

Inspection report for Congleton Children's Centre

Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	383413
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Linked school if applicable	111222 Daven Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	305341 Stepping Stones Pre-School

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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.

An inspection of the co-located primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

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

The inspectors held meetings with staff and managers from the centre and the local authority, parents, members of the advisory board, representatives from the health services, voluntary organisations and other partner organisations. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Congleton Children's Centre is located close to Congleton town centre in East Cheshire. The centre's building adjoins Daven Primary School and Stepping Stones Pre-School. Both settings are separately managed. The report of the pre-school's inspection is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre was designated as a Phase Two children's centre in February 2009 and provides family support services and outreach work. Partner agencies provide a range of health, social care and education services at the centre's premises. The centre operates from a single building and offers some services at a local community centre. Staff support two other children's centres and two family centres across the locality. Governance arrangements are through an advisory board which reports to the local authority.

Parts of the Congleton area are prosperous but 17.4 % of the centre's reach area live in the 30% most deprived areas in England and Wales. Centre data indicate that unemployment is low at 2.3%. A high proportion of families are of White British heritage and a very small number represent a number of minority ethnic groups. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with varied skill levels.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory with some aspects that are good. Accommodation at the centre is bright and attractive and the environment is welcoming. This helps families respond well to the good range of services provided. The centre is becoming increasingly well established within the community. The leadership team is aware that more families could be using the centre and is determined to increase the number of those registered and engaged in services. The rate of registration shows an improving picture, from 22% of the reach area registered in March 2010 to 52.8% registered in January 2012. The centre does not have an accurate picture of the extent to which those registered are currently engaged in the centre's services, although data provided indicate that this is a minority of the reach area.

Partnerships, particularly with health professionals are strong and this has a positive impact on families and leads to good outcomes for their health. Families say they feel safe at the centre. The Common Assessment Framework process is used to provide effective support for families and helps to ensure that children are appropriately safeguarded.

Parents' views are valued and sought. The centre has been proactive in seeking parents' views and has used them to adapt services to more effectively meet the needs of families. Some parents have been helped to improve their economic stability and to find employment. Data indicate an improving picture in Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores for the area. However, the centre does not have effective systems in place to monitor the impact of its provision on children's learning, with the result that the progress of children is not accurately assessed. Some parents have improved parenting skills as a result of their engagement with the centre's services. The impact of centre's work on adult training and signposting is not clear as this is not effectively tracked.

The centre provides a broad range of services, most of which are designed to meet the needs of target groups in the area including young parents, fathers and disabled children. The increasing popularity of the centre has increased the demand for some universal services such as 'Stay and Play', aimed at meeting the needs of a broad range of families in

the reach area. However, due to limited accommodation in the centre, the increased demand cannot always be met. Staff are committed to improving the life chances of the families in the reach area. Parents who are experiencing change and challenging circumstances in their lives share their concerns with staff because they trust them and know they will receive effective help.

Leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. The reorganisation in October 2011 of the local authority resulted in a change in management structure at the centre. The new arrangements are becoming established. Governance arrangements are clear and the advisory board has a good understanding of its role and provides both support and challenge to the centre leaders. It has an accurate understanding of the strengths and weakness of the centre. The local authority provides the centre with a good range of data about the reach area, although this is not effectively used to inform evaluation or to develop targets against which progress can be measured. Systems to evaluate outcomes and the progress made by families and children are being developed. At present, evaluation does not give a consistently clear picture of the impact of the centre's services on outcomes for its families. The local authority acknowledges that this is an area for development and is committed to working with the centre to make improvements. This, together with the centre's own resolve and existing actions to respond to priorities, makes the centre's capacity for sustained improvement satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase registration and participation for more local children and families by:
 - further developing outreach work
 - exploring ways to manage the demand for existing services so that more families who wish to attend are able to do so.

- Strengthen the self-evaluation process by:
 - making better use of data to develop targets that are more specific and measurable
 - developing more robust systems to monitor and evaluate impact of services on outcomes for children and families.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents' understanding of how to improve their health has increased as a result of their involvement with the centre. Activities organised by the centre, such as swimming and healthy eating, promote healthy lifestyles. A strong partnership with health professionals and the establishment of antenatal, post-natal, well-baby and breastfeeding clinics at the centre has ensured that the majority of families in the reach have had contact with health services. Local data show that the breastfeeding group has increased the proportion of

mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six weeks. Parents report the positive impact of this group, as one parent commented, 'It helped me to carry on feeding when I was having problems.'

Parents comment that they find the environment safe and welcoming. Family service workers give guidance on safety in the home and have provided families with appropriate safety equipment in their homes. Parents are encouraged to manage their children's behaviour in more effective ways through attending courses focusing on behaviour management. These have had a positive impact on parents' confidence and skills. For example, one parent commented, 'Since the course I feel better equipped, the course helps to give you more confidence that what you are doing is right'.

Attendance at the 'Stay and Play' and 'Tiny Toes' sessions is good and parents report a positive benefit on children's confidence and self-esteem. The centre has focused on improving speech and language skills, particularly through targeted services. There is evidence of children's increased progress in speech and language development as a result. However, the impact of the centre's services on children's learning and development is not effectively tracked. This means that the centre cannot demonstrate clearly the level of progress made. Parents are given advice about debt management and are offered a back-to-work course, which has a positive impact on those attending. A small number of parents have worked as volunteers and some have since progressed to paid employment. Parents are signposted to local centres to attend basic skills courses and the centre has also recently offered an information and communication technology course for parents. However, the centre does not monitor whether parents who have been signposted to courses complete them and progress to further training and employment.

