

Inspection report for St Clement's Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	362575
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Diane Auton

Centre governance	Manchester LA
Centre leader	Joanne Farrell
Date of previous inspection	NA
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Linked school if applicable	St Clement's 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, the centre leader, staff, members of the advisory board, a range of providers, parents and carers, users and local authority officers linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

St Clement's Sure Start Children's Centre serves a residential area of north-east Manchester. It was established in 2006 as a Phase 1 children's centre, providing the full core offer of services. Statistical data for the area indicates that levels of social and economic disadvantage are above average; unemployment and the proportion of families on benefit are also above average. Most children's development on entry to early years provision is below expected levels for their age. Although most families in the area are from White British backgrounds, the proportion from other heritages has increased over recent years and the community is now more culturally diverse than it was at the time the centre was established. A range of ethnic backgrounds is represented, with families from Eastern Europe, from Africa and from the Asian sub-continent.

The centre operates from three sites, all a short walking distance apart from each other, with its hub situated on the St Clement's Primary School site. A range of childcare is provided, all of which was visited as part of this inspection: full day-care and holiday care are provided at the centre's Wetherby Street site; a playgroup operates at its Delamere Park site; and the centre's crèche is based in the St Clement's site.

The local authority has responsibility for governance of the children's centre and an advisory board oversees the centre's effective day-to-day operation. The centre

leader works within the local authority's management structure for children's centres across Manchester; a head of centre has overall responsibility for this centre and another centre in the locality. The centre works in partnership with the co-located primary school and with other local schools. St Clement's CE Primary School was inspected at the same time as the children's centre. This was a separate inspection and the report can be found on the Ofsted website.

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

St Clement's children's centre provides satisfactory support to children and their families. Although other outcomes are satisfactory overall, there are strengths in the safeguarding and care the centre provides for its users. Parents and carers report how comfortable and well cared for they feel in the centre and pay tribute to the work of the staff. They talk with feeling about the warm, inclusive welcome the centre gives them and provide some moving accounts of the difference the activities and support they have received have made to their own and their children's well-being.

The centre has only recently started to use statistical data to assess the needs of its community and to evaluate how well it is meeting them. It has not yet formally measured its performance against nationally established indicators and benchmarks. This means that it does not have a clear enough picture of its effectiveness. The quality of childcare provision is satisfactory. The centre has not yet implemented effective assessment, relying on informal methods to measure the progress children are making in their learning and development. The centre does not have a clear picture of the impact of adult learning opportunities provided on-site or signposted at other venues on improving outcomes for adult users.

The centre is starting to have an impact on improving healthy lifestyles for those families who take up its services. Health professionals report that attendance at ante-natal and post-natal clinics in the health centre is good and that the children's centre plays a role in sustaining this through its signposting and support activities. Parents and carers told inspectors about the benefits they and their children have gained

from participation in parenting courses run by the centre. Adult users evaluate activities routinely; parents and carers say they value the centre's user forum and they feel their views are listened to and respected. The centre's partnerships with a range of other agencies and community initiatives have been forged over time and this contributes to the satisfactory effectiveness of the integrated services it provides.

Leadership and management is satisfactory overall. The centre leader ensures that day-to-day operation is efficient and that the staff team work together well. The advisory board is supportive and efforts are made to ensure users' views are taken into account. Safeguarding users' health, safety and well-being is given high priority and systems for safeguarding, safe recruitment and child protection fully meet statutory requirements. The centre makes appropriate use of the Common Assessment Framework to target resources. Centre staff work proactively with external agencies to identify, help and support families at risk and this is making a positive and sometimes significant impact on improving the circumstances of some children and families in the centre's reach area. The centre has begun to draw in users from the range of heritages represented in its increasingly diverse community, including newly-arrived families.

