

Non-maintained nurseries

Total number of settings providing funded education

569

January 2019

546

January 2020

537

July 2021

529

August 2022

543

May 2023

527

August 2024

Core inspections

Autumn 2023: 30 inspections

Spring 2024: 27 inspections

Summer 2024: 33 inspections

No. of inspections: 90

Follow-up

Placed into Estyn review follow-up category: 1 during 23/24

Removed from follow-up category: 1 from 22/23

Remained in Estyn review follow-up category: 0 from 22/23

Case studies

Requested: 20

Published on website: 17

Summary

Where practitioners provided rich opportunities through well-planned activities and learning areas, most children developed skills holistically across different contexts. Practitioners effectively captured children's curiosity, immersing them in awe and wonder about the natural world. They offered purposeful learning experiences based on the children's immediate environment, allowing for long periods of play where children could deeply engage in their interests. However, in some settings, the use of assessments and observations to respond to individual children's needs was still developing. A minority of practitioners did not effectively use observations to plan the next steps in learning. Additionally, some settings did not plan purposefully enough to develop children's skills, particularly in outdoor areas.

Settings provided good levels of care, support, and guidance, positively impacting children's well-being. Regular, predictable routines helped children feel secure and comfortable, allowing them to form strong bonds with peers and practitioners. These children displayed high levels of enjoyment and confidence in their play and learning. Nearly all settings promoted healthy lifestyles and safety, with many having procedures to support children with additional learning needs. However, in a few instances, risk assessments were generic or not regularly reviewed to reflect the current situation.

Leadership was strong in many settings, with leaders having a clear vision for providing worthwhile experiences in safe and nurturing environments. Effective self-evaluation processes informed improvement plans, leading to positive changes in provision and outcomes for children. However, in some settings, leaders did not prioritise key areas for improvement, focusing instead on areas of interest.

Teaching and learning

In nearly all settings inspected, most children made at least good progress from their individual starting points and developed a wide range of skills through their play.

Overall, many settings implemented the Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings successfully. Practitioners in these settings provided rich opportunities for children to develop a wide range of skills within carefully planned areas and activities. For example, many practitioners provided beneficial opportunities for children to handle books and listen to stories in all areas of the setting.

Most practitioners promoted children's communication skills effectively. They encouraged children to ask and answer questions and provided thought provoking comments that encouraged children to think for themselves. Most children spoke confidently to adults and to their peers. They used a suitable range of vocabulary during spontaneous and structured play to explain basic ideas and to describe what they were doing. Many children listened carefully and with understanding to practitioners and followed their instructions willingly.

In Welsh-medium settings, most practitioners planned for the children's Welsh language development effectively. They immersed the children in the Welsh language and, as a result, the children's understanding developed well. In the most successful settings, practitioners worked together beneficially, ensuring that these practices were consistent and had the best possible effect on the children's understanding and linguistic progress.

In many English-medium settings, practitioners developed children's use of the Welsh language successfully by utilising opportunities throughout the session to introduce and consolidate children's learning and understanding. In the strongest practice, practitioners spoke clearly and took every opportunity to introduce new vocabulary to children, encouraging them to respond to simple words and phrases in Welsh. However, in a few settings, practitioners did not always use Welsh consistently enough to support the children's development of their Welsh language skills.

Many practitioners planned a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated learning. They ensured that resources were easily accessible to children so that they could make purposeful choices about where and how they wanted to play. This meant that children engaged well in activities and had many opportunities to follow their own interests and develop their skills.

Many practitioners provided a wide range of well-planned opportunities for children to develop their physical skills successfully. For example, they encouraged children to use planks and balance equipment provided to build their own obstacle courses. Many children developed fine motor skills and manual dexterity effectively through activities such as using tweezers, threading beads and manipulating dough.

Overall, practitioners planned experiences that captured children's curiosity well. In the best examples, they ensured that the children were immersed in awe and wonder of the natural world and

the way things develop and grow. They also used these activities to develop children's skills holistically. For example, practitioners involved children in gardening activities to develop children's mathematical language in real life contexts. This allowed children to develop their numeracy and problem-solving skills successfully as well as their physical skills.

In the strongest practice, practitioners provided children with extended periods of play, where they could revisit activities that they were interested in and allowed time for them to engage deeply in their learning. They responded positively to children's interests and fascinations. They used this information effectively and adapted their planning to further engage the children in their learning, for example by providing cooking activities in response to children's interests in making biscuits in the role play area.

Generally, settings provided children with valuable opportunities to be creative and to experiment with ideas, materials and equipment. As a result, most children developed their creative skills well through art activities or by experimenting with musical instruments and dancing expressively. Nearly all children developed their digital skills well. In the strongest examples, practitioners encouraged children to understand the effect of digital devices on their lives through activities such as weighing items on digital scales, recording voice memos, or using voice activated technology to find information.

