

Inspection report for Heanor Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	365681
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Tim Bristow HMI

Centre governance	Derbyshire Local Authority
Centre leader	Marie Eastwood
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	Roper Avenue Marlpool Heanor DE75 7BZ
Telephone number	01773 530892
Fax number	01773 530763
Email address	Marie.eastwood@derbyshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Coppice Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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 local authority, centre staff, representatives from the partnership advisory board, representatives from services that work in partnership with the centre and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This is a phase 2 children's centre providing the core offer to a community which is in one of the 70% most deprived wards in the country. It is situated on the Coppice Primary School site sharing a building with the school nursery. The centre provides a range of services designed to support families and young children. The centre is managed by a district manager and a centre coordinator. The centre coordinator manages two centres within the Amber Valley. The district manager has the overall responsibility for the nine centres in the Amber Valley. The district manager is accountable to Derbyshire County Council for the delivery of services within the centres. There is also an advisory board that represents users and service partners.

The population in the reach area of the centre is largely White British with very few families from minority ethnic groups. The majority of children enter early year's settings with skill development that is below national expectations. The proportion of users who live in workless families is higher than the county and national averages as is the proportion receiving state benefits. In the last two years, there has been a rise in the obesity rate of children of Reception age and a decline in the proportion of parents who are breastfeeding.

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

3

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory because the outcomes for users within the Heanor reach area are satisfactory. The centre users are unanimous in their appreciation and praise for the services and activities provided. However, the impact of these services on outcomes overall is only satisfactory because there are families and children in the community who are not yet as involved in the work of the centre as they could be. This is because assessment and evaluation procedures do not fully address the needs of some users. Consequently, the equality of opportunity for users in the reach area is satisfactory.

While outcomes are satisfactory overall, there are a number of good outcomes for users such as the improvement in speech and language of children as a result of the very good ‘Every Child a Talker’ initiative that is being used in all settings facilitated by the children’s centre. In addition, Jobcentre Plus is successfully encouraging a steady stream of users back into work and training as a result of its partnership with the children’s centre. The contribution made by users to the services in the centre and its governance is inadequate. This is because the centre has encouraged too few to be involved in this work. The centre is well aware of this and has taken steps to remedy the situation, such as the course for volunteers starting this month.

While provision is satisfactory overall, there are some good elements. Families that are referred to the centre and those that are vulnerable, receive good quality support from the Children’s Centre workers. These workers assess needs effectively and coordinate the necessary services required. They are aided in this by the improving partnerships between the children’s centre and health and social services.

Governance and leadership are satisfactory and improving. The centre coordinator demonstrates a clear ambition and determination to improve the outcomes of users that is reflected in the business plan. This has led to some improvements in outcomes such as for vulnerable families. However, the success criteria are not as sharp as they could be which makes it difficult for centre leaders to judge the effectiveness of their work. The advisory board is a useful forum for improving

partnerships and promoting the development of services. However, insufficient attention is paid to taking a strategic overview of the success of the centre's services in meeting local priorities. Regular supervision of centre workers, such as the Children's Centre workers, has resulted in users benefiting from the appropriate services. Consequently, the centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for improvement.

Safeguarding procedures are well established and there are some strengths such as the procedures in partnership with other services to ensure the safety of vulnerable children. The opportunities for the wider community to influence the work of the centre are inadequate. Users report that many people in the community are not aware of its existence and that more could be done to engage these people in its services.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the governance and leadership of the centre by:
 - ensuring that the success criteria in the business plan are measurable so that the centre leaders can be held to account for their work
 - ensuring that the advisory board maintains a strategic overview of the children's centre work so that it can determine the extent to which users are benefiting from accurately targeted services.
- Strengthen evaluation and assessment procedures so that:
 - the centre can better demonstrate how its activities are meeting local priorities
 - activities are refined to meet the needs of target groups more successfully
 - the centre is better able to demonstrate clearly the impact of activities on its users.
- Ensure that users and the wider community have a much greater involvement in the governance of the centre and in determining what services and activities are needed.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

By the time children in the settings in the reach area are five, the outcomes in all aspects are satisfactory or better. The impact of the centre on these outcomes is satisfactory and is improving as the centre strengthens its partnerships with other organisations and services. For example, the local school has taken advantage of the expertise of the centre's Asian worker in its activities to improve children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Some activities are having a strong impact on users such as the groups that are successful in encouraging mothers to continue with breastfeeding. As one parent reported, 'I thought I was alone with breastfeeding problems and would have given up if it wasn't for the help from the centre.' Activities such as 'Weigh and Play' ensure that the centre, in partnership with health services, successfully checks the well-being of very young children and identifies those that might benefit from accessing other services.