Leaders have identified areas for improvement correctly. The centre's development plan identifies appropriate actions to secure improvement, but the criteria against which it plans to measure the success of its actions are not sufficiently precise. For these reasons, the centre's capacity to sustain improvement is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the quality of self-evaluation by making full use of statistical data in evaluating the impact of services and activities.
- Improve procedures for assessing users' learning and development in order to:
 - provide a clear picture of how successfully the centre is reaching its targets for adults and children
 - measure children's progress in their early learning and development more accurately.
- Identify success criteria in planning against which to measure improvement and ensure that these are clear, realistic and quantitative.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Activities at the centre often complement core services provided at the local health centre. Monthly sessions led by the community nurse on breastfeeding and weaning, for example, are hosted by the children's centre. The health care room in the centre is extremely small, but is in regular use by professionals to deliver individual support programmes for families. A breast feeding peer support group uses the room for its weekly meetings and this is helping those mothers to sustain breastfeeding beyond the first weeks of their babies' lives. The centre's communication links with health

professionals are well-established. This helps to ensure that families in need of support are identified and provided for; it also helps to ensure that users are signposted to appropriate services across the locality. The centre's close link with the nearby Rainbow Haven, a project for asylum seeking families, supports early identification of need in newly arrived families. This contributes significantly to the speed and effectiveness of early intervention and support for some critical cases. Other health-related activities provided by the centre include parenting programmes, first-aid training, aerobics classes and a 'Living Well' weekly drop-in session. Attendance at these activities is usually good, but accommodation issues can limit the number of users able to take part. The centre has begun to find ways around this problem, for example, by using the school hall for the popular aerobics class.

The centre has not successfully developed the use of monitoring and evaluation data to measure the impact of its health-related activities against any national or local performance measures, such as those for obesity rates or uptake of breastfeeding. Nonetheless, parents and carers report that they are developing an improved understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy.

The centre makes a good contribution to the safety and welfare of its users. Effective systems for security ensure that parents and carers and children remain safe and feel safe when attending sessions. As a result of trusting relationships between centre staff, children and parents, parents have the confidence to speak with staff about issues that concern them. The centre is able to provide an interpreter for most of the home languages of users and this is appreciated, particularly by newly arrived families. A range of information and sensitive support is available for those users experiencing domestic violence.

The centre offers a satisfactory range of activities to help parents to support and improve their children's personal, social and emotional development. These include the Chatterbox sessions, with practical guidance on how parents can help children's language skills to develop, and the 'Ready for School' programme, which supports children who have had no previous day-care provision preparing them for transition to the nursery class. Parents report that these sessions have given them an improved understanding of how their children learn and develop and have helped them to feel more confident in supporting their children. A new system has been introduced to track the impact of provision in the day-care settings on children's learning and development; this is still at the initial stage of implementation, so the centre does not yet have clear data on children's starting points or progress. Children are happy and settled in the settings, however. They enjoy the activities, their behaviour is good and they have positive, secure relationships with the childcare staff. Vulnerable children and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given sensitive, caring support.

Centre users are good informal advocates of its benefits. They routinely communicate their positive experiences of the support they and their children receive by word of mouth, which encourages others to participate. Some users are confident enough to contribute more formally to the development of services by participating

in the decision making process through the regular user forum meetings and also through membership of the advisory board.

Information, advice and guidance available to users on a range of issues, such as support for health and well-being, housing and benefits are satisfactory. The centre signposts parents and carers to further learning activities elsewhere, but does not currently carry out complete evaluations of the impact this is having. A signposting project by Jobcentre Plus at the centre has not produced convincing evidence of impact. Overall, therefore, access to further learning opportunities and advice that may increase adults' chances to progress into employment or training are limited.

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	3
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 centre meets the areas of the core offer satisfactorily, with no aspect that is inadequate. There is a positive ethos of care among all of the staff. All of the provision is helping to improve outcomes for those families in the reach area who attend the centre. This is reflected in regular attendance at most sessions and in the increasing numbers who are involved in more than one of the centre's activities.

A talented outreach worker is helping to ensure that links are sustained between the centre and other professionals and agencies working in the centre's footprint area. Parents have nothing but praise for her work; she is particularly skilful in engaging newly-arrived families and encouraging them to come to the centre to take part in activities and to access support. Although this is starting to engage more families in using the centre's services, take-up numbers are still low in relation to the number of families in the centre's reach area. The centre team's knows and assesses the needs of the community through informal measures; the use of statistical data provided by the local authority and by the primary care trust is still at an early stage of development. Past difficulties around inaccurate data are being resolved and the

centre's confidence in working with data is starting to improve. This is work in progress, however, and the centre does not yet have a precise picture of the extent to which it is meeting the needs of users in the wider community.

