

Inspection report for Moss Bank Children's Centre

Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	383596
Inspection dates	23 - 24 February 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Portico at Moss Bank EY384275

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.

Report Published: March 2012

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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers and staff from the centre and the local authority, parents, volunteers, the chair of the advisory board, local partners including from health, nursery and the adjacent school. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Moss Bank Children's Centre is on the edge of Moss Bank housing estate in the west of St Helens. It is adjacent to the Carr Mill Primary School. The centre was designated in May 2007 and achieved the full core offer of services in May 2009. The area is socially and economically deprived and includes two super output areas falling in the 10% most deprived areas in England. Most of the remaining area is amongst the 30% most deprived areas. The centre also serves a less deprived, more rural area. Services for families in the reach area are delivered from both this centre and two other phase two centres and another phase one centre, all in the West of St Helens. There is a private nursery providing childcare within the centre.

Children enter early years provision with skills below those expected for their age, particularly in relation to their communication and social skills. There are high levels of worklessness in the most deprived areas and 34% of children under the age of five are living in households dependent on benefits. Almost all of the community are of White British heritage. There are some families from Eastern Europe that have moved to the area more recently.

The centre is governed by the local authority and has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, parents and partner professionals.

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 centre is well established in the community and has provided good services resulting in good outcomes for local families. In the last year there have been changes resulting in service and staff cuts. The children's centre is part of the local authority's early intervention structure, based on a 'think family' approach. This new structure has yet to be fully reviewed and evaluated. Currently it is providing a satisfactory service. This is because there is limited capacity to build on the services that have been previously developed. Evaluation is not based upon enough measurable evidence of impact, particularly on the priority groups. Some partners have reduced their services and have a smaller presence in the centre. A once very active and busy centre is now underutilised.

There are good plans in place to develop the advisory board and there has always been good parent and community representation. It knows, however, that at the moment it is not offering enough challenge or holding the centre to account sufficiently for its work, largely because of the absence of relevant data.

The centre's early intervention workers understandably focus their efforts and resources on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families. However, this limits some of the universal and some of the targeted services which were provided in the centre. To some extent this problem has been addressed by offering these services at other local centres. Staff provide good care, guidance and services to individuals and on a group basis. Staff are well trained and supported to fulfil their roles. Management provides good direction and supervision of staff.

The centre is particularly good at supporting teenage parents and carefully identifies and engages teenage parents well. There is a full suite of activities and support delivered by the centre and partners, which includes all aspects of healthy living and topics such as safety on the internet. There is also good support for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Seventy five per cent of families have registered with the centre and there are no significant differences between levels of registration across the areas where

there are different levels of deprivation. The centre is unsure of how well it is meeting the needs of some priority target groups, such as lone parents.

There is an extremely well managed and supported group of volunteers who are active in the centre. They give peer support, run groups and maintain some of the universal services. Most volunteers go onto training and employment.

Good safeguarding processes are in place. Multi-agency work ensures the protection of children who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework. There are good working links with the police to protect families suffering from domestic abuse.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the effectiveness of self evaluation by:
 - ensuring the local authority and partners collect and produce data in a format that can be utilised by the children's centre and advisory board to measure impact
 - setting specific and challenging targets.
- Ensure there is better identification of the needs of priority groups to inform planning, delivery of services and the use of resources by:
 - increasing registration and using this data to plan services for all priority target groups.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre supports families to improve all aspects of their health and well being and some outcomes are showing improvement. Obesity levels have dropped from 11% in 2010 to 4.3% in 2011 at reception, which is well below the national average. Breastfeeding has gradually increased each year with the current figure at 21% for sustained breastfeeding. The large majority of mothers continue breastfeeding support once they have joined the support group. However, the support worker receives information about new births too late to have maximum impact on supporting mothers who choose to breastfeed. Dental health is significantly worse than the national average for five year olds. The impact of a supervised teeth brushing programme is yet to be reviewed. More healthy cooking activities are being planned. There is a good uptake of the low cost fruit and vegetable bags produced and delivered locally. Levels of immunisation and attendance at health checks have been high although data is not available to confirm whether this has continued.