The children's centre has established safeguarding procedures that ensure that all children in the centre are safe. Partners, such as social services, arrange meetings in the centre with users because they recognise that the centre has successfully created an environment in which users feel safe. Children that are subject to Common Assessment Framework procedures or child protection plans are well supported, particularly by the Children's Centre workers, who provide a crucial link between services. Users, such as those who have been victims of domestic abuse, report how much they appreciate the work of the centre in ensuring their safety.

Activities provided by the speech therapist in the children's centre are having an important impact on children's readiness for learning. These are instrumental in ensuring that speech delays are addressed early. All users who attend activities such as 'Tiny Tots' thoroughly enjoy the opportunities to play and learn. As one parent reported, 'These activities have helped me to understand child development.' Adult users benefit from a satisfactory range of courses coordinated by the children's centre, in partnership with adult education. For example, half the adults who attended the mathematics course to help them with their children's homework enjoyed it so much that they embarked on a Level 2 mathematics course which they passed successfully.

Behaviour of all children who take part in centre activities is good. Very few parents attend the parents' forum or the advisory group. Those who do are keen to promote its work and are knowledgeable and supportive. However, they have too little influence on the centre's activities. There are one or two successful examples of volunteers working such as those who support breastfeeding, but again these are very limited.

The centre is becoming increasingly effective at ensuring the economic well-being of its users. For example, the proportion of users who attend benefits appointments to meet Jobcentre Plus staff at the centre is much higher than at the job centre, thus aiding the stabilising of their economic well-being. The number of users who embark on voluntary plans to improve their economic well-being is also a successful feature of the centre's work. Of the 80 in the last year who are on voluntary plans, approximately half are now in employment and 16 have embarked on adult training courses.

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	3
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healthy lifestyles	
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 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	4
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

Assessment procedures are used well by Children's Centre workers to encourage families, particularly those that are vulnerable, to request the services that are needed to ensure their safety and well-being. These are then tailored effectively to meet their needs. The centre successfully nurtures and fosters confidence in some users and develops their basic skills so that they are well prepared for training courses and employment. For example, one user, who initially lacked confidence, started using the centre to aid breastfeeding and has been encouraged and trained to believe that she could embark on a career in childcare. For other users, the assessment of their participation in some activities is not yet sufficiently useful in identifying the next steps they could take to further improve their well-being and social and economic contribution. Consequently, the care, guidance and support of the centre are limited to satisfactory.

The centre has a successful track record of facilitating the effectiveness of services, such as for health. Generally these services are the necessary ones for the community, but the centre does not sufficiently ensure that they are specifically targeted to some groups of users who could benefit from them. Within the centre, users and staff are proud of their achievements. However, not enough is done to celebrate these achievements. This results in the centre having a lower profile in the community than it could have and fewer users participating in activities because they are unaware of the success of the centre's activities and services in improving well-being and achievements.

All staff provide a welcoming and secure environment in the centre. This starts from first contact with the well-trained reception staff. Many users also trust the centre staff so much that they report that this is where they come for advice and support on a range of issues. As one parent reported, 'Children's centres and their activities are a godsend, particularly to those of us who parent pretty much single-handed. Great to have something to look forward to and fab people to interact with.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Supervision procedures to check the work of centre staff are satisfactory. While they ensure that users receive the necessary services, they are less effective at ensuring that evaluations of outcomes for users are as robust as they could be. For example, users who embark on a debt-management course are judged to have improved their economic well-being. This may be the case eventually, but at the time the judgement is made all that is known is that they have accessed the necessary services to aid them in improving their economic well-being.

