make. They recognise some farming implements, know of some of the produce that can be found on farms and are well acquainted with the work of the farmer.

Most children are well informed about the functions of different types of workers who serve the community.

All children have a developing understanding of the concept of time in the context of daily events in the home and the setting, and quite a few are able to refer to what day of the week it is in both English and in Welsh.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings.

3.6 Physical development

Children achieve good standards in their physical development and there are no important shortcomings.

Good features

All children make skilful use of a good range of equipment such as paintbrushes, pencils, crayons, scissors and jig-saws in a good variety of structured activities. Good hand eye co-ordination is evident when undertaking threading activities and individuals are well capable of using building blocks and construction kits effectively.

The regular use children make of most large equipment ensures that their pedalling, controlling and steering skills develop to the expected standard. They all respond well to commands, run safely and energetically, showing good spatial awareness when working on the local leisure centre's floor area. Most children's balancing skills develop well as they move confidently along a low bench with the minimum of assistance, or moving across the floor area with beanbags on their backs.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings, but children would benefit from more regular access to climbing apparatus.

3.7 Creative development

Children achieve good standards in their creative development and there are no important shortcomings.

Good features

All children know a good range of songs and nursery rhymes in both English and Welsh, singing them tunefully and with enjoyment.

They use a variety of materials and media to convey their ideas effectively. Most children develop their skills well as they make cows, pig collages and rubbings of farm animals. They print with their hands, footwear and natural resources. They learn how to mix colours and are able to make suitable choices resulting in them expressing themselves well in their farm paintings.

The majority of children respond creatively to music as they enthusiastically emulate the movements of farm animals. Regular experiences in creative dance make a significant contribution to children's development in this respect.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings.

4.0 The quality of educational provision

The quality of educational provision for 3-4 year-olds and for 4-5 year-olds

4.1 Quality of provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

The quality of provision for children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has good features and no important shortcomings.

Good features

The setting's day-to-day activities and procedures effectively nurture children's understanding of important values such as honesty, gratitude and showing respect for others. Children are taught to work well together and are encouraged to be courteous and polite at all times.

Much effort is put into children acquiring proficiency in the Welsh Language and they have access to a range of activities that celebrate Welsh traditions and culture effectively.

Children are given appropriate opportunities to learn about Christian based celebrations such as the Nativity, together with learning about diversity through their studies of children's lives in different countries.

The practice of offering a short prayer of thanks prior to receiving their snacks effectively promotes children's awareness of being grateful.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings.

4.2 Quality of planning for children's learning

The quality of planning for children's learning has good features and no important shortcomings.

Good features

Overall, planning reflects the requirements of the Foundation Phase as set out in the *Framework for Children's Learning for 3-7 year olds in Wales*.

Activities are organised around a series of termly or half-termly themes such as 'Myself', 'The Seaside' and currently, 'The Farm'. These are sufficiently flexible to take into account the interests and needs of every child, with staff always prepared to make adjustments according to the response they get from the children. The programme is balanced and gives worthy consideration to all the areas of Foundation Phase learning over a period of time.

Every child receives equal access to the programme of work and good attention is given to the Cwricwlwm Cymreig and cultural diversity.

There is a good balance between planning for activities chosen by the children themselves and those that are adult led. Simple, but effective arrangements are in place to differentiate activities according to age and ability, including instances where there are additional learning needs. The evaluation of the work programme is undertaken effectively.

Shortcomings

Whilst weekly planning for focussed tasks details the activities to be undertaken by the children, over time, it is not always consistent in its noting of the learning skills that are to be developed through the various activities.

4.3 Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has good features and no important shortcomings.

Good features

The teaching makes an effective contribution to children's progress, achievements and wellbeing. Staff members are good role models and are consistent in the way in which they handle children. They have a particularly good relationship with children and provide good care, support and guidance. Any additional learning needs are identified and actioned early.

The learning environment is very positive and good effort is put into developing children's capability in Welsh. Staff are thoughtful, well-qualified and have a good knowledge and understanding of Foundation Phase outcomes. They provide a range of interesting experiences that consistently engage children's attention.

A variety of teaching strategies are used and activities are managed effectively. Small group teaching was found to be particularly effective, with adults challenging children's ideas and clearly moving their learning forward.

Good use is made of resources, and children are taught out of doors regularly. Children's work and theme-related displays are shown to particularly good effect, contributing significantly to the learning environment.

The setting receives regular support visits from its link teacher.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings.

4.4 Quality of assessment and recording of children's progress and reports for parents and carers

Overall, the quality of assessment and recording of children's progress has good features and no important shortcomings.

