A report on

Markham Playgroup Ltd

Institute Buildings
Abernant Road
Markham
NP12 0QH

Date of inspection: March 2025

by

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)

and

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

About Markham Playgroup Ltd

Name of setting	Markham Playgroup
Category of care provided	Full Day Care
Registered person(s)	
Responsible individual (if applicable)	Helen Williams
Person in charge	Helen Williams
Number of places	27
Age range of children	2 years to 5 years
Number of 3 and 4 year old children	10
Number of children who receive funding for early education	10
Opening days / times	8.45am to 2.50pm Monday to Friday. Term time only.
Flying start service	Yes
Language of the setting	English
Is this setting implementing the Child Care Offer?	Yes
Welsh Language Active Offer	This service is not making a significant effort to promote the use of Welsh language and culture.
Date of previous CIW inspection	23/01/20
Date of previous Estyn inspection	Not applicable. The setting has been re-registered by CIW since the last Estyn inspection.
Dates of this inspection visit(s)	04/03/2025
In 2023, the setting increased their registered numbers from 19 to 27. The setting provides care for two-year-olds and education for three- and four-year olds. It is registered as a Flying Start setting and provides the Child Care Offer. Very few children have prior experience of the Welsh language.	

Summary

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

Non-compliance

No non-compliance was identified during this inspection.

Recommendations

R1. Develop the support for interactions between children to encourage respect for one another and resources

R2. Promote meaningful opportunities for children to develop their early literacy and numeracy skills

R3. Maximise opportunities for practitioners to engage with children during play

R4. Strengthen self-evaluation processes to concentrate on the most important areas for development, which includes deployment of staff and how this can impact children's play and learning

What happens next

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

Main findings

Well-being: Adequate

Many children are confident when making their wishes known to practitioners and make some decisions regarding their play. They access activities that interest them, and most use resources purposefully. For example, a child takes a mirror from the home area to the imaginative play 'baby clinic' and shows the 'baby' their reflection. The majority of children express themselves well, such as saying they need to use the toilet or when choosing a song for the group to sing. Other children tend to lose interest quickly and seek out other activities that are not easily available, whilst a few become frustrated as they are directed back to join other activities.

Nearly all children enter the playroom happily and settle quickly, seeking out their favourite activity or a cuddle with practitioners. Many express their enjoyment through smiles and laughter. For example, children squeal with delight as they run under the 'parachute' as practitioners make waves, while others enjoy 'bathing' their pretend baby in the clinic. A few children show discontentment as they become disengaged from group activities such as tooth brushing. Many children are very content in their familiar environment and frequently look at pictures and their craft displayed, giving them a sense of belonging.

Many children successfully develop an understanding of right and wrong, and most are learning to share resources and take turns. A minority of children are finding it challenging when understanding their feelings and managing their own behaviour. Many children interact well with each other, sharing and involving others in their play. For example, when co-operating to build a ramp from wooden blocks, they happily take turns to push the trucks along it. The majority of children are content to play for longer periods alone or alongside others in the sand pit. Many children enjoy opportunities to participate in activities with the practitioners, showing how they can build a tower with magnetic tiles or making Welsh cakes out of dough. A majority of children naturally use good manners and listen well as they are given instructions by practitioners, while others require regular support and explanation when displaying unacceptable behaviour.

Many children enjoy their play and are developing many key skills. They join in throwing a ball back and to smiling as they catch the ball successfully. The majority are developing their language skills well and use incidental Welsh during their play, while others find verbal communication more challenging. Many children are learning to be resilient and persevere with tasks until they succeed, for example cutting vegetables and then putting them in their soup. Most children are curious learners, experimenting with sand, building shapes using test tubes and other vessels until they succeed in making a solid sand mould.

Many children are learning to do things safely for themselves. For example, they use the toilet facilities independently and are starting to learn to put their coats on to play outside. Nearly all children serve themselves food at snack time, competently using tongs when picking up fruit and pouring their own drinks. They are learning about the importance of developing good health and hygiene routines. Many enthusiastically clean their teeth during the toothbrushing session and they all wash their hands routinely at key times.

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

Overall, many children make appropriate progress from their individual starting points. Many children are making steady progress in developing their communication skills. They listen to adults and follow simple instructions, such as when collecting their belongings and getting organised at home time.

Most children talk in single words relevant to their activity or communicate through gestures and expressions. A few children speak briefly with their peers when playing together in the same area or sharing resources, such as when moving toys from one part of the block play area to another. When engaged in conversation with practitioners, children occasionally express themselves at greater length, for instance when talking about what they ate at home for breakfast.

A few children begin to show an interest in mark-making activities, for instance using large chalks outdoors or selecting paper and writing materials to use at a table. However, a few children do not maintain their concentration for long and practitioners do not support them to use resources as purposefully as they could. Children are beginning to understand that writing conveys meaning. For example, a minority recognise their own name from the initial letter. Overall, however, children show little interest when interacting with books in the comfortable reading areas the setting provides. Because of this they seldom handle or share books independently.

