



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on**

**Rachael's Playhouse**

**5 Dean Street  
Aberdare  
Rhondda Cynon Taf  
CF44 7BN**

**Date of inspection: March 2023**

**by**

**Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)**

**and**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and  
Training in Wales**

## About Rachael's Playhouse

Name of setting	Rachael's Playhouse Aberdare
Category of care provided	Full Day Care
Registered person(s)	
Responsible individual (if applicable)	Rachael Barnett, Hannah Jones
Person in charge	Hannah Jones
Number of places	30
Age range of children	2-4 years
Number of 3 and 4 year old children	13
Number of children who receive funding for early education	9
Opening days / times	Monday – Friday 08:30 to 16:30
Flying start service	Yes
Language of the setting	Bilingual
Is this setting implementing the Child Care Offer?	Yes
Welsh Language Active Offer	This service is working towards providing an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language and demonstrates a significant effort to promoting the use of the Welsh language and culture.
Date of previous CIW inspection	This is the first inspection since registration
Date of previous Estyn inspection	This is the setting's first inspection
Dates of this inspection visit(s)	21/03/2023

## Summary

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Well-being</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Learning</b> (only applies to three and four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting)	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Care and development</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Teaching and assessment</b> (only applies to three and four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting)	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Environment</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Excellent</b>

## **Non-compliance**

No non-compliance was identified during this inspection.

## **Recommendations**

R1 Strengthen opportunities to develop children's Welsh language skills

## **What happens next**

The setting will draw up an action plan that shows how it is going to address the recommendations.

CIW and Estyn will invite the setting to prepare a case study on its work in relation to meeting the needs of all children, especially children with additional needs and using snack time to develop a wide range of children's skills and understanding for dissemination on their websites.

## Main findings

### Well-being: Excellent

Nearly all children are happy, confident and excited on arrival at the setting. They express their feelings clearly and make effective choices about where and with who they play. Nearly all show excellent resilience, motivation and perseverance in their play and learning. For example, children concentrate and persevere for extended periods of time while trying to fasten the zips of their coats independently in preparation to go outside. Nearly all children respond eagerly to the challenge and support of practitioners. They identify risks highly effectively when taking part in risky play activities and explain clearly how they can keep themselves safe. Nearly all have an excellent understanding of sustainability, explaining confidently the importance of recycling and ensuring that plastic and rubbish do not end up in the sea. They have a clear understanding of the effect this has on sea life animals. A very few explain confidently that by recycling 'we reduce heat and produce transport fuel.'

Nearly all children share and collaborate extremely well with other children, showing empathy towards them. They show excellent creative and imaginative skills. For example, when a story about dinosaurs captures the children's imagination, they fetch dinosaurs to enhance their play. Nearly all children move from the indoor area to the outdoor area independently, with many putting on their wellies, coats and wet weather gear with little adult support.

Nearly all children cope very well with separation from their parents and carers when they arrive at the setting. They interact very well with practitioners and visitors. They form exceptionally positive attachments with all staff, which has a positive effect on their well-being.

Nearly all children have exceptionally good independent skills. For example, when they want more paint for their picture, they collect it and pour it into containers independently. They choose a range of different resources independently to enhance their play and learning. Nearly all children play harmoniously together and interact confidently with practitioners such as in the home corner, where they pour water to make herbal tea describing confidently how it smells and looks. Nearly all are developing excellent social skills and are patient whilst waiting their turn.

Nearly all children take pride in their ability to demonstrate their skills as they experiment with a wide range of learning experiences. They develop their self-help skills very well during snack time. This has a positive effect on their self-esteem. For example, 'Helpwr Heddiw' lays the table carefully for their friends to eat snack using ceramic cups and plates. The children cut their own fruit independently and describe maturely the risks that come with using a knife. Nearly all children take a real interest in snack time and enjoy learning about and describing different fruit and vegetables such as describing the texture, shape and appearance of an avocado.

**Learning (only applies to three or four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting): Excellent**

Nearly all children, including children with additional learning needs, make at least good progress from their individual starting points.

Nearly all children make excellent progress with their communication skills. They listen intently to practitioners and their peers and respond confidently. For example, when reading a book alongside practitioners, children predict what they think will happen next in the story confidently. The children's love of books is evident as they choose stories to read independently and to share with practitioners, turning pages correctly as they look at the text and pictures. Nearly all children talk enthusiastically about their play using a rich range of vocabulary highly effectively. For example, during snack time, they discuss the importance of keeping 'hydrated' and why they need to avoid 'cross contamination' for children who have specific allergies. Most develop their early writing skills successfully such as creating a shopping list of the resources needed to make dough at home, ensuring a new line for each ingredient in the list.

