A report on

Marford Playgroup Little Explorers Ltd

Marford Community Centre
Pant Lane
Marford
Wrexham
LL12 8SH

Date of inspection: March 2026

by

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)

and

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

About Marford Playgroup Little Explorers Ltd

Name of setting	Marford Playgroup Little Explorers Ltd
Category of care provided	Full Day Care
Registered person(s)	Tracey Nevitt
Responsible individual (if applicable)	Tracey Nevitt
Person in charge	Tracey Nevitt
Number of places	45
Age range of children	2-12 years
Number of 3 and 4 year old children	17
Number of children who receive funding for early education	7
Opening days / times	07:30 to 18:00, Monday to Friday
Flying start service	No
Language of the setting	English
Is this setting implementing the Child Care Offer?	Yes
Welsh Language Active Offer	This is a service that 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	15/01/2020
Date of previous Estyn inspection	01/06/2018
Dates of this inspection visit(s)	03/03/2026
Additional information	

Summary

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

Non-compliance

No non-compliance was identified during this inspection.

Recommendations

R1 Refine teaching to strengthen children's independent 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: Good

Most children make choices and decisions about their play and learning. For example, they choose which colours they want to paint with and decide when they would like to listen to a story with a practitioner. Children communicate their needs successfully, as they know practitioners respect their choices and will listen to their ideas and respond sensitively. Most children are starting to share their ideas and to develop their play.

Nearly all children settle well. They develop positive relationships with practitioners who foster their self-esteem successfully. This ensures that children feel relaxed and secure as they play alongside their friends confidently. Most children cope well with separation from their parents, sharing a hug and waving goodbye happily. They readily go to practitioners for reassurance and help when needed.

Nearly all children behave well and are beginning to develop a sense of right and wrong. They are learning to understand their feelings and are starting to be considerate towards each other. Most children are kind to their peers, such as when sharing dough with others or consoling a friend who has fallen over. They are aware of simple rules, and remind their friends helpfully, for instance to take care when chopping vegetables.

Most children are curious learners. For example, they are intrigued to listen to shells they find in the sand, holding them to their ears and saying they can hear the sea. They experiment with different ways to spray paint from bottles and persevere when cutting dough to create the shape they want. Most children show interest in what their peers are doing during free play and enjoy joining in with their friends. They show a sense of achievement when working together pouring and filling jugs with blue bubbly water.

Most children are well motivated and are developing their independence appropriately, such as by pouring their own drinks and putting on wellington boots to play in the garden with minimal support. They decide when to wash their hands when they have been mixing paint outside. Most children develop well physically, for instance proudly demonstrating how fast they can ride their bikes and using the climbing apparatus outdoors confidently. Many are starting to problem solve and to seek creative solutions as part of their play. For example, they investigate how to balance two buckets on weighing scales outdoors and seek out twisty shells to make unicorn horns.

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

Most children make sound progress in their learning from their individual starting points. They develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills appropriately through a wide range of meaningful play experiences. Most children acquire knowledge and skills at a suitable pace and increasingly apply what they learn across different areas of the curriculum.

Most children listen attentively during daily routines, responding suitably to questions about how they are feeling or to instructions at snack time. They use spoken language

purposefully, such as to explain how they are making potato soup or to name sea creatures they have learned about in the sand tray. Nearly all children join in enthusiastically with familiar songs and rhymes in both English and Welsh. Most use a good range of Welsh vocabulary confidently when counting, naming colours or describing the weather.

Nearly all children enjoy stories and participate eagerly by joining in with familiar rhyming phrases enthusiastically. A few choose to look at books independently, demonstrating a growing interest in reading. They handle books correctly, turning the pages in sequence and sustaining their attention for increasing periods. Many children experiment confidently with mark making, manipulating a range of tools with suitable dexterity. They paint and draw with growing control and begin to use emergent writing for real purposes, such as to create simple lists.

Most children make good progress in developing their early numeracy skills. They count objects reliably to five or ten and recognise and name simple shapes in the environment. A few begin to identify numerals correctly. Many children use mathematical language and resources naturally in their play, such as when comparing the height of towers or exploring the length of objects with tape measures. These activities help them to develop their understanding of key mathematical concepts in practical contexts.

Most children express themselves creatively and physically. They show good balance and coordination when dancing, spinning or riding bikes and trikes. Their imaginative play is often lively and collaborative, such as when pretending to be dinosaurs and inventing role play scenarios with their friends.

Most children demonstrate suitable early independence skills. They generally manage self-care tasks, such as putting on their coats, placing belongings on the correct trolleys or spreading butter on Welsh cakes with limited adult help.

Most children are inquisitive explorrs of their environment for instance becoming absorbed in feeling the push and pull of horseshoe magnets and using an endoscope to observe activity inside a bird box. They experiment actively, testing and adapting their ideas and seeking out suitable resources to help them when they encounter a problem. For example, they use crates as steps to help them access blocks they need for a sleigh when these are beyond their reach. Many cooperate well with one another to share equipment purposefully when transporting water and using brushes to clean up paint from the hard surface outdoors.

