

Inspection report for Rural Families Children's Centre for Selston, Jacksdale and Underwood

Local authority	Nottinghamshire
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Reporting inspector	Anthony O'Malley HMI

Centre governance	Nottinghamshire Community Health, commissioned by the local authority
Centre leader	Sara Mayer
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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.

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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 additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the local advisory board, staff, the senior leadership team, a local authority representative and partner agencies, including representatives from the health service. They also had discussions with users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Rural Families Children's Centre covers four main villages: Westwood, Selston, Jacksdale and Underwood. The centre serves a catchment area among the 30% most deprived in the country. It provides all elements of the core offer: integrated childcare and early learning, health, family support and outreach, links to Jobcentre Plus and a childminder network. Over 98% of the population in the catchment area is of White British heritage.

Due to the rural nature of the areas covered by the children's centre, services are delivered at a number of venues. Outreach services play a key role in delivering services. The outreach team includes a midwife, health visitors, family support workers, Ashfield District Council tenancy support and the Homestart Ashfield team. Wrap-around childcare is delivered using a rural model of childcare via a childminding group. Further wrap-around childcare opened this year at Holly Hill Primary School and is run by the Pre-School Learning Alliance.

Partner agencies work in the centre to deliver their services. These include: nutrition, speech and language, play development, colleges and specialist family support.

Nottinghamshire County Council commissions the delivery of children's centres in the Ashfield District to the Nottinghamshire Teaching Primary Care Trust via the Trust's provider arm, Nottinghamshire Community Health.

Nineteen per cent of children in the centre’s reach area live in workless households. The most recent available information indicates that approximately 15% of families access the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Just over 5% of young people in the reach area are not in education, employment or training.

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

Rural Families provides a friendly and welcoming environment for children and their families. In a little over three years, the centre has become an important part of the local community. Families are keen to share their positive views of the centre’s work and the impact it has had on their lives. Typical views expressed by users are, ‘I learn something new every time I come to the centre’ and ‘If I had not come to the centre and met staff and other mums I do not know where I would be.’ Key to the centre’s achievements are effective multi-agency partnerships. Health visitors, the community midwife, local schools, childminders and the voluntary sector all work together closely enabling the centre to offer high-quality services to the whole community.

The outcomes for users are good. Strong centre leadership has ensured that families, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, benefit from a range of good-quality services that meet their particular needs. Consequently, the centre has successfully improved the health, safety and economic well-being of families who take advantage of its services. Parents and carers access a wide range of courses which help them care for their children and support their personal development. The volunteer training is particularly successful and has had a very positive impact on users’ self-esteem and confidence. However, at present while there are examples of how courses and events have helped users find employment, relatively few of the courses specifically develop literacy, numeracy and information technology skills. The centre is not yet tracking how successful its adult learning courses, or its links with Jobcentre Plus, have been in helping users access further education or secure paid employment.

Children, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who have

disabilities, make significant gains through the activities and services on offer. The centre is particularly successful in improving children's speaking and listening skills, and their personal, social and emotional development. This is because centre staff thread opportunities for children to develop these vital skills into all formal sessions and crèche activities. Case studies and reports from local partners provide plenty of evidence to show that focused support from health partners and family support workers has a positive impact on children showing developmental delay.

Safeguarding of children and other users is the centre's highest priority. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in this area. All receive training to enable them to provide exceptionally high levels of protection. Policies, procedures and practice are very strong and consistent, and they greatly enhance the safety of children and adults, particularly those most at risk of harm. Robust procedures ensure the suitability of all practitioners and volunteers. Thorough risk assessments are in place.

The centre coordinator provides outstanding leadership. She has developed a highly motivated and skilled team that has earned the respect of users and partners. The centre is engaging with a high proportion of the families, from all groups, in the reach area. The centre's own evaluation of its effectiveness is accurate and takes full account of feedback from users and the views put forward by the 'Not Just Mums' group, to pinpoint strengths and areas for development. The centre has good capacity for further improvement based on its track record.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve users' employment opportunities by:
 - providing access to a range of adult education courses that develop employability skills including literacy, numeracy and information, communication and technology skills
 - ensuring Jobcentre Plus services are easily accessible to centre users
 - tracking the impact of adult education and links with Jobcentre Plus so that the centre can be clear about the effectiveness of these services.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Families are improving their knowledge and understanding of issues such as healthy diets, hygiene around the home and the risks posed by obesity and smoking. The promotion of breastfeeding is particularly successful because of the expertise and personal approach of the practitioners. One mother commented: 'I would have given up breastfeeding without support from the family support worker. She is always there...we can communicate via text messages during evenings and weekends.' Not surprisingly, the group has been identified by the local authority as a shining

example of 'best beginnings'. Emotional well-being is an important aspect of the centre's work with a particular focus on tackling post-natal depression. Mothers met during the inspection were clear about the importance and high quality of this service. The centre has developed strong working relationships with partners who advise on health issues and provide a wide range of services relating to the care and protection of vulnerable children and adults. An example of a positive outcome of this work is the very low percentage of mothers who continue smoking during pregnancy.

The centre provides an exceptionally safe and supportive environment. Staff are extremely well trained and users regularly gain support on a range of well-being issues including post-natal depression and domestic violence. Discussions with users and case studies demonstrate the outstanding impact of this support. The centre draws fully on learning from local serious case reviews to ensure that its safeguarding and child protection practice matches best practice. Robust systems are in place to support children or adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Outreach workers, in partnership with health professionals, secure the early identification of families with additional or special needs. The very effective use of the Common Assessment Framework is leading to a reduction in the number of children with child protection plans. There is also strong evidence of improved outcomes for children with child protection plans and for looked after children.

