Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru
Care Inspectorate Wales

Inspection Report

First Friends

Flying Start Centre
Attlee Way
Cefn Golau
Tredegar
NP22 3TE



Date Inspection Completed

30/04/2024

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About First Friends

Type of care provided	Children's Day Care Sessional Day Care
Registered Provider	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Child Care and Play Services
Registered places	20
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	28 January 2020
Is this a Flying Start service?	Yes
Does this service promote Welsh language and culture?	This service does not provide an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language and does not demonstrate a significant effort to promoting the use of the Welsh language and culture.

Well-being	**Excellent**
Care and Development	**Excellent**
Environment	**Excellent**
Leadership and Management	**Excellent**

For further information on ratings, please see the end of this report

Summary

Children are extremely happy and relaxed at the setting because their well-being is a high priority, and their voices are always heard. They have great fun playing with their friends and have a wealth of opportunities to develop independence and follow their interests. They have developed exceptionally strong bonds with staff and receive extremely warm and responsive care.

Staff are professional and passionate about their roles and successfully implement policies and procedures to keep children safe and healthy. They are enthusiastic, always interacting positively with children. They plan an extensive range of exciting activities led by children's interests and support children's developmental needs effectively. They keep highly valuable records of children's progress.

Highly effective measures are followed to ensure the environment is safe, secure and well-maintained. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place and staff proactively identify and eliminate any emerging hazards or risks to children promptly. Children have access to a spacious indoor playroom and a well-equipped outdoor area. Resources are plentiful and allow children to develop their overall skills exceptionally well.

Leadership and management of the setting is excellent. The management team are passionate in providing an outstanding service to ensure they offer a very high standard of care to their children. They have developed exceptionally strong relationships with a range of partners and parents are highly complementary about the care and opportunities their children receive. Policies and procedures are robust and implemented effectively.

Well-being	**Excellent**

Children have a very strong voice in a setting that is child centred. They have wonderful opportunities to make choices and decisions and their interests are highly valued. For example, staff introduced a craft table and planned a variety of gluing and sticking activities after children showed great interest in this area. Children are extremely confident communicators because they know they are always listened to. For example, we saw that staff granted a variety of children's wishes such as singing their favourite songs or playing their favourite games.

Children feel safe and are immensely happy and relaxed. They arrive eagerly at the setting, settling quickly into their play. They have very strong bonds with staff, particularly their key workers which has a highly beneficial impact on their well-being. We saw children smiling delightfully as they tell staff *"I'm really happy today"* with staff responding, *"I'm glad you are really happy today, that makes me really happy too".* They readily invite staff into their play and seek spontaneous cuddles and comfort. Children receive frequent praise for their efforts and their work is celebrated and on display, providing them with a strong sense of pride and belonging.

Children have built exceptional friendships and behave exceedingly well, working cooperatively on tasks. They show a strong willingness to share resources and take turns in their play. For example, we heard a child ask another to help them build their house saying, *"Do you want to help me make it bigger?"* as they gently offer construction blocks. They are extremely kind and considerate towards one another saying *"Here you go, I will help you"* as they proceed to tidy resources.

Children gain immense pleasure in the opportunities available to them immersing themselves in their chosen play. For example, outdoors children carefully set up their own obstacle courses. They proudly showed us how they could carefully ride their bikes in-between cones shouting, *"I did it"*, beaming with delight as they finished. Indoors, children were engrossed in the role-play area as they enthusiastically baked their cakes telling us *"I'm going to make a birthday cake for mammy".* They show delight and excitement in focused activities such as 'sleeping bunnies', squealing with delight as they eagerly awaited to wake up.

Children develop self-help skills superbly. The rolling snack time means they are not restricted by routines. Children readily wash their hands before eating, carefully select their own crockery, pour their own drinks and clear away after themselves by placing any remaining food or drink into waste recycling bins. They attempt to put on and take off their wetsuits and wellies and access their belongings from their personal pegs as they transition to and from the outdoor area. Staff remain near enough to support and intervene where needed but encourage children to work things out for themselves.

