

Inspection report for The Castle Children's Centre

Local authority	Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Inspection number	362601
Inspection dates	29-30 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Janet Stacey HMI

Centre governance	The governing body of Castle Nursery School
Centre leader	Kathy Stevens
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Castle Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Castle Children's Centre Day Care

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the acting centre manager, the family support team leader, members of the governing board and advisory committee, a range of providers, parents, users and a local authority officer linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at sessions in operation in the children's centre and in nearby locations. They also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

The Castle Children's Centre is situated within Castle Nursery School. The centre evolved from an Early Excellence Centre and became a Phase 1 children's centre in 2005. Provision for nursery education for three- and four-year-old children is at Castle Nursery School, and there are 80 part-time equivalent nursery education places available. The local authority operates full day childcare provision with places for 59 children from birth to five years at the children's centre campus; funded education places are also available for parents and carers at this provision. The childcare provision was last inspected in January 2007. It was not inspected as part of this inspection. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age.

Overall, the centre serves an averagely disadvantaged area, containing parts that are both highly advantaged and significantly disadvantaged. The centre serves a population that is culturally diverse; this includes families who are of White British

heritage and South Asian and Traveller communities. There has been an influx of Eastern European and African communities recently moving into the area. Family support services are based in the centre. Health services are based at Sandal Castle Medical centre and Maybush surgery. The centre takes referrals from, and supports, families with children in three local schools.

Governance of the centre is provided by the governing body of Castle Nursery School. An advisory committee, which is made up of representatives from parents, neighbourhood partners, health and centre staff contributes to the strategic management and direction of the centre.

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

The Castle Children's Centre provides good quality support to children and families in the locality. It provides a friendly welcome in a well-organised, bright and cheerful environment. Throughout the inspection, users were keen to share their experiences of how the centre has benefited their families, in some cases helping to transform and save their lives.

Outcomes for users are good. Support for breastfeeding mothers is excellent through the highly effective peer mentoring programme and 'Little Angels' breastfeeding group. One mother commented, 'the support I have had from Little Angels has been excellent, they are on hand 24 hours a day if you need them. I wish I had got this support with my first child. I would have breastfed her as well'. Fathers are very well supported and motivated through a well-established dad's group. Increasing numbers of parents are encouraged to participate in adult learning through a range of courses offered by the centre and at Manygates Adult Education college, with some gaining qualifications that have enabled them to move off benefits and into work. Parents attending the parent and toddler group report that they feel safe while attending the centre and that their children are happy to be there. The children and families who regularly use the centre are learning to lead healthy lifestyles; they enjoy the cookery classes and support the fresh food cooperative which runs from Portobello community café. While users' views are heard through the centre's effective Parents 4 Parents forum, only a narrow range of user groups are represented on the advisory committee.

Attachment is cited by the centre staff as one of the key issues affecting many parents in the reach area. The centre works in partnership with the Child and

Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to run the 'Snowdrop Project'. This is a successful project and has helped many families to develop emotional and attachment bonds with their children. One parent said, 'It has helped me build confidence and I am now more connected with my son.'

The strengths of the centre are in the good leadership and management provided by all the leadership team. There is a clear sense of drive and passion, which is shared by all the staff who work at the centre and is central to the good morale, strong teamwork and sense of pride in the centre's work. The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. A parent's powerful response when she talked about the intensive one to one support she had received from the centre staff was, 'I just cannot tell you how much they have helped me. Without them I would have committed suicide.' The commitment shown by all staff to helping families in times of crisis goes without question. The centre has established strong and effective links with the local Traveller community and has worked tirelessly to win their trust. While the centre has some positive contact with the South Asian community, the lack of live birth data from the Primary Care Trust (PCT) has had a particular impact on the centre's ability to help and support families with young children in this area.

The centre works very hard to address any shortfalls in partnership work through signposting families to the appropriate service. Some partners can demonstrate clearly the positive impact of their work on the outcomes for children and families, such as the local social work team, CAMHS and the community nursery nurse. The impact of the centre's work in helping users' to look for work and receive advice on claiming working-age benefits is currently limited as Jobcentre Plus have minimal contact with the centre.