Overall, many children are developing an effective understanding of the Welsh language and respond to instructions appropriately. A few children are beginning to use Welsh vocabulary independently in their play, for example when singing a song about splashing as they jump in puddles in the outdoor play area.

Nearly all children make very strong progress in their mathematical development. They use mathematical language naturally in their play when saying if their cups of tea are 'full' or 'half full'. They measure the amount of water in a container accurately when creating potions in the outdoor area. Most children count and recognise numbers up to ten confidently and use a door knocker to make the number of sounds that correspond to a number.

Nearly all children use a range of equipment skilfully to develop their strength and balancing skills, walking confidently over different textured surfaces outdoors. They consider carefully the risks associated with climbing high and explain how they can keep themselves safe. Nearly all develop their fine gross motor skills successfully when making marks using a wide range of resources and by using scissors correctly to cut dough.

Nearly all children think creatively to solve problems. When deciding to create a cave for dinosaurs, they choose materials independently giving a clear reason for their choices such as when choosing a plastic sheet to keep the dinosaurs dry. Nearly all develop very strong creative skills, for example when observing insects on the electronic tablet before painting them with cotton buds.

Nearly all children develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills purposefully. They use cameras confidently to take photographs of their work and have a good understanding of how to access instructions by pressing a talking button.

## **Care and development: Excellent**

Practitioners follow rigorous and robust systems and procedures to ensure children's health and safety. They have an exceptional understanding of their responsibilities and provide excellent opportunities for children to develop through daily routines. Practitioners have extremely high expectations for children. An outstanding example of this is the way they teach the children how to keep safe, consider the well-being of others and how to consider risks in their play. For example, when children are using the climbing equipment in the outdoor area, practitioners explore with them what they need to consider and do when climbing high or over uneven surfaces. The setting has very thorough procedures for keeping children safe. Leaders and practitioners keep records of any concerns, accidents, incidents and relevant information securely. Practitioners have up-to-date first aid certificates. The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meet the requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Practitioners promote excellent practices to ensure that children stay healthy, for example by providing healthy and nutritious food and by encouraging children to wash their hands regularly. Practitioners have developed outstanding arrangements for snack time that allow children to develop their social and communication skills extremely well. They ensure excellent opportunities for children to set the table, cut their own food, serve their drinks. They also help children to learn about how different children have various needs and allergies and the importance of avoiding cross-contamination. They also use snack time very well to teach children about the importance of sustainability and recycling through real-life experiences. For example, they talk about the importance of picking up rubbish and recycling as much as possible. They also encourage children to consider what will happen to sea creatures if plastic and rubbish gets into the sea and the impact on sea life.

Practitioners manage interactions with children extremely well and there is a caring and nurturing relationship between them. Practitioners have a highly effective understanding of supporting children to make friends, manage their feelings and cope with difficult situations. They support the children to concentrate on developing their resilience and perseverance particularly well, such as when they try to hit golf tees into a piece of wood to correspond with a number. The gentle and calm attitudes of all practitioners have a very positive effect on the children's behaviour and interactions with others.

Practitioners have an excellent knowledge of how to meet children's individual needs. They use observations and assessments as a natural part of daily practice and use this information extremely well to plan provision to ensure that all children make at least good progress. The provision for identifying and supporting children with additional learning needs is an outstanding feature of the setting. The setting has robust procedures in place to identify and support children with additional learning needs. Leaders and practitioners know each child's individual targets very well and have a strong understanding of how to support them to make progress. They ensure that parents are integral to the support provided to their children and keep them updated regularly of progress. They collaborate extremely well with external agencies to support children with additional learning needs, for example by working closely with health professionals and the local authority's advisory teacher.

Practitioners promote the children's awareness of the importance of treating people from all cultural backgrounds with respect and tolerance. They promote the children's Welsh heritage successfully, for example by celebrating the Welsh football team reaching the football World Cup.

**Teaching and assessment (only applies to three or four year old children who do not receive education in a maintained setting): Excellent**

Practitioners have an excellent understanding of child development and how children learn. They have high expectations of themselves and the children and know children's individual strengths and needs extremely well. They use this knowledge as well as observation and assessment arrangements highly effectively to plan a wide range of stimulating learning experiences that spark children's curiosity. This develops their independence, problem-solving and thinking skills sophisticatedly across all areas of learning. They recognise valuable opportunities to take advantage of all teachable moments. For example, when children notice a woodlouse walking across the floor, practitioners encourage the children to think about how it had got there and how they would go about finding a safe habitat for it. They use the momentum from this moment to plan activities for children to explore and learn about different minibeasts with beneficial opportunities to develop children's communication, ICT and creative skills.