Good features

Parents are invited to complete a 'First Steps' booklet soon after their children commence at the setting. This provides a good base of information for staff to work with in these early days. When staff feel that children may have additional learning needs, they are well aware of the procedures to follow and the appropriate agencies to contact for assistance.

On-going assessment is a sound feature of the setting's arrangements and a good balance is achieved between informal assessment through spontaneous observation, and planned observations against specific activities. Overall, there is good emphasis placed on identifying the next steps in learning for all children, including where there are additional learning needs.

Parents and carers receive regular opportunities to discuss progress on an informal basis before and after the daily sessions. Children's work is also sent home regularly to be celebrated, and in due course, a file containing significant samples of work kept over time.

Written reports are detailed and informative, and submitted annually to parents.

Shortcomings

The setting's 'Records of Progress' format requires adapting to fully reflect Foundation Phase Outcomes.

4.5 Quality of the relationships with parents, carers and the community

The quality of relationships with parents, carers and the community has good features and no important shortcomings.

Good features

Good relations exist between parents, carers and staff, and they are pleased with the progress their children are making. Questionnaires returned by parents to the inspector were very positive and showed no significant concerns. This was confirmed through discussions with parents and carers during the course of the inspection.

Parents visit the setting before their children start and are given a useful package of information, including a booklet produced by the Welsh Assembly Government detailing the Foundation Phase curriculum.

A good range of information is provided for parents on the setting's notice board, conveniently situated in the entrance hallway. This includes details of the current theme and learning activities, together with contact numbers for various agencies.

Children receive regular visits from people which are theme related, for example, a lifeboat man, health visitor, dental hygienist, mother and baby. The current study of farming will shortly result in a visit by a farmer, together with some of his equipment and animals. Recently, the children have visited the seaside.

Particularly good links exist with the local primary school in terms of preparing the children for transferring to the next phase in their learning and also through various fundraising activities. Links with specialist agencies in respect of supporting children with additional learning needs are good.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings.

4.6 The extent to which the setting contributes to children's wellbeing

The setting's contribution to children's wellbeing has good features and no important shortcomings.

Good features

Overall, the range of policies and procedures in place contribute effectively to children's well-being. Accidents or incidents are duly recorded. Both fire-drills and risk assessments are also held in accordance with the requirements.

There are very sound arrangements for receiving and releasing children to their parents or carers at the beginning and end of sessions.

Children eat healthily during their snack times and high standards of hygiene are maintained at all times. Good opportunities are provided for children to work energetically in the nearby leisure centre and to play out of doors.

Overall, learning resources are in good condition and are safely accessible to children.

Staff are familiar with Child Protection procedures. The setting's leader has received the relevant training. Other members of staff are awaiting placement on courses.

Shortcomings

Whilst the contact points with agencies in respect of issues relating to protecting children clearly feature on the setting's notice board, it would also be appropriate for this information to be included within the handbook distributed to parents and policy documents.

4.7 Quality of the leadership and management of the setting

The quality of the leadership and management of the setting has good features and no important shortcomings.

Good features

Staff contribute effectively to a team ethos and the setting is well led by a leader who has a clear vision of what is required.

Policies, based mainly on those prepared by Wales Pre-School Playgroup have been adopted and are well reflected in practice. The Management Committee usually meets on a termly basis and makes a valuable contribution to the setting's direction.

Staff appraisals have been completed as required. Training requirements for professional development have been identified and there is good support for training courses in order to improve standards and the quality of provision.

The management and use of resources is good and a recent significant donation of money have been earmarked for further improvements.

Staff are becoming increasingly more confident with self-evaluation processes. They show a good level of awareness of what they do well and what is in need of improvement. Development targets have been set to ensure that the setting is continuously moving forward.

Shortcomings

There are no important shortcomings, but in order to further facilitate the management of the way in which the setting moves forward, it would be appropriate to identify a programme of improvements over the longer term rather than planning development purely on an annual basis as is currently the case.

4.8 The progress made by the setting in implementing the key issues for action identified in the last inspection report

Overall, good progress has been made by the setting in implementing the key issues raised in the previous inspection report.

5.0 Recommendations

The setting needs to:

Continue to maintain and build on the standards achieved by children, attending to the few shortcomings noted.

Ensure that its weekly planning of focussed tasks is consistent in the noting of the learning skills that are to be developed through the various activities.

The provider must draw up an action plan within 40 working days, or 45 working days if the plan needs to be translated to or from Welsh, showing how the issues identified above will be addressed. The action plan must be given to all parents/carers with a child at the setting. A copy of the action plan must be sent to the Chair of the Early Years and Childcare Partnership or Children and Young Peoples' Partnership, as appropriate, and to the Local Authority. An evaluation of the action taken will form part of the next inspection.