Care and Development — Excellent

Staff are conscientious and implement policies and procedures to a very high standard to keep children safe and healthy. They ensure safeguarding is a high priority and are

confident in their role, following rigorous procedures. They follow a clear medication policy and keep thorough records relating to accidents, incidents, and pre-existing injuries. They ensure these records are signed by parents and formally evaluate them to identify any emerging patterns. All staff hold paediatric first aid training, enabling them to deal with minor accidents confidently. The setting has recently completed their reaccreditation for the 'Healthy and Sustainable Pre-school Scheme' to further promote children's health and well-being, encouraging children to develop healthy habits such as good hand washing, healthy eating and being active. Additionally, children take part in the 'Design to Smile' initiative to learn about good dental hygiene. Food is freshly prepared, healthy, and nutritious. Staff hold food safety training and follow robust procedures to manage children's food allergies, individual dietary requirements, or medical needs. Continuous access to daily outdoor play experiences offers children the benefits of physical exercise and fresh air. Regular audits of infection control measures ensure hygiene procedures are up to date and implemented effectively. We saw staff consistently follow thorough hygiene and cleaning practices as part of the infection control process to help keep children healthy and safe.

Staff are excellent role models and manage interactions superbly. They are kind, caring and patient, genuinely showing interest and care in all that they do. They encourage children to express their feelings and emotions and are extremely responsive and nurturing, meaning children approach them with great ease. There is a comprehensive behaviour management policy and we saw staff implement this skilfully, using gentle tones, distraction methods and lots of meaningful praise for children's efforts and achievements. We heard staff use positive phrases such as *"That's so kind of you for sharing with your friends" and "Well done, that's absolutely amazing what you did there",* often.

Staff support children's learning and development in a highly effective way. A strong key worker system is in place and staff have a thorough knowledge of children's individual needs using regularly updated 'all about me' forms to support them. Staff follow the new curriculum for Wales to plan high quality experiences and evaluate children's enjoyment and engagement in activities to adapt and plan further play opportunities. Regular observations and assessments allow staff to monitor and track children's progress and plan effectively for children's progression. Staff are extremely proactive and work outstandingly with a range of partners and outside professionals such as health visitors and educational psychologists to effectively support children with additional learning needs. They focus on liaising with parents from a very early stage to identify any support that may be required, allowing a smooth transition for children into the setting. They attend training such as 'Autism Awareness' to implement effective strategies across their practice. Staff use a small amount of Welsh with children, however we noted that there were many missed opportunities for children to develop their use of incidental Welsh further.

Environment — Excellent

Staff ensure children are cared for in an extremely safe and secure environment. They are vigilant, supervise the children closely at all times and ensure only authorised persons have entry to the setting, maintaining a log of any visitors. They work closely with the local

authority and flying start health and safety advisors to ensure children's safety is top priority. Routine maintenance checks for the premises and any appliance checks are conducted frequently, including smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, emergency lighting, portable appliances and periodical electrical checks. Staff follow an extensive range of comprehensive risk assessments including daily safety checks of the indoor and outdoor area to highlight any risks. They complete fire drills regularly with detailed records kept and notes made of any relevant issues encountered. Additionally, reverse drills are also undertaken in case the children need to move inside quickly. Registers clearly record the time both staff and children arrive and leave the premises.

The environment is extremely clean, warm, welcoming and highly maintained. The indoor and outdoor play areas provide a high-quality environment for children to play and learn. We observed children moving freely and confidently between these two spaces, relishing in the activities and resources on offer. Indoors is presented with care and natural décor ensuring a calming environment. Clearly defined areas offer rich learning experiences such as dramatic play, role-play, messy play and construction as well as a cosy reading corner. The layout of the environment in conjunction with low-level furniture and resources fosters children's independence. For example, they confidently access low level storage with open shelves and baskets finding what they want with ease. Since the last inspection, the outdoor play area has been renovated to make it all one level. It provides a wealth of opportunities to support children's overall learning and curiosity as well as their physical development. People who run the setting told us of their plans for working with 'Natural Resources Wales' which will allow children to nurture animals, plants and their habitats to help promote biodiversity. Children's toilets are clean and fresh with nappy changing facilities which are suitably located to promote children's privacy, dignity and respect.

