



**INCLUSIVE
EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION**

INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Case Study Visit Report:

Tremorfa Nursery School, Cardiff, Wales, 16–18 May 2016

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
PREAMBLE: THE IECE PROJECT.....	5
1. INTRODUCTION: SELECTED CASE STUDY VISIT OF THE IECE PROJECT.....	7
2. THE CONTEXT	9
2.1 Inclusive education in Wales	9
2.2 Tremorfa Nursery School.....	10
3. THE SETTING’S HIGHLIGHT (THEME 1): HOLISTIC APPROACH AND DEVELOPMENT.....	11
4. THEME 2: FOCUS ON CHILDREN’S STRENGTHS	12
4.1 Capturing all children’s abilities	12
4.2 Play-based approach to learning.....	12
5. THEME 3: SHARED VISION OF INCLUSION	14
5.1 Strong and shared leadership	14
5.2 Continuing professional development.....	14
5.3 Parental involvement and partnership	15
5.4 Reflection time among practitioners	15
6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	16
6.1 Areas for further discussion	16



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full version
ALN:	Additional Learning Needs
ECE:	Early Childhood Education
EU:	European Union
IECE:	Inclusive Early Childhood Education
IEP:	Individual Education Plan
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAG:	Project Advisory Group
SEN:	Special educational needs



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Agency gratefully acknowledges the generous help, support and warm welcome provided by the hosts in Cardiff and Tremorfa Nursery School, in particular Alyson Lewis and Sarah Elizabeth Ghahremani. Thanks also go to Annamaria Bevan, head teacher of Tremorfa Nursery School, the nursery school's educational and support staff, and the children and parents, all of whom gave up their time to meet with us in Wales.

Finally, the Agency would like to acknowledge the key role of the PAG members and national experts who took part in the visit and provided additional support.



PREAMBLE: THE IECE PROJECT


This report on the case study visit to Cardiff and Tremorfa Nursery School, Wales, is part of the Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) project, conducted by the Agency from 2015 to 2017. The project includes a total of eight such visits in different European countries.

The project's overall goal is to identify, analyse and subsequently promote the main characteristics of quality inclusive ECE for all children from three years old to the start of primary education.

Thus, the project focuses on the structures and processes that can ensure a systemic approach to providing high-quality inclusive ECE that effectively meets the academic and social learning needs of all the children from the school group's local community.

The project started off with a focus on the five thematic areas for improving ECE that were raised by EU and OECD working groups for this field (EU, 2014; OECD, 2014):

- Access to quality ECE for all children. From the perspective of the project, this principle refers to facilitating access for all children in the community, with particular concern for the most vulnerable, such as children with disabilities and SEN, immigrants and newcomers, and other at-risk children and families.
- Workforce quality. This principle calls for the employment of appropriately trained staff with access to continuous training and adequate working conditions, appropriate leadership, support staff inside and outside the school, and adequate resources and positive parent, interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration.
- Quality curriculum/content. This principle underlines the need for a holistic and flexible curriculum and pedagogy that promote child wellbeing and learning in all aspects of development – cognitive, social, language, emotional and physical – and enable children to be meaningfully and actively engaged in a safe but open and stimulating environment.
- Evaluation and monitoring. This not only refers to how children's development and learning is monitored, but also to the ECE provision's level of effectiveness to meet established quality standards that ensure a quality learning environment for all children.
- Governance and funding. This principle considers how public funding and leadership models are used accountably to ensure that a quality ECE service is



available to all children and is managed with a constant focus on enabling each child's holistic growth and learning.

Project activity and project outputs will include:

- A literature and policy review providing the conceptual framework for the project and including a review of international and European research literature and policy papers on ECE.
- Country reports providing information on policy and practice in inclusive ECE for all children at national level.
- European practitioners' perceptions of and practices for inclusive ECE: a qualitative analysis of descriptions of 32 examples of inclusive ECE provisions.
- Detailed reports of the eight selected case study sites, including analysis of the key project themes investigated.
- Recommendations designed to meet policy-makers' needs: the project synthesis report will draw on evidence from all project activities; the key issues/factors facilitating quality inclusion in ECE will be analysed and translated into recommendations.
- A self-assessment/self-reflection tool for the ECE setting.



1. INTRODUCTION: SELECTED CASE STUDY VISIT OF THE IECE PROJECT

This report provides information about the case study visit that the Agency team conducted in Wales in May 2016.

Tremorfa Nursery School was selected, along with seven other sites, from examples of inclusive practice in ECE submitted by national experts and Agency Representative Board members. The eight selected examples were willing to be visited and studied by a project team in order to understand the quality features of inclusive ECE provision.

