

Inspection report for Michaelmas Children's Centre

Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	362526
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Liz Godman

Centre governance	The governing body of Flanshaw St Michael's Church of England Primary School
Centre leader	Mrs Joyce Field
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Flanshaw St Michael's Church of England Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Childcare @ St Georges 503017

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders of the centre and of the school and with members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with representatives from the centre's partnership board, parents, carers and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Michaelmas Children's Centre received its designation on 6 February 2007. The centre provides a core offer of family support, health services, childminder support, adult learning and links with Jobcentre Plus. The centre is located on the site of Flanshaw St Michael's Church of England Primary School. This school was inspected in the same week as the children's centre. The school report can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre links equally with two other primary schools within its reach area and with four private and voluntary early years and childcare settings. The linked early years and childcare setting with which the centre has agreement to provide priority places for children's centre children is Childcare @ St George's. This setting is located about a mile away from the centre and was last inspected in June 2007 when it was judged to be good. The children's centre also provides outreach activities at English Martyrs Catholic Primary School and Balne Lane Community Centre. Most children enter early education with knowledge and skills that are below expectations for their age.

Governance of the centre is provided by St Michael's Primary School governing body, in conjunction with a partnership group. This group includes representatives from the centre's linked schools, partner agencies and parents.

The centre serves a community which experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Levels of unemployment are high, as is the number of families in receipt of benefits and many of the existing jobs are low paid. Most families live in

social housing on estates on the outskirts Wakefield, although some houses are privately rented or privately owned. The majority of families are of White British heritage. A growing number of families from minority ethnic groups, particularly of Pakistani and Eastern European heritage also live within the centre’s reach area.

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

Michaelmas Children’s Centre provides good services for young children and their families. It builds outstanding partnerships with a wide range of settings and agencies to meet needs, especially of the more vulnerable families. It also promotes the learning, development and enjoyment of all its users exceptionally well.

Adult users are enthusiastic about developing a healthier lifestyle for their families. The focus on healthy eating is starting to influence the children as they move on to school and choose healthy snacks. Users feel very safe in the centre and most feel safe at home. The centre staff know the families well and liaise closely with other providers, such as the area special educational needs coordinator. This level of knowledge and communication helps to ensure that children at risk are kept safe and there is a high level of cooperation from families.

Adults and children show outstanding enjoyment of everything the centre offers, especially the excellent opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. One user said, ‘I’ve learned to play again’. After a dip in 2009, intervention led by the children’s centre teacher has led to rapid improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores in all the linked schools, particularly in communication, language and literacy and in children’s knowledge of letters and the sounds they make. Adults also make outstanding progress on the learning programmes they undertake because the courses are very well taught and very closely matched to their needs. Adults and children are also improving their skills for the future at an excellent rate. The centre’s work, in partnership with a wide range of agencies, is having a very positive effect on adult users’ confidence and self-esteem and on improving their economic stability.

However, there are some families, particularly on the edge of the reach area who do

not use the centre and so do not contribute to its development or say what they would like. This includes some women of Pakistani heritage, some Polish families and some who do not live within easy walking distance of the centre.

The school's headteacher and deputy headteacher and the partnership board provide strong support and are empowering the centre manager to drive change. However, the school's governing body is less active in promoting the centre across its full reach area. Under the dynamic and committed leadership of the centre manager, staff work very well and flexibly together as a team. Parents and carers are fully involved and well informed. For example, when asked about how the centre could be improved, a parent forum member said, 'We have to work on reaching out'. The centre recognises that it now needs to take sharply targeted steps in extending its reach to those who do not use the centre at present.

The centre provides good value for money. Its good leadership and the accuracy of its self-evaluation give it good capacity to improve further. Safeguarding meets requirements well. Staff are trained and vigilant in recognising signs of abuse and all relevant checks on staff, other agencies and volunteers are recorded. Strong partnerships and information shared between agencies help to ensure safeguarding. These excellent partnerships also ensure that services are integrated to promote health, education and financial management. This is helping to reduce inequalities. Particularly effective are the strong links between the centre and its linked schools and early years providers.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Take sharply targeted steps to extend the centre's work so that services are more effective in meeting the needs of those families who currently do not use the centre.
- Develop the contribution of the school's governing body in promoting the centre across its full reach area.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Cookery courses are popular and cover healthy eating, food hygiene and budgeting. They also allow users to progress from a basic to a more advanced level. Users indicate that the next step is a weight management group. Health visitors and midwives help mothers sustain breastfeeding and give them helpful advice on weaning. The centre promotes physical activity well through an attractive outdoor play area for children attending the crèche and through healthy walks and ideas for home such as dancing. Parents' and carers' understanding of children's emotional well-being is growing as they see their happy babies enjoying the baby massage and play sessions. However, for some families the stress in their lives makes it hard for

them to sustain a healthy lifestyle and, for example, to give up smoking or alcohol misuse.