Effective procedures are in place to work with partner agencies to ensure that the actions and services provided achieve good outcomes for children. There is a shared understanding

of the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the roles and responsibilities of each agency. The electronic based system provides convincing evidence of support being well matched to need, and regularly reviewed to monitor its continuing effectiveness. Safety in the home is enhanced by the provision of home-safety equipment and the advice and guidance provided by the community fire service.

Achievement, as demonstrated by Early Years Foundation Profile scores, shows a steady improvement, with a dip more recently from 63% of children in 2010 achieving at least 78 points across the scales, to 43% in 2011. This is thought to be partly because of the cohort of learners who have greater educational needs. Since 2010, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers has narrowed by 21.8%, from 43.9% to 22.1%, although this impressive reduction is partly due to an overall decrease in profile scores. Transition arrangements into school are good. Parents make good progress on specific programmes for promoting their parenting skills. Parents and their children get great deal of enjoyment from activities and value the quality of crèche care. The good range of summer activities was well received by families.

There are thirteen active volunteers who make tremendous contributions to activities and services as well as offering peer support. A typical comment from a volunteer is 'I just want to give back to the children's centre because they helped me through tough times. I think it's nice to give something back'. Volunteers receive good training and regular supervision for their role. All volunteers are part of a parent forum and two parents sit on the advisory board. Parental views are gathered regularly, but not analysed systematically to inform improvement planning and service provision. Children are well behaved and their views and interests are taken into account.

Weekly drop in sessions offer support and advice for further training, development and job opportunities. Teenage parents are a target group and 38% are engaged in learning. Parents are signposted to the Citizens Advice Bureau for debt and financial advice. There have been 21 interventions since November 2011 as a result of these 'drop in' sessions which are very popular and impact on parents' independence and well-being.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
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	2

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.	2
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How good is the provision?

2

The range of services and activities, including outreach services, meet the needs of users satisfactorily. Services are delivered on an individual basis including activities such as baby massage. If there are families with similar needs then group sessions are arranged or families are signposted to suitable activities at other centres. Visits to all families with new births have recently been re-introduced and this has started to increase registrations. However, notification of new births is too late for breastfeeding support to be given when it has most impact. Registrations are not routinely investigated to identify where priority groups are and how well services meet their needs.

All learning activities are supported by the teacher to ensure they embed appropriate learning. Particular attention is given to the development of communication and social skills, which have been identified as a greater need. Sessions are given imaginative names to emphasise the development of speech and communication in babies and toddlers, such as 'babble and speak' and 'small talk'. The quality of sessions is good and volunteers delivering sessions are supported well to ensure the quality of provision. The toy library is now being re-launched in an attempt to increase its usage. Parents coming to sessions are very enthusiastic and comments such as, 'I think they are fantastic places and more people should access them' reflects their level of satisfaction.

The quality of care is good, including that of private providers and childminders. Families are signposted well to other services and there is a range of good quality information available. Families are supported well in times of crisis and comments such as, 'The children's centre has had a massive impact' are typical. Services for families are now at different centres but public transport between centres is good and families are given detailed information of transport including bus times. Transport is also arranged if required to get families to activities or appointments. Portage is offered to all families in need and there is a weekly group at a local children's centre. Staff are trained to recognise if a child will benefit from a referral to Portage.

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	2

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2
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How effective are the leadership and management?

3

There is a clear commitment to ensuring the best is made of reduced services and staff. Other centres in the west area of St Helens are included to offer services to Moss Bank families. Staff are trained and supported extremely well to perform what is for many, new roles. However, the focus is on early intervention and as a result universal services have decreased. A comment made by one individual that the centre, 'hasn't got the same activities as before and is not buzzing as it used to be' reflects the general feeling well. The most is made of current resources to ensure a spread of activities that families can access. Value for money is satisfactory.

The self-evaluation, action plan and the local authority priority targets do not blend together and there are few specific targets agreed for the Moss Bank area. Insufficient time has been spent on examining local data to ensure there is a full picture of potential target groups and their needs.

Safeguarding is given a high priority and there are good processes in place to ensure the protection of children. The multi-agency approach and early intervention works very well in meeting the needs of families and developing safe practices in the home. The recording of actions and progress is done thoroughly for each family and there are robust systems in place to ensure that all agencies remain fully involved. There are particularly good arrangements in place to protect families when there is evidence of domestic abuse.