Care and development: Good

The setting's policies and procedures promote healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating and drinking, effectively. Practitioners implement agreed practices consistently well and attend a range of different courses to update their knowledge and skills successfully. They supervise the children well, for instance, by ensuring they cross the road safely during school pick up times.

Leaders ensure staffing levels are appropriate to meet the needs of the children and resources are managed efficiently. The setting's safeguarding procedures are clear and well understood. This ensures that practitioners meet their responsibilities effectively. For

example, practitioners know to report concerns directly to the designated safeguarding lead and understand the correct referral routes to use when needed. As a result, the setting's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Practitioners pay attention to all aspects of hygiene successfully. For example, they wear aprons and gloves to prevent cross infection and when serving food. They ensure that any allergies are clearly understood and communicated so that everyone can enjoy their food safely. Staff maintain detailed individual records, including children's health care needs, which supports practitioners to provide an appropriate level of care for all children, including those with any additional learning needs (ALN). Practitioners complete a daily register detailing attendance, and minor injuries are noted and brought to the attention of parents and carers.

Practitioners are good role models. They are thoughtful, calm and gentle in their interactions with children. They set appropriate boundaries and follow the setting's behaviour management policy consistently well. They use speech and signing to communicate with children sensitively and to praise them often for their achievements. Practitioners share consistent expectations and remind children helpfully about simple rules, for instance about sharing resources and how to use scissors safely. They make effective use of learning through play, building on opportunities to develop children's language and social skills beneficially. They extend children's curiosity in the world around them successfully, for instance by helping them to observe and identify birds that visit their garden and by sharing amusement at the antics of squirrels.

Practitioners treat all children with dignity and respect. They provide a nurturing environment that values diversity and supports children to feel happy and settled. Practitioners monitor children's progress appropriately and take time to speak with parents about their next steps. This ensures that practitioners know the children well and enables them to adapt the provision to respond to children's needs and interests successfully. For example, practitioners take suitable account of children's ideas to provide worthwhile experiences that motivate them to engage well.

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

Practitioners use a consistent notice-and-respond approach to take suitable account of children's previous learning and their emerging interests. This ensures that learning experiences generally build appropriately on what children already know and are eager to explore. Practitioners monitor individual children's progress over time and adapt provision to maintain a suitable breadth and balance across areas of learning. This supports most children's holistic development effectively.

There is a strong sense of teamwork among staff. Practitioners discuss plans and reflect on outcomes together, sharing helpful information about children's engagement and progress. This collaborative approach strengthens the coherence of provision and enables staff to tailor the learning environment purposefully. As a result, children benefit from a wide range of well-planned learning experiences that stimulate their curiosity and motivate them to explore.

Practitioners provide suitable opportunities to develop children's early mathematical understanding. They embed counting, shape recognition and comparative language naturally within play. Physical development is supported well, particularly outdoors, where children challenge themselves on equipment such as balance beams. Staff offer sensitive guidance that encourages children to be adventurous while developing independence and pride in their achievements. Children's fine motor skills are nurtured through purposeful opportunities to manipulate materials, handle tools and use mark making equipment confidently.

The setting provides a language-rich environment. Practitioners make beneficial use of songs, rhymes and stories to develop children's enjoyment of Welsh and English, strengthening their vocabulary and developing their phonological awareness effectively. Staff model reading for pleasure and give children regular access to appealing books and mark-making materials. They use stories well as a stimulus for imaginative play, which helps children to make meaningful connections between familiar texts and their own ideas.

Practitioners provide suitable opportunities for children to make decisions, for instance to select stories, songs and play activities and to choose whether to spend time indoors or outdoors at appropriate points in the session. They make beneficial use of the setting's outdoor environment to develop children's understanding of the natural world. For example, they plant seeds in the teepee and use technology such as binoculars to observe wildlife and learn about the needs of living things. They make worthwhile use of visits to enhance children's knowledge of their local area and to promote children's awareness of Welsh culture.

Practitioners teach children how to take appropriate risks and keep themselves safe, such as by encouraging them to use the balance beam independently and prompting them to wear safety glasses when using tools. Relationships between staff and children are warm and nurturing. Staff model respectful language consistently and use routines well to create an orderly, calm environment where children feel at ease. This helps ensure that most children behave kindly, show good manners and cooperate considerately with one another. Practitioners invite children sensitively to learn about how individuals and families differ and to develop positive attitudes towards diversity. They use simple, familiar prayers to encourage children to give thanks and to show appreciation for the kindness of others.

When teaching is most effective, practitioners interact purposefully with children's play. They observe carefully, listen attentively and use well-judged prompts and questions to extend children's thinking. This supports children to sustain concentration, explore their ideas more deeply and to solve problems creatively. In a few instances, practitioners lead children's play too much or intervene unnecessarily. When this happens, children become distracted or focus on following adults rather than engaging in learning independently.

Staff use regular observation to assess children's progress and to develop a useful picture of their individual strengths, interests and next steps. They share this information with parents appropriately.