The centre is very sensitive to the needs of vulnerable families and does all it can to help them stay safe. Children behave well in the centre and play safely with others and on the outdoor climbing equipment. Courses on parenting skills help parents and carers contribute effectively to children's improved behaviour and ability to play. Adult users are aware of safe practice in the centre, with clear policies and briefings at the start of courses. Families appreciate the safety equipment provided for them at home where necessary and the home and fire safety checks. Uptake of relevant courses is good, including paediatric first aid and infant life support. Training is extending users' understanding of what to do in an emergency. However, the number of emergency admissions to hospital for children in the reach area remains high. The centre is aware of this and is looking closely to see what might be done to help reduce this figure.

Schools attribute the rapid gains in children's communication, language and literacy in part to the leadership of the children's centre teacher. Targeting of the lowest 20% of achievers is closing the gap quickly and is helping to ensure this excellent progress. As a result, children are prepared very effectively for school. Parents' and carers' skills and confidence are also improving rapidly because of the excellent opportunities to develop skills and to learn how to help at home. Accredited courses completed at the centre include adult literacy and numeracy and courses on helping in schools. For many this is leading to work as volunteers or employment and career changes. Course attendance and completion rates are high.

Users contribute to decision making through the parents' forum and the partnership group. They are clear as to how they have made a difference. For example, they requested an evening course on parenting and commented that as a result, 'the children's dad learned praise works better than punishment'. Adults and children say they feel listened to and there is a strong sense of mutual support. A group of mothers said, 'We found each other and wouldn't have met otherwise. We are a network of friends'. Another user said, 'I like to come here and meet people and have a chat'. Fathers are also welcomed and able to contribute. They chose to participate alongside the women as they did not want a men-only group.

The centre 'has turned my life around' is a typical view. Because children are eager to attend the high quality crèche, adults are able to concentrate on the courses and develop skills for future employment. A large majority who have used the 'Job Shop drop-in' have gone on to further training or employment. This represents considerable success and is assisted by the model set by staff through their own extensive continuing professional development. There is also very good information available about benefits, job hunting and a credit union. Staff's flexible approach helps users to get beneath the surface of a problem. For example, the health trainer recognises the link between health and financial problems and so helps users to see these links and to tackle their difficulties.

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	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1

How good is the provision?

2

There are strong systems for reviewing and responding to adults' and children's needs. Staff understand users' needs very well due to good data and sensitive personal contact. Users are confident that the staff will help them to find the right advice and support. Parent support workers play a key role in helping families with children with special educational needs, those whose safety is at risk as a result of domestic violence and those who are isolated because they are asylum seekers who speak little or no English. Excellent partnerships with different agencies and providers help to secure swift identification and meeting of needs. Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are used well.

The centre's '0 to 5' crèche room provides an outstanding example for parents, carers and childminders of ways to promote the learning and development of very young children. Parents, carers and childminders are equal partners in accurately and carefully observing and recording children's learning and progress. Planning is clearly displayed so that all users can see how the activities on offer ensure progress across the areas of learning. This helps to ensure a very strong and consistent approach to preparing children for nursery and school. It is also having a very positive impact on outcomes, particularly in communication, language and literacy. Staff are excellent models in creating a climate where everyone has fun as well as in promoting children's play and language development. Achievements are recorded and celebrated very well, whether this is a small step in a very young child's development or an adults' progress in advanced cookery, literacy, numeracy or ideas to use with their children.

Provision to meet needs of children and adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very good. There was a specific parent support group, but the parents themselves decided that it should be open to anyone who wanted to come. The

centre is aware of the needs of those families who do not use the centre and is planning further analysis, in conjunction with a neighbouring children's centre, as to why this is the case and in order to find ways to respond to these unmet needs.