An outstanding feature of the teaching is the rich language model practitioners provide, developing children's use of vocabulary to a high standard. For example, they discuss how wellies are designed to be waterproof and how they repel water so that their feet do not get wet. Generally, practitioners provide beneficial opportunities for children to hear and use the Welsh language in their play, although they do not always consider well enough the development of their skills systematically over time.

Practitioners make excellent use of the high quality indoor and outdoor learning environments, allowing children to choose independently where they wish to learn. The carefully planned and well-considered activities enable children to develop a wide range of skills progressively in all areas. Practitioners ensure that activities derive from the interests of children, including from regular contact with parents and carers who send photographs and information of their children's interests at home. Practitioners adapt their provision skilfully to respond to these interests, engaging the children in play and learning in a creative way.

Practitioners are highly skilled at observing play and intervening to support children's learning and to challenge them further to develop their skills. They are excellent role models. For example, they share books with children, model how to read a book correctly and discuss the story with enthusiasm, developing children's love of reading. They respond very well to children's interests such as providing opportunities for children to make cave paintings after seeing them in a story. The support for children with additional needs is outstanding. Practitioners are attuned to the individual needs of children with a clear understanding of the strategies needed to enable them to make strong progress in their well-being and learning. The use of questioning to encourage children to think and solve problems is an outstanding feature of the setting. For example, when children see water on the floor, practitioners ask them about what might happen if it is left there and how they can make it safe.



Practitioners make excellent use of the local area to enhance children's learning. For example, after building Welsh castles out of boxes, practitioners took the children to the local library to look for books on Welsh castles. The use of worthwhile opportunities such as this fosters a sense of belonging in the local community as well as enhancing children's knowledge about the history and traditions of Wales.

Practitioners plan high-quality experiences that allow children to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development to a high level. Effective examples of this are through effective activities for black history month and visiting the local cenotaph to learn about Remembrance Day.

### **Environment: Excellent**

The quality of the play and learning environment is outstanding. It provides a wealth of valuable and challenging opportunities for children to develop a wide range of skills, especially their independence and problem-solving skills. Practitioners organise the learning areas extremely well to inspire children to investigate, inquire and develop their imagination through awe and wonder. This supports the development of children's creative skills successfully and encourages them to be inquisitive, curious learners. Practitioners ensure that the environment is welcoming and interesting and celebrates the children's creativity by displaying their work and photographs of them in their play. This gives the children a strong sense of pride, ownership and belonging. Practitioners ensure that resources are kept at a practical height for every child to be able to reach them independently. For example, when children want more water to make their 'cakes', they fetch a container to collect more water and bring it back to their work. Practitioners provide an environment that reflects and respects other cultures very effectively. For example, they display pictures of people from different countries in their traditional costume and add multi-cultural resources to enhance the sand and water areas.

Practitioners ensure that children are safe and healthy by following a range of very clear and comprehensive policies. They prioritise assessing risks that are relevant to the indoor and outdoor areas daily. They practice fire drills regularly so that children and staff become familiar with evacuation routes and procedures. The setting is clean, organised and very well maintained. Practitioners follow rigorous hygiene procedures and carry out infection control audits regularly. All furniture, equipment, and resources are appropriate for the age of the children, are of an excellent standard and very well maintained. Leaders and practitioners place a strong emphasis on using a variety of sustainable and recyclable materials to enhance children's play. For example, children have access to empty boxes, empty milk cartons and recycled paper to choose from to make their creations.

The outdoor area provides exceptional experiences for children to learn, play and relax. The area is well planned and enables children to develop physically, imaginatively and creatively. For example, children benefit from space to run around, splash in puddles or ride a bike. The area also provides children with valuable opportunities to relax in comfortable and quiet areas, should they wish.

## **Leadership and management: Excellent**

Leaders have high expectations of themselves, practitioners and children. The setting leader provides inspirational leadership for practitioners and has high aspirations for them, empowering them to lead and make decisions in the best interests of the children. Leaders have the well-being of children and practitioners at the centre of setting life, providing effective arrangements to support this. This clear vision and ethos leads to excellent team work and collaboration amongst practitioners, creating a safe and exciting environment for children to flourish.