The centre's business plan demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of the target groups within the reach area and what needs to be achieved. However, the success criteria are not sharp enough so that it is difficult for the centre or advisory board to evaluate the success of its activities in meeting local priorities or for the local authority to hold leaders to account for their work. This results in value for money being limited to satisfactory.

As well as the centre coordinator, leaders at all levels are becoming increasingly effective. There are some examples of good evaluation leading to improvements in outcomes that are sharply targeted to the needs of users. For example, the work done by the centre and its partners in improving children's speech through the 'Every Child a Talker' project. Current weaknesses in the evaluation procedures mean that leaders are not as successful at refining and improving services and activities sufficiently to enable them to better achieve local priorities. For example, the healthy cooking activities are of a high quality and users really benefit from them, but they are not targeted at the families, such as those with obese children, who could most benefit from them. Recently, the evaluation procedures have strengthened. Consequently, the centre is better placed than it was, to tailor services and activities to more accurately meet the needs of the community, but currently the impact of these improvements is not apparent.

Currently, procedures for health and safety and vetting the suitability of staff are robust. Staff are well trained in the safeguarding procedures for users. Centre staff recognise that some aspects of policy and risk assessment are in need of revision.

The centre has successfully ensured the equality of opportunity of all who take advantage of its services, including parents of children with disabilities, and can demonstrate that once they are engaged in its work it leads to improvements to their well-being. However, the centre rightly identifies that there may still be hard-to-reach families that are isolated from services.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 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	3
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	4

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

Inspectors looked at the inspection outcomes for local Early Years Foundation Stage settings that had been inspected in the last 12 months.

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copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Heanor Children's Centre on 12–13 January 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. Your views were very helpful to the inspection. We agree with you when you told us how helpful and supportive the services and activities are. The range of services and activities on offer is helping you to improve your parenting skills, and enabling some of you to train and gain employment. Those of you who are experiencing difficulty in your lives are well supported to make your families and children safe and healthy. We agree that interaction with the centre has helped some of you to overcome feelings of isolation and has boosted your confidence and self-esteem. We watched you thoroughly enjoying the activities, such as 'Tiny Tots', where you talked to each other and played with your children. Very few of you have volunteered to help in the centre and to take part in the parent forum, but many more of you should be encouraged to do so. We agree with one parent who told us that it is a pity that not enough people in the area are aware of the services on offer at the centre.

You told us that one reason why you like coming to the centre is because of the well-trained, helpful and friendly staff who work there, and we agree that this is an accurate picture of the team. They try their best to help you to make improvements to your lives. For example, the Children's Centre workers work well with other agencies like the health service and social services to make sure that the help is just right for you and your families. A significant number of you have taken advantage of the Jobcentre Plus services at the centre resulting in a steady stream of adults gaining employment and further training. The health services in the centre, such as the baby weigh and play and breastfeeding support, are good at helping you keep your children healthy. The centre has introduced a number of activities to improve your health, such as the cooking activities where you learn how to prepare healthy meals. Those of you who take part explained to us the benefits of this. There are other families that could gain from activities like this, particularly those who have some difficulty managing the diets of their children. Some of you are rightly proud of the qualifications you are gaining, such as in mathematics. The centre does not yet do enough to celebrate these successes which might encourage more people to embark on activities or take advantage of services.

The local authority is improving the way it checks the quality and impact of services at the centre. The business plan does not yet clearly show how they will know when they have been successful. This means that it is difficult for the centre to show how its activities and services are making improvements to the lives of all the families in the reach area. The advisory board gives partner agencies, like local schools, a useful opportunity to share opinions about what services the centre could provide.

However, their role is not clear, which means that at this time they do not have as much of an influence on the centre's work as they could.

The centre leaders have been successful in safeguarding the families that use the centre. They show that they know well the different groups in the community that could benefit from the centre's help. Leaders do not yet check well enough how the activities on offer are leading to improvements, both for you, but also for the community overall.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements by:

- sharpening up the business plan so it is easier to check the improvements being made
- making sure the advisory board's role is clear so that it can have a greater influence on the centre's work
- keeping a better check on their activities so that they can improve them where necessary and, also, so that they can demonstrate that the activities are fit for purpose in helping the centre meet its targets for improvement
- encouraging more of you and also the wider community to engage with the services and governance of the centre.

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