Most children listen well as part of a group during a short Welsh session and sing familiar songs enthusiastically. They use actions to identify body parts correctly and describe the colour of shapes accurately. A few children begin to use Welsh vocabulary independently, for instance, by asking for 'llaeth' during morning snack.

Most children make good progress in developing their physical skills. They manipulate a wide variety of materials and resources confidently during their play, showing appropriate control and co-ordination, such as when using tongs to pick up small objects. Many enjoy climbing a ladder and travelling down a slide, adopting different poses to see how it feels to descend facing forwards and backwards.

Many children become absorbed in tasks that motivate them. For example, they happily repeat actions in their play, such as tipping stones they have loaded into a tipper truck, showing satisfaction when making them slide out each time.

Many children use digital resources, including cameras and battery powered vehicles confidently in their play. They enjoy exploring mathematical ideas practically, for instance by experimenting with filling and emptying containers with sand and liquids in the outdoor kitchen. However, because children often carry out these activities without adult involvement, they do not benefit from valuable opportunities to build their mathematical vocabulary or to develop their counting skills as effectively as they could. This limits their ability to express their mathematical thinking clearly.

Care and development: Adequate

Practitioners work hard to prioritise children's health and safety. All practitioners have a childcare qualification and have extensive opportunities to undertake training relevant to their role. They all have up-to-date training in safeguarding, food hygiene and paediatric first aid. They understand policies and implement them appropriately. The setting's arrangements for safeguarding children meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. Practitioners record accidents, incidents, and pre-existing injuries well, and share this information promptly with parents. They implement a wide range of risk assessments and identify emerging risks effectively. Practitioners encourage children to understand and develop a healthy lifestyle, providing a choice of healthy food at snack time and ensuring that children have access to daily outdoor play for exercise and fresh air.

Practitioners know the children well and use this knowledge when encouraging them to manage their own behaviour. They recognise good behaviour and encourage a positive ethos as they engage with children using good eye contact and calmness when giving simple reminders such as "let's be careful how we sit on the chair", and "let us use kind hands". However, on many occasions, practitioners miss important opportunities to intervene and distract children before minor disagreements escalate. They are not always proactive in supporting children to respect resources. As a result, a few children do not understand that there are consequences to their actions.

Practitioners implement useful systems to identify and evaluate children's progress and seek support for children with any emerging additional learning needs, for example seeking support from speech and language services. They plan activities to promote children to learn through play, which are based on children's interests. However, they do not always successfully support children to engage meaningfully in these opportunities. Practitioners provide interesting opportunities for children to celebrate cultural events such as Chinese New Year and St David's Day, and these are reflected in many displays of children's work. Practitioners are trained in anti-racist practice and there are many play resources and photos displayed that reflect a diverse society.

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

Practitioners organise the learning environment, indoors and outdoors enabling children to follow their curiosity and to play independently. They provide a good variety of areas and resources, which engage most children's interest and stimulate their imagination successfully. As a result, many children investigate the environment enthusiastically and become immersed in their play, often sustaining their focus happily for extended periods.

A notable strength is the provision practitioners make to develop children's physical skills. For example, they provide a good range of accessible tools, materials and equipment for children to explore. This enables children to be physically active, to take appropriate risks, and to develop their strength, control and co-ordination beneficially.

Practitioners support children to develop their mathematical understanding through practical activities and by learning the names and appearance of 2D shapes. They model the use of the Welsh language effectively and make worthwhile use of focused sessions to extend children's vocabulary and develop their enjoyment in singing Welsh songs. Because of this, most children recognise a good variety of Welsh words and phrases and respond to simple questions confidently.

Practitioners make effective provision to develop children's creative, digital and problem-solving skills. They have successfully created an attractive and stimulating environment to encourage children to develop an interest in books. Overall however, practitioners do not provide enough opportunity to engage children directly in sharing and learning from stories and picture books.

Practitioners draw helpfully on their knowledge of the Curriculum for Wales and their developing understanding of the role of the enabling adult to support children's learning through play. Where this is most effective, practitioners engage children in authentic conversation during their play to model language and to prompt their thinking. This supports children to extend their vocabulary and enhances their understanding beneficially. However, practitioners are not always alert enough to opportunities to initiate helpful interventions or to promote actions and behaviours that support children's progress. Because of this they sometimes miss valuable opportunities to enhance the development of children's communication and numeracy skills.

All practitioners relate well to the children. They demonstrate kind and nurturing behaviours, for instance when distracting and consoling children who are upset at the start

of the session. They use positive praise to encourage children and show interest in their activity through asking questions and offering sensitive encouragement They encourage children to play together and learn to take turns and share resources. However, practitioners do not always make their expectations of children's behaviour sufficiently clear. In addition, they do not provide enough opportunity for all children to take responsibility, for instance by looking after resources and tidying away at the end of the session.

Staff are developing their capacity to evaluate and assess children's progress, including those children with additional learning needs (ALN). They demonstrate a strong understanding of each child's needs and use this to inform provision so that it builds on children's interests and motivates their engagement. Practitioners are beginning to place greater emphasis on monitoring the development of children's skills through their observation. However, this practice is not well enough embedded to impact fully on the progress children make.

