

Inspection report for Cobden Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Leicestershire
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Date of previous inspection	9 March 2011
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Linked school if applicable	Cobden Primary School 120097
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cobden Pre-School EY396750

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of management meetings.

Information about the centre

Cobden Children's Centre is one of seven centres in Charnwood. It was designated a phase one centre in 2007 and serves a large residential area with an ethnically diverse community in the town. The area is one of the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. The area served by the centre is socially mixed and highly populated. A high number of properties are council owned. An above-average proportion of families are unemployed. While the majority of families are of White British heritage, a significant proportion, around 30%, represents a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being Indian and Bangladeshi. The centre's reach area serves an overall population of around 900 children aged five years or under. Around half of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are well below those expected for their age. A significant proportion come from homes where English is not the first language. Within the area the centre serves, there is a significant amount of extreme poverty, unemployment, poor health and low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The local authority has overall accountability for the centre and has devolved governance to the Charnwood locality partnership board. The centre has commissioned inter-agency partnerships to deliver the services and activities on its behalf in the local area. The day-to-day running of the centre is coordinated by a local authority officer who also manages six other centres in Charnwood. The centre

offers a range of health, social care, education and family support services. Within the same premises, early years education and care for children aged between two and four years are provided under the governance of Cobden Primary School. Education for children aged five plus is provided through Cobden Primary School on the same site as the centre.

When the centre was inspected in March 2011, its overall effectiveness was judged inadequate.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

3

Main findings

Cobden Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre. It has improved since its previous inspection. The leadership team has taken effective action to address weaknesses in the services provided to meet the needs of the community. Overall participation rates in activities have increased, particularly from some of the most vulnerable families. Engagement with children and families with disabilities and fathers remains low. The local authority and the centre's strategic leadership team have improved management processes.

The partnership board has clear terms of reference and is held to account appropriately by the local authority. The partnership board includes good representation from services which support the work of the centre, and consequently the work of the centre is improving. However, this aspect of its work is at an early stage of development because not all services are fully developed and so having a measurable impact on improving outcomes for families. There is currently no parental representation on the board. A parent forum has been established, with the aim to encourage parents to become members of the board.

Since the previous inspection, the local authority has improved the staffing structure of the centre. A part-time centre manager and the appointment of a senior family outreach worker have strengthened management capacity. A family outreach worker is now seconded to the health team to work in partnership with the health visitor to assess families' needs and promote the centre's services.

The centre's leadership team has implemented systems to collate and record effectively the qualitative and quantitative information available which gives it an increasingly accurate understanding of its community's needs. The centre uses this information appropriately to ensure the development plans are linked to needs and have clear and measurable targets against which commissioned contractors are held to account.

Leaders have implemented new and improved quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the quality of provision and to identify the impact for families over the long term. All services are required to submit quarterly reports to the centre outlining qualitative and quantitative data clearly evidencing the impact on outcomes of the families engaging with services. Observation spot checks across all services are being introduced. There is now a more consistent approach to evaluation across all activities. However, the quality of these is variable, particularly with regard to the sessions to promote children's learning and development.

Centre users are having a greater say in shaping the centre's services. For example, a parents' forum, supported with crèche provision, has been introduced. Users are surveyed annually and offer ideas through 'Tell us what you think' feedback forms and a suggestion box. Although adult users evaluate activities regularly, children's views are not routinely sought. Where users make requests for services, the centre strives to meet demand. Users feel listened to and respected.

Partnership working and the outcomes for children and adults using the centre are satisfactory. The partnerships with outreach workers such as Home-Start, speech and language, and adult learning services are particularly strong and contribute well to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Collectively, these organisations ensure families are given good care, appropriate information and support tailored to their individual needs. However, despite continued efforts to improve the health and well-being of families, the numbers of parents smoking during pregnancy and babies born with low birth weight remain a concern.

Opportunities for parents to become volunteers are not explored effectively. Staff do not routinely encourage parents to consider engaging in voluntary work and, for those who show interest, the recruitment process is slow and, consequently, the take-up rates are low.

