

Non-maintained nurseries

Schools Data

526

No. of settings providing funded education in 2025

Follow-up Data

No. in FU September 2024

ER:1

No. removed 2024-2025:

ER: 1

No. went into FU after core inspection 2024-2025:

ER: 1

In follow-up: 1

Total in FU August 2025

ER: 1

In follow-up: 1

Inspection activity

No. of core inspections: **90**

Summary

Nearly all settings provided a high standard of care, support, and learning, enabling children to make strong progress in their development. Children's communication and literacy skills continued to develop well, particularly where practitioners modelled language skilfully and embedded vocabulary through meaningful interactions. In English-medium settings, support for Welsh language acquisition was effective where practitioners confidently integrated Welsh into daily routines. In Welsh-medium settings, children made good progress in their language skills when practitioners immersed them in the language and were strong role models. However, in a few settings, the lack of consistency in the provision limited children's Welsh language development.

Many practitioners developed children's mathematical understanding through beneficial practical experiences and precise use of mathematical language. They enriched children's learning through local community engagement and nature-based experiences that enhanced children's sense of

wonder and understanding of the world. Many settings embraced the ethos of the [Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#), with agile responses to children's ideas and interests, and by planning purposeful learning opportunities.

Many practitioners ensured that children benefited from activities that developed their physical and creative skills well. Pupils' digital skills were promoted effectively in most settings. In general, many practitioners used observations and assessments well to inform their planning although, in a few settings, they did not always identify the next steps for individual children's learning well enough. Many practitioners provided thoughtfully tailored learning experiences for children with additional learning needs (ALN), with effective collaboration, personalised plans, and inclusive practices.

Leadership was strong in most settings, with setting leaders articulating ambitious visions, promoting reflective self-evaluation, and fostering professional learning. Positive partnerships with parents, carers, and external agencies enriched provision and facilitated smooth transitions.

Teaching and learning

In nearly all settings inspected, most children made effective progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding through well-considered play-based learning. Many children's communication skills developed well. In many settings, practitioners ensured that these skills were fostered through environments that enabled sustained interaction between adults and peers. Where practitioners promoted an early love of books and provided purposeful mark-making opportunities, children made strong progress in literacy, understanding that writing has meaning and function.

In many English-medium settings, practitioners supported Welsh language acquisition effectively by making the most of opportunities for children to hear and experience the language. However, children's Welsh language development was less effective in settings where practitioners' Welsh language skills were underdeveloped, or the Welsh language was used inconsistently during sessions.

In most Welsh-medium settings, children's Welsh language skills were developing well. Practitioners planned together effectively to immerse children in the language. They modelled Welsh language patterns effectively, questioning children regularly and encouraging them continuously to respond in Welsh.

Most practitioners supported children's mathematical development successfully by providing purposeful, practical learning and play experiences, and by modelling appropriate mathematical language. In these instances, children demonstrated secure counting skills, effective use of mathematical language, and confidence in exploring number, shape and measure through play.

Practitioners in many settings increasingly embraced the ethos of the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. In these instances, practitioners adapted their planning regularly in response to children's questions and ideas. They provided learning areas and activities that excited and interested children, ensuring authentic and purposeful experiences. This developed their curiosity well, built their independence and supported the needs of all children successfully. Read how children at [Plas Gogerddan Nursery, Ceredigion](#), benefit from regular, extended sessions in purposefully developed woodland space. In a very few settings, practitioners were still developing their confidence and understanding of the curriculum's requirements whilst embedding their knowledge and practice suitably.

Many practitioners enriched children's experiences through exploring their local communities and localities. They visited local businesses and amenities and immersed the children in nature. They used these visits to develop children's knowledge of the wider world, offering meaningful opportunities for children to develop a sense of awe and wonder.

Most children benefited from well-planned physical experiences that supported the development of their fine and gross motor skills and contributed to their co-ordination, balance and resilience. In the most effective settings, practitioners nurtured children's creative skills effectively by encouraging them to express their ideas through art, music, movement and role play.

