

Inspection report for Maple Trees Children's Centre

Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	365808
Inspection dates	27–28 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Godfrey Bancroft AI

Centre governance	Redditch YMCA
Centre leader	Helen Horton
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Matchborough First School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sneakers Day Care Maple Trees Children's Centre

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.

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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

An inspection of the maintained nursery at Matchborough First 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 two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with leaders, staff and parents and carers. They also conducted discussions with representatives of the local authority, the health authority, the main partner school, community groups and service partner providers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The centre was designated as a phase two Sure Start children's centre in December 2007. It operates under the auspices of Redditch YMCA who are commissioned by the local authority and provides children's centre services in the Matchborough and Winyates areas of Redditch. The centre works in partnership with the education, health and specialist family support services. It offers full core provision. Services are provided at three different sites in the area through a multi-agency approach aimed at supporting families in the reach area. The centre shares its accommodation with local first and primary schools. The centre leader also manages the Willow Trees Children's Centre at Church Hill in Redditch. Many of the staff work at both centres.

The area served by the centre is ranked in the highest 30% of the most deprived areas of the country. Three of its 'Super Output Areas' are ranked in the highest 30%. The immediate area is ranked in the top 10%. Statistical data shows the reach area has above average levels of economic and social disadvantage, including high

levels of unemployment and many families on benefits. Within the reach area, there are 730 children from birth to five years. The population is mainly White British with just 5% coming from minority ethnic groups. Evidence indicates that children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills, knowledge and understanding that are significantly lower than those expected for their age.

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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The centre is relatively new and still developing. That said, it has many strengths and provides well for those within its reach area, embracing the full diversity of the community and ensuring there is equality for all. The involvement of fathers and adults from minority ethnic groups is a prominent feature. The centre is highly regarded by parents and carers who comment positively about the quality of its work. Relationships among staff and with users are very positive. Many users say that staff are approachable, helpful, give confidence and raise self-esteem. One parent, reflecting the views of many, said: 'I can do a good job with my daughter because of this centre. The staff make you feel accepted and not judged.' The care, guidance and support are outstanding, particularly in giving users the confidence to be involved in activities and to participate in community events. The various needs of users are addressed effectively through good liaison arrangements, early identification and referral and sustained support.

Children and adults benefit greatly from the programme of activities. Communication is good, ensuring users are fully aware of the available activities. However, not all activities are consistently available at each of the centres three venues. This means it is sometimes difficult for a minority of users, who find transport hard to arrange, to access some activities without having to wait for them to be on the programme at their nearest venue. Strategic management, support and inter-agency cooperation are all good. This is illustrated by the supervision and training provided for staff, the development of the volunteer workforce and the close cooperation with the centre's many partners. Arrangements for safeguarding are effective, ensuring the well-being and safety of children and of their parents and carers.

The capacity for future improvement is good. This is illustrated by the developments made since the centre opened and the effective procedures for self-evaluation. The centre sets realistic, but challenging, targets for improvement that are identified clearly in its strategic development plan. Consultation with users about the quality of provision on a day to day basis is good and they are represented on the centre's advisory board. However, the centre has identified that there is a need to extend the opportunities for parents and carers to ensure more are able to formally influence

the work of the centre at a strategic level.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the availability and frequency of activities for all users at each of the centre's three locations.
- Further develop the systems already in place to enable more parents and carers to contribute formally to making strategic decisions about the direction and work of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre helps children and their parents and carers to build good personal relationships, raising their self-confidence and self-esteem. Good attention is given to the promotion of emotional and mental health in addition to physical well-being for children and for adults, including the promotion of breastfeeding and helping users to give up smoking. Central to this is the good quality of outreach work provided during home visits. This applies particularly in the case of those children and adults who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It is also applicable to those who are from a minority ethnic group or, because of their circumstances, may be potentially vulnerable.

Arrangements to promote children's awareness of how to stay safe is good. Effective liaison with partner agencies also helps to ensure that users are safe; for example, when health visitors make referrals. The centre is similarly vigilant in advising parents and carers about how to keep themselves and their children safe at home, and it loans resources, such as stair gates and socket covers, which help to make their homes safer. The monitoring of the progress of any child who has a protection plan, including looked after children and those who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework, is thorough and records are updated with appropriate frequency.

The majority of children behave well and make good progress, often from relatively low starting points. They enjoy activities and achieve well. This is affirmed by the centre's partner schools, who say that children are often prepared well for starting in the various nursery classes. The very early skills of many children blossom through attending sessions with their parents and carers, such as 'stay and play' and 'messy play'. Parents and carers benefit from the range of courses provided to help them to acquire skills for the future and prepare for their return to the world of work. The approach often begins with users participating in 'fun' activities that capture interest and lead on to courses that bring formal qualifications. They are also full of praise for the ways in which the centre staff help them to enjoy parenting and develop their skills. The positive promotion of fathers in their children's early learning provides a telling example of this. Even so mechanisms through which users can contribute to the strategic management processes that influence the development of the centre are somewhat limited.