The centre's early years practitioners demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of the requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage and promote learning and development appropriately. The range of adult learning opportunities based in the centre is small, with its primary focus on developing good parenting. The centre signposts adult users to further educational courses with other providers. The centre's plans to target activities particularly at fathers have not yet had time to have an impact although some fathers have attended some of the community events, such as the party in the park last summer. There are no specific services for teenage parents at this centre, as these are currently provided at a neighbouring centre. A weekly drop-in session for child-minders is attended regularly by a core group, with numbers starting to increase as the provision is becoming better known in the area.

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

The centre leader has worked diligently to ensure that staff performance is managed and monitored appropriately and that the day to-to-day operation of the centre and its satellites is smooth and efficient. She has created a positive team ethos in the centre and ensured that governance arrangements and systems to support consultation with users are satisfactory and improving in their effectiveness. She is ably supported by the outreach worker and the leadership team has been further strengthened by the recent appointment of a qualified early years teacher. The centre provides a bright, welcoming and safe environment for adults and children on all of its sites. Resources are managed appropriately and the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Safeguarding arrangements, including vetting and recruitment procedures, are good and comply with local and national requirements. Clear procedures are in place for reporting child protection issues and are fully understood by the staff, whose training is regularly updated. The centre works effectively with a range of agencies that support child protection and vulnerable families. A sensitive approach to the variety

of the centre's users' needs ensures that families feel comfortable with the staff. The centre's work to promote equality and tackle discrimination against vulnerable groups is having a satisfactory and improving impact; this is seen particularly in its partnership with the Rainbow Haven project, which is helping an increasing number of families to get the support they need. The day care settings are inclusive and evidence was seen during the inspection of appropriate support given to enable children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to attend day care and make successful transition to the next stage in their education.

The advisory board is supportive and committed to the centre and the ongoing development of its role in the community. The development plan for the centre is detailed and reflects consultation with users. It identifies desired outcomes for planned actions in broad terms, but is imprecise about the extent of improvements the centre wishes to make during the year. This makes it difficult, when the centre's leaders carry out evaluations, for them to measure and review exactly how well the centre is doing. While the centre can demonstrate its outcomes and the qualitative difference it has made to individual children and families, it is not currently able to show its impact quantitatively through comparison to national performance indicators.

Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors place a high level of trust in the centre. They say they value the regular user forums and they feel that their views are taken into account fully when provision is planned. There are some positive examples of health professionals and centre staff linking together to deliver universal services. Although the centre does not currently provide suitable accommodation for healthcare professionals to perform a wide range of specialist functions on site, it plays a facilitating role by, for example, providing crèche support as required to allow parents to attend the health centre. Communications with health colleagues are good and this contributes to the satisfactory delivery of integrated 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	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services	3

and activities	
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	3

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the St Clement's Sure Start Children's Centre on 10–11 November 2010. We found that the centre's overall effectiveness was satisfactory.

Within this overall picture, however, we found that the centre does some things particularly well and our conversations with you provided positive evidence of this. We found, for example, that the centre takes effective steps to ensure that you and your children are safe and secure when you use the centre. You told us about the warm welcome you always get when you visit the centre and how much you appreciate and trust the centre staff. One or two parents told us about difficult times in their lives, when the centre had been their first port of call and had provided invaluable help and support. Thank you for speaking to us so honestly and openly. Your contribution helped us to get an accurate idea of the centre's work and its impact in the community.

The centre offers a number of activities to promote healthy living. You told us how much you enjoy the aerobics class! You also spoke about how your children are now much more willing to drink water at home, how they know how to wash their hands and how the day-care staff have helped with successful potty training! All of the parents we spoke to told us how much their children enjoy coming to the centre and gave us some examples of how children have grown and developed as a result. Several parents commented positively on the 'Ready for School' course and said how helpful they and their children had found it.

The centre manager and all staff are determined to continue to improve the centre and make sure the activities and support they provide for you are based on your needs and wants. They have started to use the statistical information from the local authority to help them with their planning and their evaluations. We have asked them to keep on working on this. We want them to set really sharp targets for improvement so they can measure how well they are doing in meeting their targets

as they go along. We were pleased to see that the user forums are working well. We hope you'll continue to attend them and keep on making your views known that way. Also, please encourage your friends who don't come to the centre to give it a try – your recommendations are important.

Although the centre does not provide a wide range of adult learning classes, it does signpost its users to classes elsewhere. We want the centre's leaders to make sure they investigate how effective this is in improving the outcomes for adults. They are also about to introduce a new system for tracking your children's learning and development. We think this will help you and the staff to see the progress your child is making in greater detail.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you happiness and success for the future.

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