Most settings continued to provide suitable opportunities for children to become familiar with, and experience Welsh culture. For example, practitioners arranged visits and activities such as walks to local shops, libraires and parks, or journeys on local service buses to amenities that were a little further afield. Most settings celebrated and planned activities around a few important cultural dates such as Chinese New Year and Diwali, but opportunities for children to develop an understanding of cultures they were not familiar with remained limited. This meant that children did not always learn about the diversity of Wales.

In many settings, where teaching was strong, practitioners had a secure understanding of child development and they offered children a wide range of rich play opportunities based on the principles of the [Curriculum for Wales](#). Practitioners provided activities indoors and outdoors that encouraged children to take risks and to develop their social and collaborative skills purposefully. They created nurturing learning environments, which created a strong sense of belonging amongst the children and supported the development of their skills, knowledge and understanding well. Many practitioners questioned children skilfully to support and extend their learning. They used open questions skilfully to draw out children's ideas and encouraged them to think more extensively.

In the most effective practice, practitioners recognised when they needed to intervene, and when to step away to encourage children to think and work things out for themselves. For example, practitioners allowed children the freedom to examine how things work, such as wheels on toy trucks. They then introduced tools and other materials to enable the children to fix problems for themselves.

However, in a few settings, practitioners did not plan purposefully enough to develop children's skills, especially in the outdoor areas. In these examples, children often played with no real focus or purpose and practitioners tended to over-direct children's learning, hampering their chances of finding things out for themselves.

Over the year, an increasing number of settings adopted the [Assessment Arrangements for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings](#). This helped practitioners to better understand progression in

children's learning and to apply the principles of progression in practice.

Tiggys Day Care Day Nursery

In Tiggys Day Care Day Nursery, practitioners use observations proactively to write down children's interests and fascinations as they play. They place their written notes on a planning board that is then used by all practitioners to plan experiences and adapt environments to be meaningful and relevant to children's interests. For example, when children are observed pretending to fix a cupboard in the role play area, practitioners enrich the area the following day with tools relating to carpenters, plumbers and electricians.

In a minority of settings, the use of assessments and observations to respond to individual children's needs and to deepen and extend their learning were still in the early stages of development. In these instances, practitioners did not always make worthwhile use of observations and assessments to plan and teach the next steps in children's knowledge, understanding and skills development well enough.

Care, support and guidance and well-being

Settings continued to provide effective levels of care, support and guidance to children that impacted positively on their well-being. Many children engaged happily with peers and adults in their settings. Those settings that established regular, predictable routines provided children with a sense of security, enabling them to feel comfortable and at ease. These children settled well and formed strong bonds with their peers and practitioners. They displayed high levels of enjoyment. In these instances, children often made confident choices and decisions about their play and learning. They moved freely between easily accessible activities that interested them and made meaningful choices in their play. They often played with a wide range of interesting resources and used these to construct their own play and to develop their ideas effectively. In the many settings where this was the case, most children expressed themselves well because they knew practitioners valued their opinions and feelings.

Many practitioners supported children skilfully during play and daily routines that kept children safe, whilst also encouraging their independence and respecting their privacy.

Little Explorers

In Little Explorers, children thrive at the setting and respond very well to the numerous opportunities to develop independence. They serve themselves at snack time, peel and cut their fruit, pour their own milk and take their plates to the sink. Older children find their name cards to write their name on their pictures and all children learn to put on their waterproofs and boots before outside play.

In nearly all settings, practitioners followed their setting's policies and procedures that encouraged healthy lifestyles and promoted children's safety and well-being. In these settings, practitioners were

clear about their responsibilities in relation to dealing with child protection concerns and any child's medical needs. They provided well-balanced food and drink options and were successful in encouraging parents to provide healthy packed lunches. In the best examples, practitioners supervised children well and completed all relevant records in relation to accidents, incidents, existing injuries and medication appropriately. They undertook regular reviews and analysed any trends. However, in a very few instances where practice was not as strong, leaders adopted generic risk assessments that lacked specific details about the setting, or they did not review risk assessments regularly to reflect the setting's current situation.

Most practitioners managed children's interactions very well. Through clear explanations and calm discussions, they helped children to develop a sense of right and wrong sensitively. They used praise to celebrate the positive things children did and these actions often helped children understand how their actions affected others. This resulted in many children using good manners and showing kindness to one another when playing with their peers.

In nearly all settings, practitioners developed warm relationships with children and treated them with care and respect. They knew the children well and were responsive to their individual needs and offered a good level of support. In the best examples, practitioners obtained useful information from parents and carers about children's likes and dislikes. This supported practitioners to gain a better understanding of individual children before they entered the setting. In these settings, practitioners regularly amended their practice to reflect and consider changes and developments that occurred both within the setting and the child's home life.