Many practitioners made valuable observations of children's play and learning. They used these effectively to provide useful initial assessments of children's learning and development and planned purposeful learning opportunities. However, in a few settings, this was still at an early stage of development and observations did not always focus clearly enough on learning and what children could do. This limited practitioners' abilities to plan the next steps in individual children's learning well enough.

In most settings, practitioners developed children's spiritual, moral and social skills effectively, ensuring that children had a developing understanding of values such as honesty, fairness and respect. However, in a few settings, opportunities for children to learn about the lives and beliefs of people from cultures other than their own were limited.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Nearly all settings continued to provide strong care, support and guidance to children, which had a positive impact on their well-being. Nearly all children formed warm, trusting relationships with practitioners, who knew them well and met their needs sensitively. Settings that established familiar routines helped children to develop a strong sense of belonging and a feeling of security. [Ysgol Feithrin y Trallwng in Powys](#) is a good example of how embedding a language communication system supports inclusion.

In many settings, practitioners ensured that children played an active role in shaping their experiences. They allowed children to make purposeful choices about their play and learning. Most children moved confidently between activities, selecting resources that interested them. They expressed themselves clearly, knowing that practitioners listened to them with interest and respect. In nearly all settings, children shared resources and took turns successfully and learned to co-operate during play. Most children showed empathy and considered the feelings of others. They supported their friends and celebrated each other's achievements.

Most children engaged enthusiastically in a wide range of purposeful play experiences. They sustained their concentration for suitable periods and persevered with tasks. They explored creatively, experimenting with different materials, and enjoyed discovering independently. Many children took pride in their achievements and responded well to encouragement and praise.

Most practitioners promoted children's independent learning skills effectively. They ensured that children had opportunities to take increasing responsibility for their personal care. They provided purposeful opportunities for children to serve themselves by pouring drinks and choosing their snacks before clearing away. Many of these children attempted tasks independently before seeking adult support.

Nearly all practitioners had a sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. They ensured that they were up to date with safeguarding training, ensuring that they had a clear understanding of safeguarding issues, and their duty to report concerns. Most settings adhered to safety procedures and kept accurate and bespoke risk assessments. However, in a very few instances, settings did not always provide sufficient detail in written records of all incidents that occurred on the premises, including noting further actions and outcomes.

Many settings provided thoughtfully tailored learning experiences for children with additional learning needs (ALN), supported by strong multi-agency collaboration including the Early Years ALN Lead Officers (EY ALNLOs). These settings ensured that dedicated staff members were trained and fully aware of the appropriate legislation and requirements. They worked closely with parents to produce individual profiles that contained highly informative support plans, which were shared with keyworkers to ensure best outcomes for children. In successful settings, staff monitored the impact of interventions on children's needs carefully and ensured that they sought and implemented advice from appropriate health professionals, when necessary. At [Standing to Grow Playgroup](#) in Bridgend, a dedicated sensory space known as the 'Bumblebee area' enables children with a range of additional learning and developmental needs to identify their emotions and self-regulate when needed.

Many settings demonstrated inclusive practices through well-planned transitions, personalised provision, and creative use of indoor and outdoor environments. Read about how [Montgomery Pre-School](#) in Powys places strong emphasis on ensuring children feel confident and secure as they move to primary school.

Leading and improving

Leadership across many settings remained strong. Leaders across the sector consistently articulated clear and ambitious visions that prioritised the well-being and progress of children. In these settings, leaders successfully fostered welcoming and nurturing environments where children thrived emotionally and socially, and made good progress.

Most leaders built strong, collaborative teams where practitioners felt valued and supported. They established positive cultures where practitioners shared responsibilities and contributed to planning and decision-making. Read how leaders at [Beach House Nursery](#) in Rhyl, have recently introduced purposeful improvement processes and an effective style of leadership which is having a positive impact on many aspects of the provision and well-being.