The quality of provision is improving and is becoming more consistent. The centre has taken action to improve the quality of early years provision, such as replacing the 'Stay and Play' sessions with a more structured programme of 'Play and Learn' sessions. These sessions are planned with a suitable focus on the development of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Although leaders evaluate these sessions, the evaluations are not consistently focused on learning and development and are not always used effectively to improve future planning.

Sessions to engage parents in their children's development are not consistently

effective. While children enjoy the activities, parents do not always benefit from learning how they can develop their own skills to support their children's learning because they do not become sufficiently involved. Parents are supported in some sessions to understand the purpose of an activity in relation to their children's learning; however, they are not routinely involved in assessing the outcome. There is limited information about the Early Years Foundation Stage displayed around the centre, inhibiting opportunities for parents to develop their understanding of this. Children's 'scrap books' have been introduced to which parents contribute, but these lack meaning and quality. For example, pictures are undated and there is little reference to the child's stage of learning and development.

Much has changed since the last inspection in March 2011. The centre has established firm foundations and has demonstrated that it has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of the most vulnerable families who engage with the services available to them, particularly fathers and disabled children.
- Improve the physical and emotional health and well-being of children and adults by implementing strategies to:
 - decrease the number of parents smoking during pregnancy
 - reduce the number of babies born with low birth weight.
- Improve the quality of services available to children and families by ensuring the monitoring and evaluation systems are implemented effectively across all commissioned and children's centre services.
- Improve outcomes for children and families through ensuring the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance is integral to and embedded in all aspects of the centre's programme.
- Improve parents' economic stability and independence and the centre's sustainability through maximising opportunities for parents to become volunteers.
- Develop further and continue the support from partners to strengthen the effectiveness of the partnership board in delivering high-quality provision and improving outcomes for children and families.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre is focused on improving the health and well-being of families. Although satisfactory overall, outcomes are improving in most areas. Families are developing a satisfactory understanding of the importance of healthy eating through attendance at cooking sessions and the special advice and support they receive from the dietetic service. Physical activity sessions such as 'Mini-Movers' and 'Mini-Tunes' promote the importance of exercise and have resulted in most parents reporting that their own and their children's emotional health and well-being have improved.

The effective partnership working with the health visitors and outreach workers means that all new-birth families receive a joint home 'Cherub' visit which contributes to increasing numbers of vulnerable families accessing the centre's services and to the early identification of health and safety concerns. The well-attended on-site baby clinics ensure that parents have access to a range of postnatal services and information on issues, such as breastfeeding, weaning and feeding routines. Parents value these sessions. The majority of families are engaging well with universal services. Immunisation rates and the uptake of mothers breastfeeding their babies are generally in line with national averages.

Where the centre has been successful in engaging with families with disabilities, it has been effective in improving the outcomes for these users. For example, one parent commented positively on how the staff's involvement at a very important part of a child's life had been invaluable and that, without the support from the family outreach service, she would not have known what to do and that the child would not have made the progression it had. However, the centre has only managed to engage with a minority of this group.

Parents say they feel safe at the centre and how their awareness of keeping their children safe has increased through activities such as the 'Safe Start' scheme and 'Positive Parenting' course. Parents experiencing domestic violence feel supported. Home-Start provides effective support for families experiencing isolation or finding it hard to cope due to physical or mental illness. As a result, parents report positively on how the centre has improved their confidence, self-esteem and social skills. Others report on how their parenting skills have improved and how they have made positive relationships with others.

The centre has begun to implement early intervention strategies as a result of previous concerns regarding children's communication and language skills. For example, the 'Chatterbabies' and 'Chatterbox' sessions have been introduced to improve parents' understanding of the importance of communicating with their babies and the strategies to take from an early age. Parents comment on how these sessions have helped their understanding about how children learn to communicate and the negative impact television has on their children's development.