There are many opportunities for adults and children to play, learn and have fun together in sessions such as 'Babbles, Bumps and Babies', 'Incredible Years' and the 'Dads Group'. Children are keen and active learners. The centre plans all of its sessions carefully and assesses each child's progress using 'All About Me' booklets. This strategy ensures that parents and carers are active partners in their children's development right from the start. Representatives from local childminders, nurseries and schools were eager to emphasise the impact of the centre's work through programmes such as 'Animal Boogie' and the 'Two-year' pilot. Their collective view is that the centre ensures children and their families are increasingly well prepared for starting nursery or school.

A high number of parents and carers volunteer in the centre. Their experiences and good training opportunities have helped some to get back into work and others to achieve accredited qualifications. However, Jobcentre Plus does not deliver its services from the centre and this means that some adults do not have easy access to appropriate advice, information and guidance about training and employment. Adults using the centre provide valuable feedback on their experiences following engagement with the centre. In addition, four parents are on the local advisory board, including one who serves as Chair. The centre engages well with all groups including families from minority ethnic backgrounds. Through offering local services that in the past were inaccessible to many families, and organising an imaginative range of family events, the centre is a very positive force for developing strong community cohesion.

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	1
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

The centre successfully matches its provision to meet the needs of users in the area, including groups who can benefit most from its services such as lone parents and young mothers. During the inspection, eight young mothers attended a support group being run by practitioners from the centre, the holistic health team and a volunteer. In this rural area, transport can be a barrier to engagement so the centre organises transport to and from the site. The feedback from the mothers was very positive because the practitioners took great care to tailor the session to meet the specific needs of this group. Their comments confirmed that the provision is a very welcome support.

The effective partnership with health and voluntary groups helps the centre to identify at an early stage children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This leads to the provision of timely multi-agency support that meets the children's needs well. For example, when screening by health visitors identifies children with delayed speaking skills, the family support team are able to provide 'Hometalk'. This individualised support for the child and family over six sessions has a demonstrable impact upon the child's communication skills. It is just one example of how outreach work plays a significant part in the centre's provision.

The partnership with childminders is strong and they regularly access the services and training provided by the centre. The children's centre teacher has been very successful in establishing productive links with local settings, nurseries and primary schools. Throughout the reach area there are agreed approaches to early years provision and opportunities for staff to access training such as 'Talking Matters' and 'Let's Interact'. This approach ensures consistency and has been one of the factors that is bringing about good levels of improvement in the progress children make.

Relationships with users are extremely positive. Parent and carers are confident to talk with staff about any concerns because they know they will receive practical and sensitive support. Work with the most vulnerable children and families is exemplary.

However, the centre is aware of that the lack of a presence by Jobcentre Plus at the centre sites limits the quality of guidance for users seeking employment.

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	2
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

Governance and accountability arrangements between Nottinghamshire Community Health and the Nottinghamshire County Council are clear and include strong arrangements for performance management through the annual conversation and regular one-to-one meetings with the senior children's centre coordinator. The centre coordinator is developing the local advisory board's capacity to give a strong strategic lead. However, inconsistent attendance at meetings by some external partners reduces its effectiveness.

The centre coordinator has raised the quality of leadership and management at all levels among centre staff. Her high expectations and rigorous professional supervision arrangements have developed successfully the capacity of her team to evaluate the effectiveness of provision and drive improvement. Reviews of all activities are thorough and form part of the robust performance management arrangements. Staff are passionate about the centre and its community. They are effective in ensuring that all children, parents and carers, regardless of differences, have the equal access to the centre's services and achieve well.

There is a high uptake of the centre's services. Careful planning and costing ensures the efficient use of resources and helps the centre to cover transportation costs where these are a barrier to engaging with services. The outreach work of the centre provides particularly well for the most vulnerable groups and for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The improvement plan reflects local priorities and has ambitious targets to improve still further the use of the common assessment framework and support for adults at risk of domestic violence and mothers suffering from post-natal depression.

Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. Staff work very effectively with other agencies to ensure that vulnerable children and adults in the area receive the

support they need.

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	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Rural Families Children's Centre for Selston, Jacksdale and Underwood on 3–4 February 2011. We talked with parents and carers, staff, a wide

range of partners and a member of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents. We judged the centre as good overall with outstanding procedures for safeguarding.

The children's centre provides a good range of services that is helping children and their families in Selston, Jacksdale and Underwood. Throughout the inspection, you were keen to tell us how you had benefited from support provided by the centre. We were also impressed by the very positive comments you made about the services on offer and the anonymous case studies that show how lives have been transformed through links with the centre.

The centre works very well with its partners such as childminders and health visitors. This joint working ensures the delivery of good quality services to the whole community either at locations around the area or through home visits. It helps many children get a good start in life, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. There are also many examples of the centre winning the confidence of adults so that they move on from occasional contact and become regular users of the centre. The number of you who have trained as volunteers is particularly impressive. The centre team greatly appreciates the help you give it to deliver services. We would also like to congratulate the 'Not Just Mums' group on its successful lottery bid and its well thought out plans to make best use of the additional funding.

The centre provides a good range of services and activities which suit the needs within the community. The numbers attending the centre's events show how popular they are. Sessions such as 'Babbles, Bumps and Babies', 'Paediatric First Aid', 'Breast Friends' and 'Dads Group' all help improve the health and well-being of children and their families. The high priority given to users at risk of post-natal depression or from domestic violence demonstrates the centre's outstanding work to safeguard users at risk of emotional or physical harm.

The centre offers a good range of services and activities for all families. However, we judge that those of you seeking employment would benefit from more opportunities to improve your literacy, numeracy and information, communication and technology skills, and if Jobcentre Plus services were more easily accessible. We have asked the centre to check more closely the impact of its adult education training and its links with Jobcentre Plus.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. 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.

