Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru
Care Inspectorate Wales

Inspection Report

Elemental Outdoor Play & Learning

Coed Blaenigau Woods
Llandysul
SA44 5PS



Date Inspection Completed

20/08/2024

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About Elemental Outdoor Play & Learning

Type of care provided	Children's Day Care Full Day Care
Registered Provider	The Elemental Adventures Project CIC
Registered places	24
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	This is a post registration inspection.
Is this a Flying Start service?	No
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	**Good**

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

Summary

Children thoroughly enjoy their time at this setting because they have a strong voice and they are curious learners who thrive in the outdoors. They consistently make choices about what they do and how they spend their time whilst engaging in purposeful outdoor play-based activities. They develop strong relationships and express their views openly, knowing that they will be listened to.

Staff fully understand and follow policies and procedures to promote healthy lifestyles, safety and personal well-being. They are qualified, knowledgeable, kind and very caring towards children, providing a nurturing and child-led setting. Staff fully promote the forest school ethos to ensure children holistically develop. Staff show a genuine passion for their roles.

People who run the setting have effective measures in place to ensure the environment is safe and that the natural environment is respected by all. They ensure children have access to an extensive range of natural resources and purposeful equipment to utilise as they wish within an enabling outdoor environment. People who run the setting offer an outstanding outdoor space in which children are free to explore and discover.

People who run the setting provide clear policies, in line with regulations and the National Minimum Standards. They ensure staff are supported well and are given relevant training for their roles. However, staff supervision meetings are not always recorded. They have strong parent partnerships and work closely with a range of organisations to promote the benefits of their unique provision.

Well-being Excellent

Children have a very strong voice in how this setting operates and how their needs are met. This child-centred inspirational setting offers children opportunities to grow holistically and confidently. For example, children make choices on where they wish to spend their time, whether it may be building tree houses, lighting a fire or exploring the woodlands. Children know that their opinions and interests are highly valued and acted upon and as a result they confidently access natural resources along with age appropriate tools and equipment.

Children are extremely happy and engaged and have a strong sense of belonging. The woodland setting has been adapted over time by both the children and staff. Children enthusiastically gave us a tour of their favourite spots and spoke of the fun memories they have of creating many magical areas within the site. For example, they introduced us to their 'Tree Pirate boat' and told us of the fun they have when sailing through the woodlands. All children are fully engaged and each child is valued and respected. They are aware of the setting's expectations and are able to explain the reasons for the rules and how they keep them safe. Children are also aware that these expectations result in them gaining a greater freedom to take part in risky play. Children's resilience is naturally built upon when physically exploring the woodland environment.

Interactions between children and adults are consistently stimulating. Children express empathy and care towards each other and listen carefully to one another, responding and communicating with interest. They are fully engaged and show respect for others and to the environment. Children co-operate extremely well, take turns and share. For example, children listened carefully to the instructions before having a try at whittling themselves, they waited their turn for extra guidance and followed expectations throughout the closely supervised activity.

Children are developing a deep awareness of the world around them. Their play, exploration and supported risk taking create opportunities for holistic development and growth. Children are thoroughly engaged in their play, building tree houses, baking cakes in the mud kitchen, painting with natural and self-made colours, climbing and balancing using ropes and safety mats and creating friendship bands from berries. We saw other children practise their fire lighting skills, which was closely supervised by a member of staff. Children love to use their imagination telling us of the magical trees within the woodland and a sense of awe and wonder permeates all of their play.

Children are given lots of time and encouragement to do things for themselves, build confidence in their own abilities, become resilient and problem solve. Children take responsibility for their belongings, learn good hygiene practices and make their own nutritious snacks to enjoy in the afternoon. The risk based play which is fully embedded in their provision promotes healthy, resilient, creative and independent learners.

Care and Development — Excellent

Staff are highly motivated and are passionate about their work. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep children safe and healthy within their setting. They know children's allergies, dietary requirements and medical needs. Staff have a clear understanding of the safeguarding procedures. They complete records relating to accidents and medication, promptly sharing these with parents. Staff champion all round healthy lifestyles. For example, they promote healthy eating, emotional well-being and resilience, alongside the health benefits of being immersed in nature with constant outdoor play and fresh air. Children are taught fire safety and regularly practice fire drills under staff direction. Staff have excellent relationships with their colleagues and communicate very well with each other; this ensures they supervise and support children effectively at all times.