Parents' are developing satisfactory economic stability and independence. A small number of parents have achieved further qualifications and moved into employment. The 'Parents with Prospect' courses support young teenage parents well in gaining parenting skills. However, the ongoing group support for young parents following these courses is limited. The centre uses networking within the community to support learning needs and provides a good range of sessions such as family learning, skills for life, English for speakers of other languages, and cookery sessions where adults improve their literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Some adults move on to further training and employment, although numbers are low.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are	3
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physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

Parents expressed appreciation of the support they receive and of the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. Case studies show how staff support them through difficult times and how their lives would be very different without the centre's help.

The centre is increasingly successful in meeting the needs of the wider community and, therefore, much of the centre's work is focused on supporting the most vulnerable groups. Where the centre has been successful, for example, in engaging with young parents, it has been effective in improving the outcomes for these users. For example, the early intervention work, such as the 'Early Start' programme, contributes towards the earlier identification of need and offers extra support for teenage parents. The programme enables parents to access services such as housing advice and safety equipment and encourages them to attend sessions such as first-aid courses and breastfeeding cafes. Young parents talked confidently about how the centre had improved their confidence, helped them become independent and better parents, and enabled them to understand dangers to children and how to make their homes safe. However, the centre has been less successful in engaging with other groups, such as fathers.

Transition arrangements for children and partnerships with local early years providers, including childminders, are insufficiently developed, therefore making it difficult to share information to promote children's learning and development. Staff adequately support parents' understanding of the age-appropriate learning activities they can provide for their children. The initial assessment of needs and the tracking of progress for families receiving one-to-one targeted support are good. However, the ongoing assessment and tracking of all users is not sufficiently developed. Staff work closely with the on-site pre-school in supporting children referred through the 'New for Two' programme. Although, the number of families accessing this programme is low the gap between the outcomes for the most vulnerable groups and others is narrowing.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre coordinator and locality partnership coordinator currently provide satisfactory leadership and management for the centre. The new staffing structure places managers in a stronger position than it was less than a year ago to continue to move the centre forward. The managers are supported by a very committed and dedicated team who deliver an improving service to the families in their area. Users and partner agencies expressed how highly valued staff are and the difference that has been made in a relatively short time. For example, one partner stated, 'I can't believe how much things have changed, it is wonderful to see the community coming together, talking, sharing and respecting each other.' Another talked positively about how staff are very good, very enthusiastic, very willing and professional.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and this is clearly evident when entering the premises. The centre is bright, warm and welcoming. The reception area has good-quality displays and information reflecting the community's diverse cultures, although these are less evident in other rooms within the centre. A culture of respect and acceptance of each other's differences is clearly evident. The centre has been particularly successful in engaging with the Bangladeshi community with over 60% of families accessing the centre's services. The centre is aware there is more work to do to improve user engagement, particularly for those families who do not speak English. It has put measures in place, such as the English for speakers of other languages programme, to address this.

Regular supervision supports the professional development of staff sufficiently well. Staff are well trained and fully understand their roles and responsibilities. The centre is particularly successful in its targeted work to support children and families who are in most need of help. Effective inter-agency working with skilled professionals means that the needs of potentially vulnerable families are identified at an early stage and the professionals intervene quickly. This prompt action and satisfactory use of the Common Assessment Framework ensure efficient use of resources and reduce the number of children subject to child protection plans. Consequently, the centre is making a considerable improvement to the lives of some of the children and families who are accessing the services. Satisfactory procedures are in place within the centre and with partner agencies which ensure that all staff and volunteers have appropriate checks. However, the systems and procedures to ensure that children

and families are safe at the centre are insufficiently robust. For example, risk assessments are undertaken but the frequency and quality of these are variable. There is inconsistent practice in how users are made aware of safeguarding procedures, such as how to evacuate premises safely in the event of a fire or what to do if they have a child protection concern. In addition, supporting documentation and records lack detail and the monitoring of these is ineffective.