Parents are encouraged to share their views and play a part in the life of the centre. One parent has joined the advisory board and a small number attend the parents' forum. Parent's views are used to adapt services. For example, their comments that a newly established family fun session at Bromley Farm community centre was not sufficiently varied, led to a review of the programme and provision of different activities. The centre acknowledges that one of its priorities is to make better use of parents' views.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
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
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How good is the provision?

3

The centre staff establish supportive relationships with users and respond well to the needs of families in times of crisis. Families are advised appropriately on issues such as debt management and childcare. Centre staff assess the needs of centre users effectively and provide a broad range of provision which is improving outcomes for some target groups. For example, in response to issues relating to behaviour management, the centre organised a parenting course for families who were referred to the centre. The centre is effective in meeting the needs of teenage parents and the vast majority in the reach area are engaged in centre activities. A regular 'Dads Venture' group is well attended and a weekly 'Little Stars' session for families with disabled children, contribute to improving outcomes for these groups. Targeted services such as 'Baby Boogie' and 'Baby Yoga' and a course focusing on developing emotional well-being are having a positive impact on outcomes for those identified as being in most need of support. Data provided by the centre indicate that other target groups such as lone parents are not as effectively engaged with the centre.

Outreach workers hold events in the local community to attract new members, for example they organised a 'teddy bears picnic' event. The centre has been proactive in providing 'Family Fun' sessions in a community centre in an area where there is a need to provide services locally. The increased demand for some services, such as 'Stay and Play', means that some parents have to be turned away from oversubscribed sessions because of limited accommodation. The centre is trying to resolve this issue.

Provision made by the centre to support children's learning and development is satisfactory. The centre evaluates the impact of its services such as parenting course on adults' confidence and skills. However, systems to monitor and set targets for adults' achievement are at an early stage of development.

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	2
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

Centre leaders are committed to securing improvement and are beginning to focus the work of the centre more clearly on priorities and outcomes. The centre leader is well respected by professionals and parents and has been instrumental in developing the good range of partnerships, particularly with health services. This has had a positive impact on health and other outcomes for centre users. The positive partnership with the adjoining school has resulted in some children from Reception Year taking part in a targeted programme to promote emotional well-being. An effective partnership with the school nurse and health visitors ensures that almost all teenage parents in the area are registered and benefiting from the centre's services.

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and are becoming more firmly established following the recent reorganisation. The advisory board is proactive in helping the centre to become better known in the community. Systems to ensure that evaluation is firmly based on evidence of impact are still developing. The head of centre has a good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses and what actions for improvement need to be taken. The centre's development plan accurately identifies key priorities such as increasing the level of engagement. However, the centre does not have a clear definition of engagement and has not used available data to establish targets for increasing outreach and engagement.

User engagement is satisfactory and parental evaluations are used to help develop the work of the centre. Safeguarding is appropriately promoted at the centre and Criminal Records Bureau checks, vetting and other procedures to protect children and vulnerable families are satisfactory. Protocols for information sharing and referrals through key agencies are good. The centre provides a welcoming and safe environment. Value for money is satisfactory because of the satisfactory outcomes achieved by those who use the centre and take advantage of what it has to offer.

The centre is meeting its equality and diversity duties satisfactorily and there is evidence that the achievement gap is narrowing. The centre can demonstrate that it is improving outcomes for many of the target groups using the centre, including families with disabled children, although for some groups this represents a minority of those in the reach area. The centre is aware of the different groups and is proactive in identifying those who may be vulnerable. For example, it has recently identified male domestic violence as an issue and is seeking ways to provide support to these families. There is evidence that the centre has provided effective support for some families from minority ethnic groups and that some are engaged in the centre's work.

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 secures 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	2
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

Findings from the concurrent inspection of the primary school have contributed to the centre report and judgements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Congleton Children's Centre on 18–19 January 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We enjoyed our visit to your centre and meeting so many of you. We would like to thank those of you who helped us with our work. You told us that the centre is friendly and welcoming and that staff value your views on the services provided. They assess any difficult situations well and know what support to provide you with in times of crisis.

The centre leaders and staff have established some good partnerships with other professional and organisations, such as the midwives and health visitors. This helps to ensure that you receive good information and support regarding your own and your children's health. We know that some of you have found groups such as the breastfeeding support to be very valuable. The centre provides you with a good range of activities which you told us you enjoy. You have told us that you particularly enjoy the opportunity to meet

one another at the 'Stay and Play' and 'Tiny Toes' groups and that these groups give you some ideas about developing children's learning at home. Some of you said that at times you have not been able to attend a session such as 'Stay and Play' because there was not enough room for everyone who wished to attend. We have asked the centre to look at ways to ensure that more of those who wish to attend sessions are able to do so. Some of you have been given information and support to undertake training courses, work as volunteers and have been helped to find jobs. We have asked the centre to make sure that they keep better track of how well the services they provide are improving learning and other outcomes for families.

The centre leaders have plans to further improve the centre and improve the number of families who know about the centre and take part in its activities. We have asked the centre to include targets in its plans, so that it can measure how successful it has been at improving the centre.

The centre is hoping that more of you will join the parents' forum and become more involved with making decisions about how the centre is run through being on the advisory board.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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