

Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl



Helen Greenwood explains the shared vision for Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl.

We are a non-maintained Cylch Meithrin based in the heart of the community. The staff, children and families of Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl all work closely together to ensure that we have a clear and shared vision.

We aim to provide a safe, happy, caring and stimulating environment for all our children. We make sure that we are responding to children's interests, that they are developing their skills and reaching their full potential. We support all the children to become 'ambitious and capable learners'; 'healthy and confident individuals'; 'ethical and informed citizens' and 'enterprising and creative individuals' in line with the new Curriculum for Wales and the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings.

Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl has two very versatile spaces and our vision is to ensure

children are able to spend as much time as possible outdoors.

Indoors, we have a large open hall which is divided into a number of play and learning areas to ensure the children have opportunities to develop their curiosity and imagination, to make friends and to feel that they belong to our nursery community.

Over the last two years, we have spent a lot of time and energy developing our outside space to make sure that the children have plenty of play opportunities, space for physical development, opportunities to use their imagination, to learn about nature and about planting and growing.

We are constantly spending time looking at how we can improve the learning environments in our setting. One of the things we observed having attended Communication Friendly Spaces training by Elizabeth Jarman was that we did not have many spaces where the children could spend time alone or in small groups outside. We worked on this and have now developed these important spaces both indoors and outdoors. We have tried to ensure that we offer spaces





and opportunities for the children to be both boisterous and reflective, to explore and to talk, but also to be quiet and alone if they wish.

At present, for safety reasons, parents are dropping their children off at the gate. There is a member of staff at the gate daily to greet parents and children. We have lots of colourful potted plants at the entrance and the fence is decorated with examples of the children's work. We have a message board and a gazebo for parents and children to shelter if the weather is wet. We hope it will not be long before we can invite the parents back into our Cylch once more, but until then we hope the entrance is both inviting and attractive.



We are all very proud of our outdoor area. We have a climbing wall, with steps, and a platform leading onto a slide. The platform could make some children feel anxious because of its height, but adults are at hand to offer help and support and often sit up on the platform talking to the children. When we get the bikes, scooters and other riders out some of the children feel anxious because of the speed some children ride their bikes and are worried they will bump into them. To avoid this we talk to the children and have set some simple rules for physical play. We encourage risk-taking but are also constantly present to both support and to congratulate.





We have a well-developed woodwork and tinkering area which has a lot of authentic resources, a wide range of tools and wood. We built and developed this area having been inspired by Pete Moorhouse and his vision for the use of woodwork in the early years. All four members of our staff have attended training courses through the Education Achievement Service and from Academi - Mudiad Meithrin. The children now have access to this very popular area every day. A member of staff is always on hand to assist the children with their imaginative creations and their choice of tools.

We have created two areas outside with space for one or two children to sit and reflect. These areas are set away from other activities and resources. We also place individual chairs and cushions in corners around the garden so that children can relax and contemplate in safe, quiet spaces. We have ample and varied child-sized seating both indoors and outdoors; this ensures that we are always on the same level as the children. Furniture can



be moved around by the children to offer a change of scene and staff can sit and wait to be invited to join in with the play.

Last summer, we had a huge tree in our garden felled for health and safety reasons. Before the tree was felled, the children loved to play around the tree trunk which we had developed as a role play area – it was sometimes a fairy garden or a jungle. Since the tree has gone, a platform has been built above our slide but the children use this area much less now. We have invested in some outdoor cushions and throws to make it more inviting and intend on putting a canopy up above the remaining tree trunk. We hope this new cosy environment will encourage the children to sit and discuss with us and between themselves what they would now like to see developed here.

In the past, before there was any suggestion that too many bright colours could overstimulate children, we invested in brightly coloured tables and chairs and we had a lot of brightly coloured resources and equipment. Our walls are now painted cream and over the last two years we have tried really hard to replace the colourful plastic toys with natural resources and natural loose parts, and most of our outside furniture is now plain natural wood.

The children's creations bring the colour now – their work is displayed with great pride on our walls and around the Cylch.

In the home corner, children can set the table with china cups, saucers and plates and use real cutlery. Role play corners and small world areas





are changed regularly to reflect the children's interests.

We make sure the children are given opportunities to choose and have access to the resources they want out.

The music area has a number of drums which can produce a lot of noise – obviously! These are not left out permanently and we ask the children to limit the periods of loud banging; encouraging them to experiment with different levels of sound and different combinations of instruments.

Our quiet corner is well used by the children; they are able to sit in a quiet, relaxed atmosphere. There are plenty of cushions, blankets and soft lighting. They retreat here if they want to be alone or want to just sit and watch the other children. Over the last year we have also developed more smaller, comfortable enclosed areas where the children can spend time on their own or with a friend.

We are very lucky to have a large open hall with four large windows along both sides



which let in lots of natural light. We make use of a number of other light sources – we use fairy lights in role play areas, in quiet areas and in enclosed spaces, to add atmosphere and to entice the children in. The children love to use torches and last Christmas they had a wonderful time creating homemade lanterns for an evening lantern parade through the park and a carol service around the bandstand.

We like to think that we offer the children the same learning opportunities outdoors and indoors. We visit our local park weekly and we spend whole days outside in our garden. Each child has an allocated all-weather suit and a pair of wellies to ensure we can all access the outside area in all weathers.

We believe that we offer a wide range of developmentally appropriate activities and play opportunities for every one of our children so that they can follow their own interests at all times.

Whilst developing and adapting our outside play area over the last two years, we have endeavoured to create spaces where the children can observe, relax or engage quietly in something of their choice.

We have discussed, several times, how we could change the different areas in the outside space. We asked the children to think about what they would like to change or add to each of the areas.





We decided to move our mud kitchen and construction area to be next door to each other. We were then able to organise an open space in front of our outside playhouse where children could sit and talk and observe.

The far end of our garden was a bit of a dead area which was not being used to its full potential. After much discussion, our children decided to put a small shelter under the trees, we put a table and some benches for the children to sit on and talk, draw, solve problems ... or do anything they want to!



We now have a new wooden pagoda, a platform built on the bank above our slide and a new shed and greenhouse. The greenhouse has given us opportunities to develop our growing. The children want to grow pumpkins and we have talked about what else we can grow to eat. Last year, we were able to sell punnets of our own strawberries to the parents at the gate. This year, we want to develop this further to grow and then sell tomatoes and other salad items in our little shop.

The children love their outside area. They are stimulated and excited about growing their own fruit and vegetables and love to sit and observe the changing seasons, the birds and trees.

The response we have from our parents has

always been very positive. Our fundraising activities have helped us in developing our outside area, and we have also benefited from sustainability grant support from Torfaen local authority. We have organised weekend sessions

to enable the parents to get involved and help with the gardening, the painting and decorating, building the planting boxes and putting up the fencing.

As a community Cylch Meithrin, parental involvement is of great importance to us and without their support and involvement, we would not have been able to move forward with as much confidence as we have.

We are so proud that some of our parents were children here themselves in the '90s. As a result of their introduction to Welsh-medium education at the Cylch, they went on to study at Welsh schools and are now totally bilingual. These parents are now making this choice for their own children. We continue to support and encourage our parents to use as much Welsh at home with their children as they can.

Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl is strongly rooted in our community, and we will work tirelessly to continue offering a safe, happy, caring and stimulating environment for our children and their families.