Staff take very good care of children and adults who attend the centre's activities. Users say that staff are not judgemental and help to reinforce effective approaches, so that, 'you realise you are doing it right and yes, I am a good mum'. Effective liaison meetings with the linked early years provider consider individual children's development, for example, in relation to the '2 year old offer'. These meetings explore the care and support needs of the whole family. The centre provides good advice and guidance through personal contact and leaflets. Some leaflets are in the home languages of the centre's users. Leaflets include information about sexual health, benefits, loans and housing. Information on dental health, drugs and alcohol is less prominent. Partner agencies meet users in locations accessible to them, whether home, the centre or another venue. Families feel very well supported at times of crisis, describing the centre as 'like a family'.

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	1
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

There are well-established lines of governance and a clear structure of responsibilities. However, the school's governing body is not fully engaged in promoting the centre across its full reach area. High quality management helps things run smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Effective supervision and performance management ensure that staff understand their responsibilities and have high expectations. Parents and carers are well represented on the partnership group and the parents' forum and so have a key role in shaping the centre's direction. Centre staff, parents, carers and professional partners share a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. This is because evaluation of all activities and outcomes is rigorous.

The centre's targeted use of resources is resulting in the strong improvements in outcomes, particularly for families in greatest need. However, as the centre recognises, there is scope to extend the outreach work to meet the needs of those who do not attend the centre. The centre is small but there is always a buzz of lively

activity and happy children. All areas of the centre are safe and spotlessly clean, making them attractive to both children and adults. A wise selection of good quality materials and resources, including books and toys are available for use in the centre or on loan. Resources reflect a variety of languages and cultures and help to develop users' understanding of diversity. Staff's good knowledge and skills are used well to ensure high quality provision. The centre is very welcoming and is proving effective in helping to closing the attainment gap for the children whose families use it. For example, Families Enjoying Everything Together (FEET) supported by the centre, with sessions led by reach school staff, is ensuring that children and their families are very well prepared for transition into the nursery.

Risk assessments to ensure users' safety are completed for all activities and rooms. All the necessary safeguarding policies are in place and up to date. However, because they are relatively new and wide consultation is ongoing, they have not yet all been agreed, signed, dated or reviewed.

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	2
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	1
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

None

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 Michaelmas Children's Centre on 20 and 21 October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we talked with a number of you and met the professionals who work with the centre. Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection. We visited some of the sessions and looked at the centre's documents.

We found that the centre's partnerships with other settings and services are outstanding. Some of you told us how this has helped you in times of crisis. You told us how much you have gained from the centre's excellent courses and how effective these are in building your confidence and improving your skills. We also found that the centre and its professional partners are working very well to bring together advice about health, education, jobs and money. This is helping many of you to improve your lives.

You also told us how keen you are to develop healthier lifestyle for your families. St Michael's School said that children who have attended the centre choose healthy snacks. You also said that you feel very safe in the centre and appreciate the help of staff to stay safe at home. Particularly effective are the strong links between the centre and its linked schools and early years providers. The centre staff know you very well and work closely with other services to meet your needs. You say this is very helpful.

We saw how much you and your children enjoy everything the centre offers, especially the excellent opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. As one of you said, 'I've learned to play again'. We found that the work of the children's centre teacher is making a great difference to your children's communication and language skills, especially their knowledge of letters and sounds. We were also impressed by the qualifications many of you have gained. This is because the centre listens to your views about the courses you would like and then plans and teaches them very well. This helps you to make excellent progress. Both you and your children are improving your skills for the future at an excellent rate. You told us how the centre and its staff

are increasing your confidence and self esteem and how some of you who are quite shy now feel more able to speak out.

However, there are some families who do not use the centre and so do not contribute to its development or say what they would like. This includes some families from ethnic minorities and some who do not live within easy walking distance of the centre. As one of you said, 'We have to work on reaching out'. We have asked the centre to find ways to do this and are sure that you will give new users a warm welcome.

The centre is well led and managed and the centre manager and all the staff are keen to make the centre as good for you as it possibly can be. They are a very good team. You told us how the partnership group and the parents' forum are making a difference and that you have lots of opportunities to have a say. St Michael's headteacher and deputy headteacher also give good support and are helping to change the centre for the better. We do think though that the school's governing body could do more to advertise the centre across its full reach area and have asked them to think about how they could do this.

We think the centre gives good value for money and is well placed to become even better. We wish the centre and you and your families all the very best for the future.

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