Environment: Excellent

The premises and outdoor areas are exceptionally welcoming and provide a rich and vibrant learning environment. The play space offers suitably challenging opportunities that develop children's curiosity and motivation highly successfully. Leaders have established a calm atmosphere, using neutral colours and materials that meet the needs of the children well. Leaders ensure plenty of space for children to move around and use attractive displays of children's work and photographs to promote a sense of belonging. Mature trees in the garden provide natural shade from the sun and a large teepee ensures children are able to play and learn outdoors in all weathers. The setting's office provides a confidential space for staff to hold meetings and to store documents securely.

Leaders ensure resources are exceptionally clean and well maintained. They make use of natural wicker baskets to store most items at a low level where children can choose and access resources to develop their play. Thoughtfully chosen furniture, rugs, equipment and materials are well suited to children's needs and ensure they feel relaxed and comfortable to explore the setting. Leaders and practitioners organise the environment to promote children's independence effectively, providing easy access to well-resourced areas that support children to explore their individual interests successfully. This enables children to choose when to play alongside others readily or to enjoy becoming quietly absorbed in their own activity.

Leaders provide a diverse range of natural resources and equipment, including many recycled items, which engage nearly all children's interest well. These provide purposeful support for children's learning and enable them to develop their skills successfully. For example, an imaginative variety of loose parts supports children to play creatively and to develop a broad range of skills effectively. Outdoor planting areas and an extensive mud kitchen with metal utensils and pots and pans add an authentic element to children's play.

Practitioners have enhanced the environment by introducing a selection of natural and sustainable materials that create interest, inspire curiosity and foster children's imagination and creativity successfully. They provide relevant toys and play materials to promote children's cultural awareness including the heritage of Wales well. Practitioners make beneficial use of the setting's locality to stimulate children's sense of awe and wonder, for instance by visiting a nearby former quarry to see natural rock formations. Trips to the local shop help children to become familiar with handling money and to enjoy buying something special to share at snack time.

Leaders ensure that the setting's environment is secure for children. They carry out appropriate risk assessments to identify and address potential hazards and ensure that staff adhere to agreed procedures to keep children safe. A robust cleaning schedule and good attention to infection control mean the setting provides an appropriate level of hygiene. Fire risk assessments and fire drills are carried out to ensure children and practitioners know what to do in an emergency.

Leadership and management: Good

Leaders provide a clear strategic direction that is rooted firmly in the setting's commitment to offering a safe, nurturing environment where children feel valued and are confident to

explore. This vision is shared effectively by the staff team and contributes strongly to the consistent positive ethos throughout the setting. As a result, nearly all children show enjoyment during sessions and make good overall progress from their individual starting points.

Leaders set high expectations for staff, who work together well to plan and evaluate provision. Leadership roles are distributed appropriately, including through the recent appointment of a senior practitioner to take on wider responsibilities. These arrangements have strengthened leadership capacity and enabled leaders to manage their workload efficiently. For example, they have enhanced leaders' capacity to make timely assessments of children's progress and aided implementation of a revised approach to planning for children's learning.

Leaders have an accurate grasp of the setting's strengths and areas for development and communicate these confidently. They carry out regular evaluations, drawing helpfully on the views of staff, parents and children. This helps them to identify relevant improvement priorities and to monitor the impact of actions effectively. Leaders make constructive use of their partnership with the Early Years Advisory Teacher to quality assure their evaluations, ensuring that improvement aims are appropriate and align closely with the needs of children and staff. Leaders respond positively to professional advice to refine practice further.

Leaders have secured valuable improvements over time, such as enhancing children's use of Welsh. The setting lead has managed a recent period of considerable change well, including moving into a new building and redeveloping the learning environment indoors and outdoors. Although this work is ongoing, leaders and staff have collaborated purposefully to create a highly attractive and stimulating space that promotes children's active engagement and positive attitudes to learning successfully. The setting's statement of purpose provides an accurate representation of its work and acts as a useful guide for prospective families.

All practitioners are suitably qualified and benefit from a useful induction process that means they understand their responsibilities, including the setting's safeguarding procedures, clearly. Leaders coordinate a suitable range of professional learning that provides an appropriate balance of skills across the team. Supervision processes focus well on professional reflection, supporting staff to consider what works well and where further development may be beneficial. Leaders use grant funding effectively to support the setting's strategic priorities and to enable access to specialist support when needed.

Leaders and staff build warm, positive relationships with parents. They are approachable and provide regular informal opportunities for parents to discuss their child's needs and progress. Parents appreciate this openness and express trust in staff. They value the thoughtful care staff provide and feel confident that practitioners will respond to their child's needs sensitively. Leaders and staff have recently begun using a digital platform to share children's learning with parents more easily and to strengthen their partnership further.

Leaders maintain productive links with external agencies, including the Early Years Additional Learning Needs (EYALN) team. They promote positive community engagement through local visits and implement helpful transition arrangements, including visits to nearby

primary schools to share information about children to support them to settle well when they move on from the setting.

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.

CIW has no areas for improvement identified following this inspection.

CIW has not issued any Priority action notices following this inspection.

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