In order to support the countries in identifying examples of inclusive practice in ECE, the Agency team, in collaboration with the PAG members, established criteria that the example provisions were expected to meet. These criteria, which were also used to select the eight examples, were:

- Relevance of the site
- Clarity of the information provided
- Evidence of the following:
 - respect for diversity;
 - promotion of participation and engagement;
 - holistic curriculum;
 - skilled workforce;
 - collaboration and partnership;
 - smooth transitions;
 - quality assurance;
 - self-evaluation to inform improvement.

The selected examples also needed to reflect diverse geographical locations across Europe.

A team of Agency staff, PAG members and country experts visited Cardiff and Tremorfa Nursery School, from 16 to 18 May 2016. The visit provided opportunities to hear first-hand about developments in the city and the nursery school's ECE provisions, to observe classes and to interview different stakeholder groups: principal, teachers, support teachers, parents and children. Interviews were conducted according to a schedule to provide consistency across the eight project case study visits. In addition, relevant documents on national and regional policy and practice were collected prior to and during the visit. All visiting project participants provided first impressions at a forum on the last day of the visit and



then submitted written feedback about the inclusive features of the ECE provision at Tremorfa Nursery School. All these sources of evidence have been used to draft this report.

An analysis of all the above data led to the identification of three main themes in how Tremorfa Nursery School is enhancing the inclusiveness of its ECE provision:

- 1 Holistic approach and development
- 2 Focus on children's strengths
- 3 Shared vision of inclusion

These are described in detail in Sections 3 to 5 of this report. Section 2 gives an account of the background of inclusive provision within Inclusive education in Cardiff and Tremorfa Nursery School, Wales.



2. THE CONTEXT

2.1 Inclusive education in Wales

Since 1999, the Welsh Government has autonomously handled the administration of healthcare, education and social services for Wales' population of 3 million people.

There is great economic disparity between the north and the south of Wales, and between rural areas and cities. The social situation is difficult in the former industrial regions where coal and slate were produced. There, unemployment stands at 6.1%, compared to 5.3% for the United Kingdom as a whole.

A major scheme to fight poverty affecting children has been adopted, with the prime objective of improving parenting skills and boosting investment in early childhood.

One of Wales' distinctive features is that it is officially bilingual, with Welsh speakers comprising 20% of the population. Schools offer education in Welsh or in English. Early-years schooling gives preference to the language of choice; schoolchildren are expected to learn the other language, but it is a secondary subject.

The government has undertaken a vast educational reform intended to reinforce ECE for all children. Following this reform, special educational needs (SEN) and learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) are now called additional learning needs (ALN).

A broad five-point programme of support for families has been engaged, focusing on improving parenting skills, on budget and debt management, and on fighting unemployment.

Flying Start is an educational programme for the neediest families; it aims to cover 25 to 30% of children, and offers at least 15 hours a week of after-school educational childcare, free of charge.

The Foundation Phase defines a statutory curriculum of 10 hours (sometimes 12 or 15) of teaching open to all children aged 3 to 7, free of charge. This programme was introduced in 2008 and revised in 2015. It is based on play and targets seven areas of learning. For more information about the Foundation Phase, please refer to: <http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/130424-framework-for-childrens-learning-en.pdf>

(More information about the inclusive education system in Wales is available in the country report, in the description of the example and in Wales' national overview: www.european-agency.org/national-policy-and-provision/united-kingdom-wales).



2.2 Tremorfa Nursery School

Tremorfa Nursery School is a publicly subsidised nursery school. It is located in a poor neighbourhood of Cardiff, where 91% of the residents receive unemployment or dependency benefits. The school enrolls children aged 3 and 4. English is the preferred language in this school. However, 70% of the children are below average in their linguistic development and communication skills. Some 16% of them have been identified as having ALN. Very few children have a statement of SEN. Currently, 22% of the children speak English as an additional language. None of them come from a Welsh-speaking home.

All children, regardless of ability, educational need, culture or gender, are welcome at Tremorfa Nursery School.

The teaching follows the Foundation Phase curriculum, in two half-day sessions (morning and afternoon), each attended by 60 children. As the school is located in an underprivileged neighbourhood, Tremorfa is also eligible for the Flying Start programme. All children whose families wish to register them are accepted, without any restriction. The school building is fully accessible.

The setting is staffed by one head teacher, three teachers, four nursery nurses, two learning support assistants and one-to-one support staff. The setting also employs staff for their wraparound care facility and a caretaker to look after the maintenance of the building.

The setting has undergone recent further adaptations, such as toilet facilities, ramps, etc., for health and care needs. The setting has a very long-standing commitment to parental involvement and partnership. It works closely with families and the wider community for example, and has a strong relationship with local health professionals.

