

# Inspection report for Rural (Meriden) Children's Centre

Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	362558
Inspection dates	22–23 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Susan Crawford HMI

Centre governance	The Local Authority
Centre leader	Alice Bath
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Lady Katherine Leveson CofE Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Beechwood Childcare

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 one additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre manager, senior management team, representatives of the advisory board, representatives from the Local Authority, a range of agencies and parents and other users of the centre

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

## Information about the centre

The centre is located in Meriden ward in the borough of Solihull. The area consists of five villages within a large rural geographical area and serves a region ranked within 70% of the most deprived in the country. The centre's reach area has pockets of deprivation.

Most children enter the nursery with skills below those expected for their age especially in communication, language and literacy. Most families living in the area are White British although most other minority ethnic groups are represented. There are two traveller sites in the reach area. Unemployment is below the national average and the number of families on benefit is low.

The centre opened in July 2007 and is in the grounds of the Lady Katherine Leveson CofE Primary School. The accommodation is limited to offices, a small community room and group room. Some activities are held at other sites such as Balsall Common Scout and Guide Hut and Beechwood Childcare which is attached to the Meriden Primary school site. This provision is subject to a separate inspection. There are close links with other nearby children's centres and some staff work across the bases. The centre has recently revised its governance arrangements and a newly formed Partnership Advisory Board has been set up. Rural is a Phase 2 children's centre providing the core offer of services.

## 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**

Outcomes for users are good. Multi-agency partnerships are strong and particularly responsive to meeting the needs of families.

The centre provides a good range of services that is effectively raising the knowledge of parents and carers about healthy lifestyles and keeping their children safe. Support for breastfeeding mothers is well developed through the effective programme and excellent support from health visitors and midwives. This is provided at the well attended ‘Breast Feeding Café.’ Fathers have been well supported in the past although attendance has started to decline. The centre has consulted with fathers and has ascertained that the decline is due to the need for fathers to work on Saturday’s in addition to weekdays, due to the current downturn in the economic climate. The centre has responded appropriately and the Dads Group is now accommodated during the evening.

The centre is an inclusive setting and, by providing for a wide range of users, promotes equality well. Appropriate actions are taken to support vulnerable families and children and those who require support in times of need or crisis, through close multi-agency working and the highly effective outreach support team. Mobile outreach services play a key role in ensuring accessibility for users in a large rural geographical area. The way in which the centre assesses the individual needs of children and their parents is outstanding. This makes a significant contribution to ensuring outcomes for children and families are good. Parents and carers value the range of provision that the centre offers and speak highly of the rapid response to requests for additional activities. Staff are particularly effective in listening to what parents and carers say, whether formally in the advisory group, through written feedback from participants, or informally. This information is used well to plan future activities. The positive action taken as a result of feedback has promoted trust with users of the services and with multi-agency partners.

The centre has gone some way to promoting itself in the community. However its profile within the community is limited as there are some pockets in the vast geographical area that do not understand the centre’s work. This prevents potential users accessing and benefiting from services.

Governance arrangements are currently moving from an Improvement Board to a Partnership Advisory Board (PAB). Members of the board are fully supportive of the work of the centre and there is a clear vision statement. The new board is in its infancy and not yet fully representative of all partners. The centre manager has met with local schools to ensure that they are represented so that they have full input into the centre's strategic vision. The centre shows a sound ability to evaluate the impact of its work which informs the board to enable them to hold the centre accountable. The centre has systematic and accurate management information that records the full impact of its work. Staff evaluate the impact of each activity and individual service provided. This information, combined with a range of evaluations from parents, affords the board an effective understanding of the progress the centre is making towards achieving its priorities. A Parent Forum is established known as 'Points of view'. This group feeds into the PAB and a Solihull Parents Group, enabling parents to have voice at a more strategic level.