Children benefit from a purposeful range of age-appropriate, clean and highly maintained resources which are of excellent quality. They are carefully selected to fulfil children's interests and keep them superbly engaged. Indoors a variety of real-life items in the role-play area naturally promote and stimulate children's curiosity and imagination such as a variety of crockery and utensils. Outdoors, resources promote children's exploration and physical development such as apparatus, balancing beams and a variety of ride-on toys. Regular checks are conducted to monitor resource quality and toys are frequently rotated to provide further choice and variety for children. There are a beneficial number of resources which help children learn about diversity and promote their cultural awareness such as books, dolls, puppets and puzzles.

Leadership and Management — Excellent

Leadership and management of the setting is outstanding. The statement of purpose provides parents with a clear and accurate picture of how the setting runs. Comprehensive policies and procedures are fully implemented, and essential records are completed to a very high standard, including children's contracts. Leaders have an innovative and bold vision for the service and are strongly committed to ongoing improvements. For example,

they accessed ‘Circle of Security’ training for all staff via the local authority which they have embedded into their daily practice. This focuses on improving attachments so that staff can really connect and become in tune with the children they care for. As a result, they effectively recognise when children need intervention, engagement or solitary play which has had a significant and positive impact on children’s overall well-being.

Leaders are committed to providing high-quality care and improving outcomes for children and their families through continuous self-evaluation. They have well-established systems to ensure regular feedback from parents, children, staff, and a range of outside professionals informs the quality-of-care report. As a result, tangible improvements are made which have a positive impact upon outcomes for children. For example, the implementation of rolling snack has greatly improved children’s self-help skills and allowed them to take ownership of when and what they choose to eat and drink.

Staff files are of excellent quality and leaders use robust recruitment processes to ensure they are well-qualified and suitable to work with children. They have exceptionally high expectations of staff, always challenging and supporting them to do their best. There is a thorough induction process, and regular supervisions and appraisals support all staff in their professional development. Mandatory training is renewed promptly. Frequent meetings allow staff to be kept up to date on relevant information and discuss any issues relating to the running of the setting. There is a strong ethos of teamwork amongst staff, and they work collaboratively ensuring the best experiences and outcomes for children. They are very well organised, and this allows them to remain calm whilst delivering outstanding care. Staff told us that the children are always at the centre of their hearts in everything they do.

Exceptionally positive relationships with parents and a range of worthwhile communication systems are in place. These include daily verbal feedback, newsletters, photographs of children’s activities shared via a digital app and termly parent consultation evenings. Parents and Children Together (PACT) sessions further enhance links and improve the care offered to children. A high level of satisfaction is reported from parents with one parent commenting *“My child looks forward to going in every single day and I feel comfortable and know that any concerns will be listened to, I cannot praise this service enough”.* Outstanding links with a range of key professionals are in place and exemplary links with local schools’ benefit children immensely, particularly in their onward transition to nursery. An example of complimentary feedback received includes, *“The transition handover work is incredible, and the receiving schools are so appreciative”.*

Summary of Non-Compliance	
Status	**What each means**
New	This non-compliance was identified at this inspection.
Reviewed	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.
Not Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was not achieved.
Achieved	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

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

Where we find the provider is not meeting the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care but there is no immediate or significant risk for people using the service, we highlight these as Recommendations to Meet National Minimum Standards.

We expect the provider to take action to address these and we will follow these up at the next inspection.

National Minimum Standards	
Standard	Recommendation(s)
	No NMS Recommendations were identified at this inspection

Where we think it helpful, we may make best practice recommendations. These are to encourage settings that are doing well to become even better at helping children thrive.

Best Practice
Recommendation(s)
Provide further opportunities for children to develop their use of incidental Welsh.

Ratings	What the ratings mean
Excellent	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.
Good	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.
Adequate	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.
Poor	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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