

Inspection report for St Clement's Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	365730
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Smith HMI

Centre governance	The Governing Body of St Clement's High School
Centre leader	Elizabeth Lewis
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	St Clement's High School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre's staff, representatives from professional partnerships and the local authority, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

St Clement's Children's Centre was designated as a phase 2 centre in March 2008. It reached full core offer in November 2009. The centre is governed by St Clement's High School on behalf of the local authority.

The centre is purpose built, adjacent to the doctor's surgery, maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools. It provides two large playrooms and a small consultation room as well as office space, a kitchen and a cleaner's room. Outside there are two large gardens, one being developed as an adventure garden. The centre does not provide any childcare, but offers a variety of activities for families including 'Stay and Play' and adult learning groups. The area health visitor and nursery nurse are based in the centre and provide child health clinics, development checks and infant massage and weaning groups.

The reach area is rural, and covers eight villages. Access to the centre can be difficult for families who do not have their own transport as bus routes are limited. The great majority of the population within its area is of White British heritage with a low but increasing number of families from Eastern European backgrounds. There are relatively low levels of disadvantage in the centre's reach area. Levels of worklessness and proportions of adults on benefits are comparatively low. Rural isolation is one of the biggest issues for families living in this area. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision at levels that are 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of St Clements Children's Centre is satisfactory. It provides a developing range of services which promote strongly improving outcomes for an increasing range of users. This is because the centre has only had premises to operate from since 2009 and a full complement of staff since November 2010. It offers a warm and welcoming environment to users and the wider community. Accommodation at the centre is spacious. Display areas are used effectively to promote the centre's services and to provide signposting to external services and support.

The governing body provides good governance for the centre in conjunction with the local authority. The motivated centre manager provides good management to ensure the day-to-day running of the centre is smooth and efficient. The centre is targeting its services sufficiently well to meet most users' needs. The centre manager is demonstrating a clear vision and has an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas to improve. Targets to bring about improvement are not always as precise as they could be to enable staff and governors to fully measure the impact of outcomes for all users. In addition, the centre does not yet focus acutely enough on the impact of provision on children's, parents' and families' lives over time.

Good partnership working with a wide range of providers, particularly health visitors and adult learning, is making a sound contribution to improving outcomes for users. The centre collects a wide range of data and the centre manager is analysing it sufficiently well. However, a relative weakness is the centre's ability to obtain data for its reach area with regard to the national indicators within health. This limits the centre's ability to demonstrate its impact on health outcomes.

The welfare and safety of families and children attending St Clement's are given a high priority by staff. Procedures for safeguarding children's welfare are good and families needing extra help are cared for and supported well by the staff at the centre and through collaborative working with external agencies. All staff undergo

appropriate checks on their suitability to work with children, and recruitment procedures are good.

The centre's provision is satisfactory and is inclusive and equally welcoming to all. Staff are sensitive to the needs of parents and carers and they work diligently to ensure that all groups of adults and children are made to feel welcome. The centre has identified that it needs to promote services more effectively to the wider community and in particular to parents and groups that are harder to engage such as teenage pregnant mothers. Well-judged initiatives are rightly in hand to promote more effectively the current services to the wider community; however, it is too early to evaluate the impact of some of these new projects but a strong sense of forward planning is clear. The centre's recent progress and the energy with which weaknesses are currently being tackled are indicative of its good capacity to sustain improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the centre's development plan so that it contains measurable targets to enable the centre manager and staff to evaluate the success of their work and to enable the governing body and the advisory body to challenge the centre's leaders and hold them to account.
- Work closely with the local authority to obtain precise data about the reach area from the health authority, to enable the centre to show impact on users' outcomes.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The services offered by the centre are popular and some groups have high levels of attendance. There are some effective groups and partnerships that promote healthy outcomes. Children are encouraged to make healthy choices from an early age through the range of fruit and vegetables provided by the centre as snacks. The 'Joy of Food' course was very popular with parents and carers who attended it. They found that the course not only gave them good ideas but also gave them the confidence to cook for their children. The centre's outdoor space has been developed to provide children with the opportunity to take risks in a safe environment and to encourage parents to engage in play with their children outdoors. A number of sessions have recently been changed into 'Active Kids' sessions as a result of parents' requests for more physical activities.