The local authority has recently improved its processes for providing the data needed to analyse and evaluate performance across a range of national indicators. This is not yet rigorous and some indicators are inaccurate. This reduces the rigour of any evaluation of the centre's performance and restricts its ability to set accurate priorities by which it can measure itself in relation to the impact it is having on families.

All staff have a clear understanding of their role in safeguarding. They work effectively together to reduce risk of harm and prevent difficulties escalating. Safeguarding procedures are robust and work with key agencies is effective. As a result, children are safe, protected and their welfare concerns are identified and supported. This aspect of the centre's work is outstanding.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Raise the profile of the children's centre's work and promote the facilities and benefits to families, schools, day care provision and the local community.
- Develop the availability of accurate relevant data which is specific to the immediate reach area, including the national indicator sets, to ensure all relevant users are targeted.

## **How good are outcomes for users?**

<b>2</b>
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Parents and carers show good understanding of healthy lifestyles and have a good regard for the quality of support provided. They are developing an understanding of healthy eating and staff frequently provide healthier food options. Parents and carers commented that their children are introduced to a wide range of healthy foods. Children's understanding of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle is effectively promoted within the various crèche facilities. 'Buggy Fit' has been very popular and has promoted exercise for mothers and their children. This good practice impacts

positively on reducing levels of obesity.

Although the reach area currently has no children who are either looked after or on a child protection plan, staff have a good understanding of the available support. Staff frequently initiate assessment procedures and work closely with other agencies to ensure parents receive the services that they need. Staff are trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework. Users say and show that they feel safe at the centre and are confident to share concerns. Parents and carers are complimentary about the security of the centre and confirm that they feel able to approach staff with any concerns. They are helped to develop a good understanding of safety issues and are engaged in discussions about new challenges associated with mobile babies. This enables them to keep their children safe from harm.

Highly skilled staff working in the various crèche's used to support parents and carers who wish to access services, effectively promote children's personal learning and development by planning and delivering a curriculum that meets individual children's needs. The centre is developing records of children's progress, known as 'learning journeys', which will inform parents and carers about their children's development. This is a challenge for staff as the majority of children do not attend regularly. The learning and teaching team support local provision well and the centre provides information to parents and carers to enable them to access good quality provision. A robust volunteer programme is in place to support them and the local community, with an opportunity to gain experience and skills of the centre's working environment

Children develop positive relationships with staff and their peers. Adults encourage children to explore and 'have ago' in a safe and enriched environment.

Users make a strong contribution to decision-making and share their views through various methods, including e-mail, discussion, forums and evaluation forms. They are well represented on the centre's partnership advisory group and are an integral part of governance. The centre makes users feel valued and, as a result, some have volunteered to support the centre in its work. The views of the hard-to-reach groups have been sought and feedback has been acted up on. For example, barriers to accessing services were highlighted by traveller families. The centre acted upon this information and gained funding to enable them to provide transport for users.

Due to the constraints of the building, it is difficult for the centre to provide adult learning from its premises. Strong links with Solihull College have been established and the neighbouring children's centre to provide a wide and varied family learning programme that is supported with crèche provision. The centre receives support from the Learning and Employment Co-ordinator who advises on routes to employment and training. She also regularly attends an Access to Employment Group, ensuring that links and signposting to further initiatives such as Pertemps and Colebridge Trust etc are created. Links with Jobcentre Plus are sound, thereby aiding the sharing of information which enables the co-ordinator to encourage lone parents to join the New Deal and to attend their Back to Work interviews.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre provides good quality services, which are helping to improve outcomes for families attending the centre and for those who receive more targeted support in their homes. Provision is enhanced through the strong partnerships and effective teamwork between health, social care, family support, education professionals and all centre staff. The quality of care, guidance and support for young children, parents and carers in centre based activities is consistently good. The centre has a good understanding of users' needs. Following consultation, services were adapted; for example, Little Wrigglers was moved to other premises to make it more accessible to mothers. Users' needs are assessed sensitively and appropriately. Parents and carers express the view that their needs are fully met and they receive helpful, constructive and practical guidance.