Further details about Tremorfa Nursery School are available on its website:

www.tremorfanursery.co.uk



3. THE SETTING'S HIGHLIGHT (THEME 1): HOLISTIC APPROACH AND DEVELOPMENT

Tremorfa Nursery School follows the Foundation Phase curriculum. This emphasises the centrality of the child and the significance of children's wellbeing. It advocates a balance of child-initiated and practitioner-directed (or practitioner-initiated) activities within stimulating indoor and outdoor environments. This programme is based on play and targets seven areas of learning:

1. Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity
2. Language, literacy and communication skills
3. Mathematical development
4. Welsh language development (in English-medium schools)
5. Knowledge and understanding of the world
6. Physical development
7. Creative development.

It is a bottom-up model – building on what children can do. It entails three types of provision:

1. Focused provision: Adult works with small groups to introduce concepts
2. Enhanced provision: Specific resources are added to continuous provision, e.g. bubbles/food colouring to water tray
3. Continuous provision: Resources that are continually available throughout the year, e.g. sand, water, etc.

Children's development is documented in the form of learning stories. These include photographs, next steps and adults' roles. The learning stories document a holistic picture of individual children's skills, and provide information for discussion with parents, families and other professionals.

For more information about the Foundation Phase, please refer to:

<http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/130424-framework-for-childrens-learning-en.pdf>



4. THEME 2: FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S STRENGTHS

During the visit to Tremorfa Nursery School and the discussions with the staff and parents, the case study participants observed the holistic approach they follow and the emphasis on all children's strengths and abilities.

4.1 Capturing all children's abilities

Tremorfa Nursery School uses a variety of assessment tools to ensure that every child accesses a developmentally appropriate curriculum and that the learning environment supports all children's needs. All staff in the setting have a holistic picture of each individual child.

During the first six weeks of entry into the setting, they use the Leuven scale for children's wellbeing, involvement and engagement.

Practitioners use a 'traffic light system': Green – no concerns, Amber – keep an eye (may attend a nurture group or adult support), Red – concerns, discuss with family/other professionals.

An early years on-entry tracking system assesses all areas of development.

The I CAN stages of development tool to assess early speech and language is used at home and in the setting.

Children with ALN have an IEP. This is a working document which includes measurable targets. For example, children with speech and language difficulties access intense targeted intervention from the setting's highly trained staff. To ensure that all children are able to participate, the setting also has well-established links with local special schools to provide:

- on-going support for children with ALN and their families;
- staff training;
- advice about learning environment, communication aids, etc.

In addition, there are regular reviews of the learning environment. For instance, Tremorfa is currently working to become an autism-friendly setting so, for example, displays are neutral with no bright overwhelming colours.

Moreover, visual prompts are used for all children attending the setting.

4.2 Play-based approach to learning

During the visit and the discussions with staff, the case study participants observed how they manage to balance literacy and numeracy with play-based learning.



The case study participants also observed the well-organised environment prepared for the children. Many opportunities for activities are proposed for children aged 3 to 5. Indoors, there is a corner for water games, a place for puzzles and beads, modelling clay, painting, a play kitchenette and a dining table. Outdoors, there is construction activity with wheelbarrows and a cement mixer, a kitchen, a theatre stage, musical instruments for outdoors, and various opportunities for motor play activity.

Indoors, digital devices are available to display photographs and/or films and mini reportages on the children's activities. These are frequently used and offer excellent support for linguistic activities. During the first part of the morning, the case study participants observed all the children as they freely used this space. This freedom was evident in the wide range of behaviours: some children chose one activity and stayed with it for a time, while other children sampled several activities during the same period. The children spread out among the various activities harmoniously and without conflict. The large number of adults present was undoubtedly a factor in the quality of the atmosphere. They intervened very little, however; they accompanied the children in their activities, without imposing and only making a few suggestions.

After the period of free play, the children were gathered for a snack in three groups of 20 children each, in a place slightly apart; two adults accompanied each group. This time was used to collectively recite nursery rhymes, to develop social interaction (distribution and sharing of food) and to talk together. Here again the children's attitude showed that they were at ease and comfortable.

In the third period of this half-day, the case study participants were especially attentive to the workshops led by the teachers and their assistants, aimed at developing specific skills (water games, creativity, etc.). Just as earlier in the day, it seemed that the children had considerable liberty to choose their workshops, and that their production was abundantly encouraged.

The same schedule was followed in the afternoon, and the case study participants saw that there was a lot of interest in the 'Forest School' activity. Tremorfa has worked hard to create a free-flow indoor/outdoor environment, developing features such as a small Forest School and an innovative pond within the grounds to encourage the children to engage with the natural world. Participants indicated that one of the highlights of this school is that not only does it focus on learning through free or semi-directed activities in the outdoor environment, it also creates an environment of extraordinary discoveries that children do not see in their family life.