The centre has a high profile and makes a full contribution to the life of the community it serves. Good relationships across the range of partnerships that contribute to the centre are significant feature of its work. Relationships with centre users from different backgrounds are also good and the centre is working effectively to embrace the widening range of users who come from different ethnic origins.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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	2
The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

Staff at all levels work effectively to ensure the needs of all users are recognised and met through effective assessment procedures. They gather the views of users on the quality of provision and evaluate these through the analysis of 'Parent Satisfaction Questionnaires.' The individual contact and the support provided by home visits are highly valued by users. The centre promotes children's learning and development effectively so that they acquire basic skills well, especially in terms of their personal, social and emotional development. Similarly, the courses provided for parents and carers help to give confidence and enjoyment and raise self-esteem. One parent said: 'When I go back to work I can say I was not just a stay at home Mum. I have a qualification and new skills.'

The quality and range of services meet the needs of most users well. There is clear evidence to show that participation rates continue to rise. The leaflets and brochures that explain about the activities and courses offered by the centre are of high quality and very 'user friendly'. However, a minority of users sometimes have difficulty accessing courses which are not provided at their nearest venue.

Personalised support is of a high standard and the care and empathy shown by staff results in the universal confidence of users that their needs will be met and they will receive any help they need. In this respect, the provision for home visits makes a significant contribution, particularly for those children and adults who have special

needs and/or a disability and for those who because of their circumstances might potentially be at risk. One parent reflected the views of all those met by inspectors in saying: 'My support worker is great. She prepares me for what is going to happen and accompanies me so that I do not feel alone.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre provides good value for money and uses the available resources wisely to ensure those within its reach are served well. Governance is effective, which underpins a clear direction for continued improvements. There are strong and supportive links with the advisory board. Links are also good between this centre, managed by the YMCA, the full range of partner providers and other children's centres in Redditch. There is a strong sense of teamwork amongst the staff, who work together well and support each other. Much of the centre's success is based on effective procedures for the supervision and training of staff. High quality middle and senior managers ensure that workloads remain manageable and that staff have opportunities to reflect and evaluate the quality of their work. This approach is typified by the recent development/training day involving all staff when detailed consideration was given to how the centre can improve its services and meet its targets. The centre's plans for improvement are based on a rigorous analysis of its ongoing performance and the degree to which agreed targets are met.

The promotion of equality and diversity is a significant feature of the centre's work. For example, staff ensure that any user who is at the early stages of speaking English has the support of an interpreter. At all levels, problems are shared and successes are celebrated.

The centre has effective safeguarding arrangements. Procedures for child protection are fully up to date with all staff trained to the required levels. Similarly, clear arrangements ensure that employed adults and volunteers are suitable to work with children and with potentially vulnerable adults. Good communication and liaison with partner providers help to ensure that centre staff are well placed to respond to any issues that might arise.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The findings of the recent reports for Sneakers Day Care and Matchborough First School were considered.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Maple Trees Children's Centre on 27–28 January 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank you for your contribution to this inspection. We are particularly grateful to those of you who gave your time to tell us about your experiences at Maple Trees and how much you enjoy and value the activities, advice and support provided by the centre for you and your children.

Compared with many others, Maple Trees is a relatively new children's centre. Its leaders, managers and staff have been swift to reach out and meet the needs of your community. We are impressed by the way in which the centre provides a welcome for all who take part in the activities. Everyone is made to feel special. For example, fathers participate in the full range of activities and those who have moved to the area from elsewhere, including from abroad, quickly become involved in activities. The relationships you forge with staff and the trust you build with them clearly give many of you the confidence to contribute to all aspects of your children's development. The centre also works well to help make a new start or return to the world of work.

The inspectors were particularly impressed by the care, guidance and support the staff provide. This lays the foundation for you to approach them with confidence and to share any problems you might have. We were pleased to hear that you feel confident in knowing the staff will continue to help until any difficulties are sorted out and that they will always do their best to make sure you and your children are safe.

We note that your children benefit well from the wide range of activities the centre provides. This helps them to make good progress and prepares them well for when they move on to nursery and ultimately to school. We were most impressed by the leaflets and brochures the centre provides which make you aware of what is on offer. These are particularly attractive and certainly capture your interest and enthusiasm. However, we are concerned that not all the activities are available at each of the centre's three sites. This means that sometimes you have to travel to get to activities and, for some of you, this is not always easy. We know that wherever possible the centre will help with transport, although there are times when this is not possible. With this in mind, we are asking centre managers to find ways of making all activities available more frequently at each of the sites.

The centre staff are well trained and highly competent at what they do. The centre is managed well and resources are used wisely. The staff have a good track record of responding to your needs and is well placed to continue to thrive in the future. We are pleased that staff ask for your opinion about how good the activities and courses have been. However, there are not enough opportunities for more of you to influence the work of the centre directly at management level. Your centre manager is aware of this.

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