Staff actively engage with families following assessment. If it is more appropriate for the service to be delivered by another agency, staff signpost them to services such as Relate, family support, speech and language or mental health professional support. This shows that the centre is highly responsive to the changing needs of families. The assessment of children's learning needs and progress has been enhanced by support and advice from the qualified teacher who supports the centre. Links with school have started to become established: meetings have taken place with local head teachers and they have been invited onto the Partnership Advisory Board (PAB). The centre has a good understanding of the needs of the community and has identified the most excluded and vulnerable groups. Advice relating to health matters and access to benefits is readily available.

The inclusive approach and welcoming environment ensures that once users register with the centre they go on to engage with a full range of activities. However, the centre manager and the PAB are aware that some groups are under-represented in some activities, such as travellers and fathers. There are plans to extend provision to

meet their needs.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre manager provides clear direction, and her vision for the development of the centre's provision is well supported by all the staff. The 'Action for Children' manager works closely with the centre. The impact of leadership on the outcomes for children and families is increasing as the systems and processes for monitoring and evaluating the centre's performance become more firmly established. Governance through the advisory board is in its infancy but a sound start has been made.

Performance management arrangements are in place to hold the staff to account for the outcomes of their work. All staff are observed whilst delivering services and this feeds into their performance management. The outcomes resulting from the deployment of staff and the use of all resources are good. Staff across the 11 'Action for Children' centres are deployed to provide specialist input as and when required and so provide good value for money.

Equality and diversity are valued in the day-to-day work of the centre and through its policies and procedures to promote this.

The procedures for safeguarding children and families are outstanding. Policies and procedures to ensure the protection of children and to keep everyone safe are very effective so that people say they feel safe. Security measures are appropriate and supervision is vigilant. Staff are clear about their roles in safeguarding, training is up to date and the required checks, including to the Criminal Records Bureau, are made to ensure safe recruitment. Intervention strategies are successful and, with multi-agency support, ensure that the needs of vulnerable children are dealt with quickly.

The leaders have encouraged and developed a wide range of partnerships which are increasingly providing well for all users. For example, the health visitor makes prompt referrals to the centre regarding new-born babies so that information and guidance about the centre's services can be provided quickly. The centre has completed appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of children and their families.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

Beechwood Childcare was inspected in July 2010 and was judged as outstanding.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Rural (Meriden) Children's Centre on 22 and 23 September 2010. We have judged that the centre provides good, and in some areas outstanding, support to you and your families.

One of the things that the centre is doing really well is supporting new mothers to breastfeed their babies. An area that your centre is looking to re-establish is the group for fathers so that they can be more involved with their children: we heard so many good things about this group.

The parents and carers who spoke to us said that your children's centre is a warm and welcoming place, full of staff who they feel they can trust to help and support them. You told us that staff listen to you and make sure that you get the right advice. We found that the centre was excellent at helping people at times in their lives when they most need it; action was taken quickly and different people and organisations worked exceptionally well as a team to support both children and families. In particular, you said that you really appreciated the personal attention that you received from all staff who work from the centre.

We found that staff from the outreach services work well together as a team to provide help and support to families. In particular, activities around weaning, parent craft, Stay and Play, Little Wrigglers and the Breast Feeding Cafe were really well attended. Those of you who we spoke to said you thoroughly enjoyed the activities that you attend and that you feel really happy on the days when you have an activity to go to.

The centre manager has worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is seen in the range of activities. Managers know there is still more to do if they are to fully meet the needs of your community. The Local Authority have been asked to provide some useful information to help the centre address this need.

The centre has recently changed the way in which decisions are made about its future work and the different services it provides. We are glad to see that at least two of you have volunteered to be part of this group. We were also pleased to hear that you promote the work of the centre to others to help your community understand what the centre can offer.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