Environment: Good

Leaders have effective procedures in place to ensure that the environment is safe, secure, and well maintained and practitioners implement these well. For example, there is a well-practised procedure for children to enter the building and move between areas during the session. Leaders ensure that systems such as fire and gas are serviced in line with requirements. They keep all areas clean and hygienic such as checking the outside area before children go out and cleaning areas before children sit to eat. They have robust risk assessments that cover the premises. Records show that kitchen areas, food preparation and storage areas are safe and in line with food standards legislation. Practitioners undertake fire drills regularly, ensuring that all can exit the building safely in an emergency. They practise a reverse procedure in the event that they need to re-enter the building quickly to 'lock down' should there be any incidences requiring such a response.

Leaders have sole use of the large building and ensure that the environment is bright, welcoming, and child-friendly, with a warm and natural feel. Practitioners set up spacious areas to allow children to choose from resources that interest them and access activities that promote their all-round development. They use an additional room for part of the session, allowing younger children to develop physical skills as they run and play with balls and streamers, while older children engage in circle time. Practitioners adapt an area for children to eat at key times and comfortable furniture with blankets and cushions provide facilities if children want to relax. Practitioners decorate the environment, using neutral, calming colours, and meaningful displays of photographs and children's work. They easily access an outside area that has a large canopy, making it easy for children to play outdoors in all weathers.

Leaders ensure that equipment and resources are plentiful and are of a good quality to meet the needs of the children. Practitioners ensure that areas stimulate and promote children's curiosity, with a growing emphasis on 'real life' items to spark children's imagination and mirror an environment they may recognise from home. They change the focus of areas regularly, to sustain interest. For example, they provide an area representing a 'baby clinic' with resources and visual information making it authentic and inviting. They have a Welsh area with many resources such as flags, books and dressing up clothes, promoting the Welsh culture. Practitioners make effective use of the outside space, which has equipment such as a climbing frame and slide, a construction area, mark making boards, mud kitchen and playhouses. The children enjoy growing food and flowers in the many wooden troughs during spring and summer months.

Leadership and management: Adequate

Leaders have developed a clear statement of purpose that provides an accurate picture of how the setting operates. They maintain a useful range of policies and procedures and have reviewed these recently. Leaders have established an engaged team of staff who share a strong nurturing ethos. They ensure that safe recruitment procedures are followed effectively and that the setting has an appropriate number of suitably qualified practitioners. Leaders distribute responsibilities to match the skills and experience of practitioners and provide clear job descriptions that enable all practitioners to understand their responsibilities. However, leaders do not always co-ordinate the deployment of practitioners effectively enough to achieve the greatest benefit for children. For example, at times, practitioners spend too little time engaging with children as they play.' This limits their ability to make skilful timely interventions to promote children's learning and well-being.

Leaders make use of a range of professional learning to enhance the skills and knowledge of practitioners. For example, practitioners have benefited from specific training to support children's speech and language development. This enhances the capacity of practitioners to meet children's individual needs effectively.

Leaders undertake regular evaluation of the setting's provision. They use first hand observation, feedback from parents and professional discussion as well as reflection, to identify what works well and pinpoint aspects for improvement. They make appropriate use of professional partnerships, such as with the local authority advisory service, to inform their evaluation. This supports leaders and practitioners to develop an understanding of the setting's strengths and areas for improvement. In a few instances, however, leaders do not identify key areas for development, such as the need to improve children's communication and social skills.

Leaders make appropriate use of grant funding to support different aspects of the provision. Leaders and practitioners make use of ongoing professional discussion and focused meetings to develop a shared understanding of key priorities and to agree actions to secure improvement. For example, practitioners have collaborated well to enhance the setting's extended learning environment and to improve opportunities for parents to be actively involved in their child's learning. This has improved the range of learning experiences for children and strengthened relationships with their parents.

Leaders and practitioners have established valuable partnerships with the nearby primary school and Flying Start provision. This supports effective transition arrangements for children and enhances the setting's capacity to identify and support children with specific needs. Leaders know their locality well and have fostered strong ties with the local community. Children regularly visit the surrounding area. For example, they experience the natural environment in different seasons, and visit the nearby shop to buy snacks for the setting. These opportunities help children develop a strong sense of their place in the local community. Parents report that their children enjoy coming to the setting and participating in the wide range of experiences available to them. They are confident that any concerns they may have will be dealt with appropriately.

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)

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

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

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Areas identified for improvement

Where we identify **Areas for Improvement** but we have not found outcomes for people to be at immediate or significant risk, we discuss these with the provider. We expect the provider to take action and we will follow this up at the next inspection.

Where we find outcomes for people **require significant improvement** and/or there is risk to people's well-being we identify areas for **Priority Action**. In these circumstances we issue a Priority Action Notice(s) to the Provider, and they must take immediate steps to make improvements. We will inspect again within six months to check improvements have been made and outcomes for people have improved.

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