Staff have an excellent understanding of the children's needs and how to promote positive behaviours. They treat children kindly and with a great deal of dignity and respect. Staff consistently encourage children's curiosity and problem solving skills. For example, they allow children to try and resolve their own conflict and only intervene if they feel they need further guidance. Therefore, children develop an understanding of why it is important to listen, follow instructions and share, as opposed to it being an external rule imposed upon them. All staff are outstanding role models, they take time to explain and give reasons for their expectations, which impacts the way children show empathy towards each other and compassion for the world around them.

Staff have sound knowledge of play-based learning and have the relevant childcare qualifications. They plan suitable activities to develop a range of skills and they support children well in their play. Staff know the children well and are familiar with their likes and dislikes. They use this knowledge to meet children's interests and needs effectively. Children with additional learning needs are fully supported by the staff and they thrive in this unique environment which allows them to develop at their own pace.

Environment — Excellent

The setting is safe and well managed. Staff greet children at the boundary of the setting and also take children to this point at collection time. They oversee the safe handover of children and signoff their attendance register. The attendance register was reviewed during the course of the inspection and now includes actual times of arrival and departure. Once all children have arrived and have been registered the boundary gate is closed.

People who run the setting provide systems for staff to complete daily checks of all areas and comprehensive risk assessments are in place and regularly reviewed. They respond dynamically to weather, seasonal and environmental changes in order to ensure that children are warm, dry and safe in their play. Natural boundaries keep children safe, and there is additional fencing between the woodland and surrounding farm land. People who run the setting ensure that children are aware of the perimeter and boundaries when exploring the woodland. A group of children explained the system they have in place when someone needs help; calling “1,2,3 Where are am I?”, which results in others responding with “1,2,3 Where are you?”. If children decide to explore, they must do so with a friend. All activities and equipment are risk assessed. The benefits of risky play are managed well. For example, children are reminded of how to sit properly when fire lighting and when climbing trees they know not to go further than their own personal limit, which is the point in which they can safely come down by themselves. Clear rules are in place for the log fire circle and staff consistently remind the children of the expectations when using tools and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

The setting minimises its impact upon nature as much as possible. People who run the setting have ensured there are three toilets on site, one tent toilet and the other two are compost toilets. Hand washing facilities are located next to the toilets and near the kitchen. Staff transport drinking and hand washing water to the woodland site. Children have access to a wide range of resources with an emphasis on exploring and using their natural surroundings. There is also a well-equipped mud kitchen, den building, a stage full of multicultural wooden instruments, arts and craft equipment, an area full of hammocks and safety mats for when children want to practise their acrobatics. Children have access to a small meadow when more open and spacious play such as running is needed.

Resources and play equipment made with sustainable and natural materials is favoured. Staff manage the environment well to ensure the play resources are safe, suitable and have the potential to spark curiosity and support children to reach their full potential. For example, a large group of children planned, practised and performed a circus show. People who run the setting provided art materials to make the tickets, safety mats for where they performed and bongo drums to create an exciting atmosphere.

Leadership and Management — Good

Leadership is effective and people who run the setting are motivated and passionate about the provision of care, and development of the service. They communicate and share their vision with the staff, who also embrace the ethos and values of the service. People who run the setting are supportive and committed to ensuring the whole team implements positive working practices. Policies, procedures and guidance are of a high standard and reviewed regularly. They maintain and share an up-to-date effective statement of purpose that accurately reflects the service provided. People who run the setting continually strive and are committed to delivering a quality service.

People who run the setting undertake a very thorough annual review of the service and consult with parents, staff and children. They consider and reflect upon this information very well. This informs priorities for the development of the service over the forthcoming year. Improvements to the service aim to have a positive impact upon children's experiences. For example, they have recently applied for a grant for wheel chair access to the site in order to become fully inclusive.

All staff have at least a level 3 playwork qualification and Forest School Level 3 qualification, most have a paediatric first aid, food hygiene and they are in the process of renewing their safeguarding training in line with the updated National Minimum Standards (NMS). Not all Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks were available on the day of inspection, but since the visit people who run the setting have provided evidence to show that these are now in place. Regular supervision is given to ensure staff understand their roles and responsibilities; however they have not formalised this system and records have not always been kept.

Staff understand the importance of building strong relationships with parents and the local community. Communication with parents and carers is very well maintained. Parents we spoke with are very happy with the level of communication and also report a very high level of satisfaction with the service and the care and experience their children receive. Umbrella organisations have also identified the setting as successful by submitting a nomination for the setting who were awarded 'Play Champion of the Year 2023' and by encouraging them to share their good practice with others.

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.

Area(s) for Improvement		
Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this	N/A

	inspection	

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)
Standard 13 (Day Care) - Suitable Person	To review and formalise the supervision and appraisal system.

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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