The environment is of good quality, warm, welcoming and safe. The centre is making effective use of resources in the majority of cases. Commissioned services are linked effectively to need. The presence of the on-site pre-school has improved the community's awareness of and access to the centre's activities. However, the centre, the on-site pre-school and linked school provisions are not used to their full potential. For example, not all rooms within the centre are used to maximum effect. In addition, the centre's partnership working with the school and pre-school to run sessions jointly are in the early stages of development. Although the centre has commissioned a recruitment service to engage volunteers, the number of volunteers is low. Managers are aware that to improve sustainability and economic independence, more effort is required by all services to encourage and support and recruit volunteers to run groups within the community. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made

during this inspection

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cobden Sure Start Children's Centre on 18 and 19 January 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

The centre has improved significantly since its last inspection in March 2011. We found that the local authority and senior leadership team have taken effective action to address the weaknesses in the services identified at the last inspection. They have introduced new management processes and systems to help them improve the services they offer to you and your families. As a result, more families are now engaging with the services, although some groups, such as children and families with disabilities and fathers, are still not accessing the centre as well as they could. Therefore, we have asked the centre to try to do more to make sure that all families benefit from the centre's services.

You and your families are very important to the centre and this is clearly evident when entering the premises. The centre is bright, warm and welcoming. There are good-quality displays and information reflecting your community's diverse cultures, although these are less evident in other rooms within the centre. Inspectors observed how well you all get on together, respecting and accepting each other's differences. The centre has been particularly successful in engaging with the Bangladeshi community, with over 60% of families accessing the centre's services, although the centre knows that more work is needed to engage more families. Therefore, they are putting on courses to support families who do not speak English.

The local authority has given the partnership board responsibility for ensuring the centre runs effectively. It is important that you and your children have a say in what happens at the centre and, therefore, the centre has taken action to improve this. To enable you to tell the centre what you think and want, the centre has introduced some appropriate systems including a parents' forum supported with crèche provision, an annual survey, 'Tell us what you think' feedback forms and a suggestion box. They are hoping that some of you will become members of the partnership board and contribute your views at meetings. Staff listen to what you have to say and do their best to make sure they take action where they are able.

The newly introduced monitoring systems enable the centre to have a clearer understanding of families' needs. Therefore, the staff are now able to make sure that the services they provide are what you need. They are also improving how they monitor the quality of the services provided and how many families are accessing these so that they can see how the services are helping to improve the lives of your families. They are aware that some services are not as good as they should be. Therefore, we have asked the centre to make sure that the monitoring and evaluation systems are implemented effectively across all commissioned and children's centre services.

The centre staff work well in partnership with other services which means that your families' lives are improving satisfactorily. The partnerships with outreach workers such as Home-Start, speech and language and adult learning services are particularly strong and contribute well to improving the lives of the most vulnerable families. Together, these services ensure you and your children are given good care, appropriate information and support tailored to your individual needs. However, there are still too many parents smoking during pregnancy and too many babies born with low birth weight. Therefore, we have asked the centre to take action to address this concern so as to improve the physical and emotional health and well-being of all children and adults.

You told us that you and your children enjoy attending sessions and that you have fun as you play and learn together. You told us about the difference the centre has made to you and your families, particularly how your children's behaviour has improved. The centre has taken action to improve the quality of early years provision, such as 'Play and Learn' sessions. However, we found that sessions to engage you in your children's development are not very effective. You do not always benefit from learning how you can develop your skills to support your children's learning because some of you do not become sufficiently involved. While sessions are now planned so that they are focused on the development of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the evaluations are not consistently focused on learning and development and are not always used well to improve future planning. There is limited information about the Early Years Foundation Stage displayed around the centre, which limits opportunities for you to develop your understanding of this. Children's 'scrap books' have been introduced to which you contribute, but these lack meaning and quality. For example, pictures are undated and there is little reference to the child's stage of learning and development. Therefore, we have asked the centre to make sure that the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements are integral to and embedded in all aspects of the centre's programme so that you are more aware of how to support your children's learning.

You told us how much the centre was helping you gain skills to become better parents, how they help you to obtain benefits, housing and access into training. However, we found that staff do not routinely encourage you to consider engaging in voluntary work and, for those of you who show interest, the recruitment process is slow and, consequently, not many of you are becoming volunteers. Therefore, we have asked the centre to improve what they do to encourage more of you to become

volunteers so that you can improve your economic stability and independence and support the centre's work by running your own sessions.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.