5. THEME 3: SHARED VISION OF INCLUSION

Tremorfa Nursery School is proud of its inclusive ethos and has never turned a child away. It is continually working to improve the physical environment to be appropriate for all children. It has a proactive approach to staff development for its whole team. It promotes close relationships with local primary schools, local special schools, local support services and professionals and, most importantly, with the children's parents/carers. All of these factors make it a highlight of provision.

The setting works closely with the local community and develops strong relationships with relevant services and professionals, such as local health professionals, local primary schools, local special schools, the local Flying Start link teacher, etc.

5.1 Strong and shared leadership

The head teacher's commitment, inclusive policy and values and distributive leadership impressed participants. She has worked at the nursery for over a decade, first as a teacher and now as head teacher. She seems to be passionate about early years and about providing the best possible education and experiences for all children and their families. This inclusive culture and passion is reflected in the team members. They are committed to working together, sharing and developing their knowledge and expertise to provide the best possible care and education for children whatever their background or need.

Another important matter is the relationships they have built up with other professionals. For example, the setting's leader obtains parental permission to speak to the local health visitor (HV) on a child's entry. Therefore, when she meets with the HV weekly she is able to discuss any issues or concerns quickly and, if necessary, discuss them with the child's parents. Safeguarding is also a strength of the setting, with rigorous procedures in place to deal with any issues promptly.

5.2 Continuing professional development

Through discussions with staff, the focus on in-service training and the fact that all staff have access to a wide range of specific early years training became apparent. For example, all staff are trained in developing young children's communication skills and Philosophy for Children. Many staff are Forest School accredited. More qualified members of staff often take on mentor roles to develop other staff members. For example, one nursery nurse has taken on the role of SEN mentor, which means taking responsibility for mentoring one-to-one staff, supporting IEP implementation and ensuring appropriate resources are available. The case study participants were told that all practitioners take the opportunities to visit other



sector-leading settings and schools across the United Kingdom, as well as sharing expertise with other similar settings in the city.

5.3 Parental involvement and partnership

The case study participants' conversations with parents and the school staff led to an understanding of how the school's learning project is articulated. There is a major emphasis on how children are welcomed when they first come to the school, in conjunction with a sustained dialogue with the families, facilitated by a 'log book'. Parents' involvement is sought very actively, notably through regular information and discussion sessions.

The setting seems to be committed to involving parents in the children's learning and considers them as real partners. A designated member of staff is building her skills and expertise in successfully engaging parents/carers in a very deprived area of a large city.

Also, the setting often runs events and trips to enrich all children's experiences and to engage parents/carers in their children's learning and development. In addition, each child at the setting also experiences their own 'mini trip', linked to their own interests and learning in order to provide enrichment and a truly personalised curriculum. All children have their own photo albums developed by the staff. The setting works hard to reflect the community's cultural diversity within its events and to identify and celebrate special cultural aspects.

5.4 Reflection time among practitioners

Staff meet daily to discuss planning in relation to children's interests, skills and next steps in learning. All team members evaluate their practice and activities as they go along, reflecting this within daily evaluations. The setting's leader feels it is vital that every staff member is listened to during the daily sessions. Staff rotate around the setting on a fortnightly basis and work within different learning zones.



6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tremorfa Nursery School's inclusive education model, presented in this report, was observed and appreciated by the participants during the visit and the relevant discussions. It provides a holistic education approach for all children, irrespective of ability, educational need, culture and gender.

There seems to be a clear focus on children's strengths and abilities and the emphasis is on a play-based approach to learning. Many resources are provided and the staff appear to be motivated, creative and well-trained.

The discussions with staff and parents confirmed the focus on recruiting highly-qualified staff, enabling continuing professional development and promoting a teamwork approach, based on trusting each other and collaborative teaching.

The visit participants stated that Tremorfa Nursery School's strengths are: a clear inclusive policy; inclusive values and respect for diversity; highly-qualified staff; practitioners work with passion/heart; an open curriculum that supports all children; strong parental partnership and links; natural environment and forest school opens up different possibilities; positive, friendly atmosphere; strong teamwork.

6.1 Areas for further discussion

Tremorfa Nursery School strives to continue improving its services. The visit participants made some proposals for further reflection on key areas related to inclusion:

- Limitations of 2.5 hours per day: Participants consider that the staff of Tremorfa Nursery School have to work very hard with all children, and particularly with children with ALN, in order to engage them in all activities in a very short time – 2.5 hours. In most countries, the settings are open for the whole day and the staff have enough time to provide all the necessary activities in relation to education and care. Participants recognise that the staff in Tremorfa Nursery School are doing a lot of things in that time.
- Peer interaction: Participants observed that some children – in particular two children with ALN (a child with mobility problems and a child with autism) – were helped by a support teacher and interacted very little with the other children. Both children were playing on their own, supported by the adult/teacher, and did not interact with two other children close by. The staff need to encourage more peer interaction to promote the importance of inclusion among peers.