Leaders in many settings used purposeful self-evaluation processes effectively to further improvement. They considered a wide range of evidence to identify strengths and areas for improvement. They used these insights well to develop clear and manageable targets. However, in a few settings, leaders did not always focus on the most important areas for development, or the actions that would bring about the most improvement. Read about how leaders at [Cylch Meithrin Llanrhaeadr Ym Mochnant](#) in Powys have established thorough and robust self-evaluation procedures, which have led to a culture of continuous improvement.

Many leaders ensured that performance management arrangements were robust and purposeful. Supervision and appraisal processes provided meaningful opportunities for practitioners to reflect on their practice and set targeted goals. However, in a very few settings, these processes were not carried out formally and were not fully embedded in the settings' practices. This meant that not all practitioners knew what was expected of them, or what actions they needed to take to secure

improvements. Many leaders prioritised professional learning and tailored it to individual needs and to the needs of the setting.

Many settings continued to forge strong partnerships with parents and carers. Leaders fostered open and trusting relationships with families, ensuring that they felt informed, involved and valued. Many settings used digital platforms effectively. In addition, regular stay-and-play sessions, parent workshops, and informal daily conversations strengthened home-setting relationships. Leaders also maintained valuable partnerships with local schools, community organisations, and the local authority and regional advisory services. [**Cylch Meithrin Machynlleth**](#) is highly effective in developing strong community links that support children's social, emotional skills and wider experiences. These connections supported effective transition arrangements and broadened children's learning experiences. Read about how leaders at [**Cylch Meithrin Y Drenwydd**](#) in Powys use strong community links to impact positively on pupils' experiences, progress and well-being.

Many leaders allocated resources carefully and matched their expenditure with improvement priorities. They used grant funding effectively to enrich the curriculum, promote inclusion, and enhance physical environments. In the strongest examples, leaders remained committed to continuous improvement and demonstrated a reflective and proactive approach to developing provision. At [**Cylch Meithrin Ysgol Bro Alun**](#) in Wrexham staff have thoughtfully adapted their provision to create a highly engaging, sustainable learning environment.

Overview of recommendations from inspections

A total of 90 non-maintained nursery settings were inspected in the 2024-2025 academic year. All providers were given at least one recommendation, with a total of 186 recommendations given.

73 providers (71%) were given a recommendation relating to **teaching and learning**:

- 26 providers (29%) were given a recommendation about using observations to plan children's next steps in learning
- 11 providers (12%) were given a recommendation about providing opportunities for children to learn about different cultures or diversity within society
- 7 providers (8%) were given a recommendation about providing or improving opportunities for children to develop their skills

10 providers (12%) were given a recommendation related to **well-being, care, support and guidance**:

- These recommendations all focused on various aspects of well-being, care, support and guidance and involved issues such as providing sufficient detail in written records, recording staff attendance accurately, and holding and recording fire drills regularly

51 providers (57%) were given a recommendation related to **leadership and management**:

- 16 providers (18%) were given a recommendation about staff development, including formalising or improving appraisal and supervision processes
- 13 providers (14%) were given a recommendation relating to self-evaluation, including strengthening procedures
- 7 providers (8%) were recommended to address areas of non-compliance identified in the inspection

- 6 providers (7%) were given a recommendation about continuing their good practice

Follow-up

In September 2024, there was one non-maintained setting subject to Estyn review. This setting received a follow-up visit in relation to their inspection and was judged to have made good progress in respect of the key issues for action. It was removed from the list of settings requiring monitoring in February 2025. One setting was placed into the Estyn review follow-up category in December 2024, and Estyn will visit the setting to monitor progress.

Following discussion with CIW, it was agreed that there would only be one category of follow-up, known as Joint follow-up, from January 2025. This approach provides additional flexibility for Estyn and CIW to undertake follow-up activity according to a setting's specific needs.

One further setting was placed in the Joint follow-up category during the Spring term, 2025. Estyn and CIW will visit the setting to monitor progress.