The provision of counselling services and suitable links with health visitor services ensure that emotional and physical health is suitably fostered. The deputy coordinator has been meeting with midwives who are based in the medical centre

opposite the centre to obtain information on new births in the area. In addition, they are starting to organise visits together to pregnant mothers to enable trusting relationships to begin with the centre staff.

Parents using the services state that they feel that they and their children are safe at the centre because the management and staff have built trusting relationships with users. Safeguarding procedures are good and the premises are safe and secure. Children and adults have good opportunities to learn how to stay safe, such as through attending first aid training and parental advice. The Common Assessment Framework process is well embedded and is used very effectively to support families who are vulnerable owing to their circumstances.

Parents and carers are developing a greater understanding of how to promote children's development through activities that promote purposeful play. Children visibly enjoy the activities they participate in, and parents and carers report how much they enjoy visiting the centre because it enables them to socialise with other adults and make new friends. The centre identified and evidenced some cases where children have flourished socially and adults have regained their confidence by attending sessions. The weekly toddler group and 'Stay and Play' sessions successfully encourage parents to engage in activities with their children which they may be reluctant to try at home to promote enjoyment through learning. The newly introduced 'Baby Music' is already proving popular and promotes language development. Although the centre keeps a record of the activities children have undertaken while in play sessions, it does not monitor or have an overall record of progress and achievement to enable leaders to identify the progress children make over time in relation to their starting points.

The childminding group is poorly attended; however, some of the local childminders attend other sessions provided by the centre and say this enables them to mix with other adults and for the children in their care to socialise regularly with their peers. The hardship fund ensures that those children in most need can attend childcare/nursery provision. Adults learn about a wide range of parenting skills, including how to help their children with learning. Some parents who have gained confidence from helping as volunteers in the centre have gone on to further training and gained employment. One childminder runs the 'Wiggles and Giggles' session and a grandmother runs the popular toddler group. The centre has recently provided computer resources for parents to use when searching for work. Parents are increasing their confidence and self-esteem by attending a range of adult-learning courses such as 'Story Sacks' and 'Playing Together'. This also increases aspiration for them and their children.

Children and families using the centre treat each other with respect. Parents represent the different views of users on the advisory group. As a result, users feel highly valued as their views are listened to and they are actively involved in shaping services. The centre is establishing procedures for recording successes and this is increasingly being analysed to identify what its distinctive part has been in improving outcomes for families.

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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	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 users 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 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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The range of provision is increasing as the centre now has a full complement of staff. The centre is effective at sensitively assessing the needs of individual users. Information about children and their parents and/or carers is gathered carefully by the centre's staff when users start to attend and is stored on the centre's database. The centre has recently introduced a new system for assessing users' skills and confidence at the start, middle and end of activities to measure progress more accurately.

The provision of crèche facilities for those attending courses is highly valued by parents. The centre holds information on available childcare in the area which parents can access if and when they require it. The centre has developed good relationships with local primary schools and childcare providers in the reach area and they are currently working together on a transition project to ensure that children are well prepared when they start school. Strong provision is in place for the Common Assessment Framework and networking with other agencies to ensure the safety and welfare of children. The inclusive ethos generated by the centre and its promotion of diversity through, for example, resources that reflect different cultures, ensure that the small number of users from minority ethnic backgrounds feel at ease and have equal access to provision. They are becoming increasingly aware of the need for adults who have English as an additional language to be provided with opportunities to improve their English. Consequently, they are planning to offer a course in the near future to give them the language skills to better support their children's learning.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good as staff are knowledgeable about their own and other services. Parents are very positive about the quality of help and encouragement they receive. Many are fulsome in their praise for the individual help they have received in times of crisis. Users are happy to go to any member of staff with issues, and having someone to talk to is highly valued by parents and supports families at times when they need it most. A counselling service is available through effective partnership with outside agencies, it is highly valued by those who use it.

The staff are striving to reach out to the most isolated members of the community and they publicise their services widely including through the recent launch of an informative website. A comprehensive range of relevant information is provided for all users in a wide range of formats including leaflets and discussions with staff. The use of volunteers within the centre is a good example of the commitment to developing users' confidence and to supporting them to move into employment. However, currently the centre does not offer a specific training course for volunteers to enable them to gain a recognised qualification in volunteering.

The '2gether' times for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities offers good support to the children and their families who attend. A 'Bumps to Babies' group is being planned to encourage pregnant mothers to use the centre. It is also aimed at attracting pregnant teenagers as the number of teenage pregnancies in the area is increasing.