One of the strengths of the leadership is the clear focus on providing high quality professional development for practitioners. They encourage practitioners to reflect on their own practice through regular supervision and appraisal processes and as part of their own daily practice. There are regular worthwhile opportunities for practitioners to work together and to benefit from learning from each other. Leaders also ensure that all practitioners have access to high quality, valuable training opportunities. This approach to professional development ensures that the quality of care and teaching is of a consistently high standard throughout the setting leading to excellent outcomes for all children.

Leaders have established rigorous self-evaluation and improvement planning processes that consider the views of a wide range of stakeholders. Practitioners have excellent opportunities to reflect on what works well and what could be improved and share this information regularly through opportunities such as staff meetings. Leaders also consult with parents regularly to gain their views on the setting and what needs to improve. They use all this information beneficially to plan for improvement. For example, the focus on developing provision for children with additional learning needs in line with the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Act has ensured comprehensive support for children with additional learning needs. It has also developed practitioners' knowledge and skills in supporting the individual needs of these children exceptionally well. Another strength of the self-evaluation process is the way in practitioners regularly reflect on their own roles, responsibilities and areas of learning. They work together very well to identify what works successfully in their individual areas and identify how to enhance and develop them further to improve the provision for children. This leads to high quality provision that develops a wide range of skills, especially children's independence and understanding of how to take measured risks in their play.

Leaders have established highly beneficial partnership links that have a positive effect on the provision and outcomes for children. The setting has established excellent links with parents and carers. There are highly effective procedures for the children's transition from home to the setting and from the setting into school. For example, all parents are invited to join their children in the setting whilst they settle, either in the main room or in a quieter transition room for children who find the main room overwhelming at first. This enables parents and children to get to know the setting's arrangements and establishes beneficial relationships between parents and practitioners. There is regular communication with parents and carers through an app and regular developmental reviews, which provide valuable opportunities to discuss children's progress. The setting also offers worthwhile opportunities for them to join their children and practitioners on activities during monthly 'Together Time' sessions,

such as the opportunity to taste Chinese food as part of the celebrations for Chinese New Year.

The excellent links with the community allow children to develop a sense of belonging to their area. Leaders make beneficial use of regular opportunities for children to access the local community such as with visits to the local book shop to share stories and visit the local market to purchase fruit and vegetables.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the setting and from CIW and Estyn's websites (<http://careinspectorate.wales>) ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

CIW and Estyn evaluate a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

<b>Excellent</b>	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
<b>Good</b>	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
<b>Adequate</b>	Strengths outweigh weaknesses but improvements are required
<b>Poor</b>	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths and significant improvements are required

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### Summary of Non-Compliance

Status	What each means
<b>New</b>	This non-compliance was identified at this inspection.
<b>Reviewed</b>	Compliance was reviewed at this inspection and was not achieved. The target date for compliance is in the future and will be tested at next inspection.
<b>Not Achieved</b>	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was not achieved.
<b>Achieved</b>	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was achieved.

We respond to non-compliance with regulations where poor outcomes for people, and / or risk to people’s well-being are identified by issuing Priority Action Notice (s).

The provider must take immediate steps to address this and make improvements. Where providers fail to take priority action by the target date we may escalate the matter to an Improvement and Enforcement Panel.

### Priority Action Notice(s)

Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A

Where we find non-compliance with regulations but no immediate or significant risk for people using the service is identified we highlight these as Areas for Improvement.

We expect the provider to take action to rectify this and we will follow this up at the next inspection. Where the provider has failed to make the necessary improvements we will escalate the matter by issuing a Priority Action Notice.

### Area(s) for Improvement

Regulation	Summary	Status
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N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A
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Ratings	What the ratings mean
<b>Excellent</b>	These are services which are committed to ongoing improvement with many strengths, including significant examples of sector leading practice and innovation. These services deliver high quality care and support and are able to demonstrate that they make a strong contribution to improving children’s well-being.
<b>Good</b>	These are services with strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement. They consistently exceed basic requirements, delivering positive outcomes for children and actively promote their well-being.
<b>Adequate</b>	These are services where strengths outweigh areas for improvement. They are safe and meet basic requirements but improvements are required to promote well-being and improve outcomes for children.
<b>Poor</b>	These are services where important areas for improvement outweigh strengths and there are significant examples of non-compliance that impact negatively on children’s well-being. Where services are poor we will take enforcement action and issue a non-compliance notice.

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