Of the families registered, at least 42% have received services and this could be as many as 61% but data collection systems cannot guarantee accurate figures. Around 13% of families are supported by the early intervention team. This is in an area where around one-third of families are within the top 10% of deprivation nationally, although the area based intervention team may well be involved with some of these families because their needs are more complex. Leadership is not yet able to demonstrate what difference the centre is making to specific priority groups, such as lone parents or those from other ethnic backgrounds. The progress of all disabled children and those with additional educational needs is monitored well. Fathers are engaged in activities, including in their own active group. Teenage parents are identified and supported exceptionally well. The centre offers good opportunities to young people for training and also adults with disabilities taking up volunteering. The uniqueness of children is promoted well. Key ethnic and religious events are celebrated and families treat each other with respect.

There are examples of partnerships working well to meet the needs of families, such as local training providers, the local college, school and a careers and employment advice and guidance agency. Some partners, particularly health services, are still developing their data to illustrate the impact of services. Midwifery services are based at the centre but other

health services are external. The health service recognises the importance of coming back into the centre to deliver services as well as improve resources to deliver the healthy child initiative. Some partners through cuts to their services have subsequently withdrawn from the children's centre.

User views are gathered systematically. Children's views are gathered by way of observation and using special techniques to capture their preferences. A consultation last year, although it involved few users, gave the centre useful feedback which they have used to make improvements.

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	2
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 Moss Bank Children's Centre on 23-24 February 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During our visit, we evaluated your centre's work and the quality of its resources, as well as its plans and documents. We talked to some of you and the professionals that work with you. The centre has been undergoing a lot of changes and we know some of you would like to see the return of some of the services that you used to have at your centre. You now travel to other centres to attend groups and activities but your centre supports you well by helping with transport and giving you up to date travel information. Those of you being supported by the early intervention team feel very well supported and the centre has had a big impact on the lives of your family.

Your centre has helped you become more aware of healthy lifestyles. There are plenty of opportunities to take part in physical activities; you enjoyed the range of summer activities on offer. There is a new outdoor play area and plans for a garden to grow vegetables. You make good use of the low cost bags of fruit and vegetables on sale. Your centre has recently started making sure they visit all families with new babies again and this is starting to reverse the trend of falling registrations. Unfortunately the visits are too late for those of you who may have been struggling with breastfeeding and needing more support. Your centre needs to do more to make sure they are reaching all families in the area and understanding your needs.

We were very pleased to see how much you contribute to your centre by way of volunteering. In return, your centre gives you a very good service to make sure volunteers are trained and supervised well. Volunteers help to keep groups going such as the toddler's play group and the dad's group and also give good support to the breastfeeding group. You have a thriving parent's forum and you are well represented on the advisory board that supports and helps to steer your children's centre. Many of you are engaging in learning and improving your opportunities to develop and find work. Your centre works with good quality agencies to help your family's development and learning.

Your centre gives safeguarding a high priority. The children's centre staff support families in partnership with other agencies and everyone is clear about their role in protecting children. Staff are supervised and trained well to carry out their roles. The centre makes sure actions and support are followed through and whatever is required to keep you and your family safe. They are particularly good at ensuring that those of you suffering domestic abuse are given all the right support and help to change your lives for the better. The records of assessment and the help given to you show how this results in good outcomes.

The recent cuts and changes in services mean that most of your centre's resources are taken up in giving individual support to vulnerable families. Less is available now for services

accessible to all. Your centre needs to do more to make sure they know who is using services and how well they are meeting the needs of priority groups, such as lone parents and those without work. Your centre is good at working with teenage parents and making sure they are continuously supported. Your centre also ensures they track the progress of the most vulnerable children, particularly disabled children and those with special education needs.

Your manager, staff and partners at the centre are working hard to meet the needs of families in the area. We have asked the manager and the local authority to look at how they can make things even better. These are the most important things to do: ensure that clear and demanding targets for improvement are set based on accurate data; and, improve the registration of families and use this information to make sure that the needs of all groups are identified and serviced.

Thank you very much for your welcome and for your frankness with inspectors. We are very grateful and wish you every success in the future.

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