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	3
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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre manager is highly respected by professionals and parents. The centre uses its resources well and there are clear examples of activities being adapted or developed in response to parents' requests and needs. Governance is good and systems to ensure accountability are secure. There are clear lines of responsibility within the staffing of the centre and in decision-making processes.

The centre manager has high expectations of the staff team and service partners. Together, they demonstrate genuine commitment, dedication and determination to improving outcomes for all children and their families. Relationships are good and

building steadily as new staff members fit into the team with ease. Staff are enthusiastic and positive about the work they do. They are proud of the impact they have on the lives of the children and families who attend.

The centre is collecting a wide range of data and is developing ways in which to use these data effectively. There is some evidence to show the positive impact of the centre's work on outcomes. This means that, currently, they are unable to evaluate the longer-term impact of the centre on improving outcomes for children and adults, including those from vulnerable groups. However, this is an area that the centre has already begun to address.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Child protection arrangements work effectively and ensure children are kept safe. The centre has a delegated officer for safeguarding who is currently based at the high school. Plans are in place for the centre manager to take on this role. All staff have undergone the relevant checks by the Criminal Records Bureau and all staff information is kept in a central record. Recruitment procedures fully comply with requirements. Health and safety checks and risk assessments are appropriately carried out.

The views of users are sought regularly through, for example, evaluations from those who have attended courses. The advisory group is getting established and has representation from a suitable range of professionals who work in the area. Some parents have been recruited to sit on this group and have expressed an interest in trying to start a parents' forum to give users a greater role in the decision-making process.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. The centre has a commitment to providing an inclusive environment and removing barriers. For example, it operates a hardship fund to which outside agencies can make referral. This fund has been used to provide transport towards the cost of childcare and to purchase necessary furniture and equipment within the home. This has enabled some parents and children to access services and provide a safer home environment for their children.

The centre fosters effective working relationships with a wide range of services such as adult learning providers, Jobcentre Plus and health services, in order to promote better outcomes for users. Partnerships with parents and carers are good. Inspectors observed strong mutual relationships between parents and centre staff. Parents and carers really value the input the centre has on their own well-being and that of their children and families. One parent told inspectors she felt lucky to have the children's centre because it 'made a real difference' to her.

The centre offers good value for money because its users engage positively and some have gained significantly from its activities and signposting. Widening the impact across the reach area is a challenge that the centre is currently striving to achieve by offering activities in the surrounding villages and by starting a programme of home visits to families who have not yet engaged or have not visited the centre since registering with them.

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	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	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
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	3

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

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 St Clement's Children's Centre on 2–3 February 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During the inspection, we talked with parents, staff, partners and members of the local authority linked to the children's centre. We also observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

Like you, we were greeted with a warm welcome when we arrived at the centre and found staff very communicative and helpful. Many of you confirmed that you enjoy good relationships with the centre's staff and this helps you to feel completely safe to seek advice and guidance or to share your concerns. We gathered evidence to confirm that you are very satisfied with the service you receive.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and their children. Inspectors agree with this view and think that staff work very well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. Safeguarding children is given a high priority at the centre. The centre has changed a number of sessions at your request to promote physical activity with children. The adventure garden offers an exciting area for you to enjoy the outdoors with your children.

The centre also helps you to support your children's learning and development at home by providing services which encourage you to engage in play with your children from an early age at sessions such as 'Stay and Play'. The centre has developed good relationships with local primary schools and childcare providers in the reach area, and they are currently working together on a transition project to ensure that your children are well prepared when they start school.

Some of you proudly told inspectors how you had gained confidence from helping as volunteers in the centre and have gone on to further training and in a few cases into employment.

The centre has only recently obtained a full staff team. This has enabled them to provide some additional activities such as 'Baby Music' and to concentrate on carrying out more home visits, especially to the harder-to-engage families. In addition, the centre is exploring with the midwife service how best to support breastfeeding and teenage parents.

You told us how much you valued the services provided by the centre, with many of you highlighting the positive impact that access to counselling services has had on your life.

In order to develop the centre further, we have asked the centre to work closely with the local authority to obtain precise data about the reach area from the health

authority, to enable the centre to show impact on users' outcomes. The centre also needs to develop its development plan so that it contains measurable targets to enable staff and the centre's manager to evaluate the success of their work and to enable the governing body and the advisory body to challenge the centre's managers and hold them to account.

The leadership team has appropriate plans in place to address this issue. 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.