Many settings had sound procedures to support children with additional learning needs (ALN). Where practice was effective, settings undertook valuable training to support them in their roles and to better meet the needs of children identified as having ALN. Practitioners took the time to evaluate the impact of their approaches and they identified further amendments thoughtfully. As a result, those settings knew children's individual targets well and had a strong understanding of how they could support them to make progress. In the strongest examples, settings created an inclusive environment for all children. For instance, in a few examples, staff used signs and gestures alongside spoken words successfully to help develop children's language and communication skills.

Leadership

As last year, leadership in most settings remained strong. Leaders had a clear vision for their settings and were passionate about providing worthwhile experiences for children in safe and nurturing environments. Nearly all settings placed a clear emphasis on the well-being of all children. Where leadership was strong, leaders communicated their vision clearly through their actions and through establishing and maintaining strong relationships with children and their families.

Many leaders evaluated their practice accurately, considering all aspects of their setting. They developed valuable self-evaluation processes that fed purposefully into the setting's improvement plans. They identified their strengths and areas for improvement accurately and set appropriate actions to bring about those desired improvements. Where practice was particularly strong, settings used external agencies' advice and practitioners' views well to develop and improve their provision and support children's learning. In the best examples, leaders evaluated improvements in provision by considering the impact on children's learning and well-being. However, in a few settings, leaders did not always prioritise the most important areas for improvement well enough, tending to focus on areas of interest rather than key areas for improvement.

Leaders in many settings had high expectations and invested purposefully in their staff. They completed regular, worthwhile appraisals and supervisions with their practitioners. They created and maintained a strong team ethos. In these settings, staff felt valued and empowered to develop professionally through good quality training that supported the setting's priorities and practitioners' individual aspirations. However, in a few settings, leaders did not always provide practitioners with suitable appraisals. As a result, practitioners did not always know what was expected of them, or what actions they needed to take to secure improvements and to comply with regulations. In a very few settings where supervision and appraisal procedures were ineffective, they were not always implemented consistently or formalised.

Many settings established and maintained strong partnerships, as they understood the positive effect this had on the children in their care. They supported families to understand their children's development and gave them ideas on how they could help at home through activities such as sending regular video clips and messages on social media channels, and face-to-face meetings to discuss their children's well-being and progress.

Chuckles Day Care

Leaders at Chuckles Day Care have established exceptional links with a range of partners. They work closely with local schools through activities such as forest school sessions and sports day visits. Leaders work with the local authority early years advisory teacher to improve standards and share good practice with other settings. Leaders plan family and parent workshops throughout the year, focusing on local community needs and priorities, such as a healthy food workshop and cooking days. They provide food and menu cards for families to use at home. The setting has close involvement in transition projects, supporting children and families moving from the nursery into the local schools.

In most settings, leaders made worthwhile use of available grants. They ensured that their settings were well resourced, and they spent wisely, such as to purchase new resources when needed. Most settings that were provided directly with the Early Years Development Grant used it efficiently to make a positive impact on outcomes for disadvantaged children. Leaders identified eligible children and purchased resources to support those individuals, such as maths resources or reading books to take home.

Most settings provided a rich environment that supported children's learning and development effectively. In the best examples, leaders created environments that sparked children's curiosity, empowered them to investigate and allowed them to make independent choices both indoors and outdoors.

Homestead Nursery

Leaders at Homestead Nursery provide purposeful resources that support children's holistic development in an exciting and innovative way. They consider children's development well and ensure appropriate access to activities that build upon individuals' abilities very effectively as they move through the setting. They use vintage furniture, plants and mirrors creatively and successfully to create a warm and homely environment where children, practitioners and visitors feel relaxed. The environment is further enhanced with a range of imaginative resources that stimulate children's senses extremely well. For example, fresh and dehydrated fruits, real fresh herbs and musical areas with a disused piano with its functions exposed are used effectively to inspire curiosity.

Overview of recommendations

In the 2023 - 2024 academic year, Estyn inspected 90 non-maintained settings.

38 (42.2%) settings were given a recommendation to improve their practice in some way. Of those, 26 settings were given a recommendation to provide or expand opportunities to improve children's skills; half of those recommendations were to develop children's Welsh language skills.

23 (25.6%) settings were given a recommendation to improve or develop use of observations. About half of those recommendations were about using observations to help plan the next steps in children's development, the others were variously focusing on ensuring children make progress, supporting children's learning and development, and using observations to plan experiences that meet each child's individual needs.

16 (17.8%) settings were given a recommendation related to health and safety, including completion of risk assessments and ensuring parents/carers sign accident/incident forms.

15 (15.6%) settings were given a recommendation about outdoor area, to either make more use of or develop or improve the quality of outdoor resources.

10 (11.1%) settings were given a recommendation to address areas of non-compliance.

Nine (10%) settings were given a recommendation about staff appraisals, and nine (10%) were given a recommendation about staff development.