The centre collects a wide range of data. This includes data related to events, courses, and visitors to the centre, referrals from health and outreach workers, and data from the local authority. However, staff do not always use this data accurately to identify needs and assess whether targets have been met. They recognise more needs to be done to ensure all potential users are reached and to identify where they can have an even greater impact on the outcomes for users. The governing body and advisory committee fully support the centre but are not holding it to sufficiently rigorous account; while targets are in place, they are not always precise enough or focused on the key areas of need.

Safeguarding and equality procedures are good. Staff and other adults consistently give the highest priority to safeguarding all children and their families.

Given some of the successes the centre has had so far and the dedication to reaching all the vulnerable groups in the reach area, it has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the range of representation on the advisory committee and use data more effectively to identify a manageable number of key priorities that will enable the management advisory committee to monitor and track the success of targets.
- Ensure the local authority, Jobcentre Plus and the Primary Care Trust work together to ensure the centre receives the information and input it needs to deliver appropriate services to the most vulnerable and the wider community.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for parents and families are good and improving in some areas. The centre provides an extensive range of activities which are developed extremely well in partnership with other agencies and professionals. Uptake of all courses is high and attendance is sustained. The centre has supported many women from the community to train as crèche workers. A high percentage of these women are now on the local authority crèche bank and are employed by the centre when crèches are in operation. This not only builds self-esteem for users but also helps to promote good role models within the community and encourage others to take up opportunities that will help to improve their future life chances.

The 'Birth to First Steps' course and the 'Snowdrop Project' enhances parents' and their children's self-esteem and helps to build bonds between the parents and their children. Through this course and project, parents learn about behaviour and the impact of their actions on their children's lives. Parents spoke positively that by attending the Snowdrop project it had helped to change their perceptions of what they had perceived to be negative behaviour.

Parents report that they are benefiting extremely well from the extensive range of advice and opportunities that the centre provides. All families that are known to the centre are supplied, free of charge, with bonding, early play and weaning goody bags. These not only contain a very good range of resources but help parents to develop a better understanding of the key milestones in their young children's lives.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted well through the 'Hungry Snail' cooperative. Food grown in local allotments is offered at low cost. Families say that they now realise fresh food is cheaper than supermarket food and it has helped them to learn how to cook healthy meals at home. The centre offers a wide range of courses on healthy eating and cookery which are offered in the centre site and satellite sites. One parent commented, 'I was surprised by the portion sizes, I have reduced these at home and I have already lost one stone in weight'.

Good procedures ensure that children are well safeguarded. Parents say that they feel safe in the centre and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or

personal difficulties. Family support workers undertake safety visits to homes. The centre has acted quickly on recent data indicating a rise in accidents in the home. All users have been sent an invite to attend the 'Accidents Can Happen' course. The centre has received an excellent response for places. This will help parents gain a better understanding of how to prevent accidents and hopefully help to reduce the number of children treated for injuries at hospital.

The centre has forged strong and effective links with the early years setting and local schools to raise attainment. This concerted effort has had considerable success with data showing a year-on-year increase in early years profile scores of children entering their first year of formal schooling. Most children in the reach area are now at a comparable stage with their peers. This demonstrates the resolve shown by the centre and education professionals in the area to remove barriers so that all children are able to reach their full potential and go on to succeed in society.

There is a good range of opportunities for parents to express their views and contribute to the community. These include regular evaluations of activities and courses. The centre also has its own television channel 'Life' which celebrates children's and adults achievements. A DVD entitled 'site life' has been produced with full participation from the Traveller community. These resources show a real commitment by the centre to enable individuals to realise that they are valuable and important and help their self-esteem to shine. Parents are involved in decision making and show initiative by their involvement in the active Parents 4 Parents forum which was instrumental in getting the path widened for pushchairs, erecting a new welcome sign at the centre and arranging for the 'smoking bus' to visit the centre to help families understand the health-related dangers of smoking. A parent on the forum was proud to say that as a result of the information that had been given to her, she has stopped smoking. While these parents are very proactive, representation on the advisory committee does not include users from the wide range of ethnic diversity in the reach area. As a consequence, the views of all users are not being represented at a strategic level.

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	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	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?

2

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. The centre is very aware of some of the sensitive issues in their reach area; domestic abuse is identified through the statistics as being the fourth highest in the district. Centre staff are highly skilled in this area and have helped to train teaching staff in schools on the signs and symptoms to look out for. The centre has implemented some very ingenious methods to allow users who may suffer from domestic abuse to alert them, in confidence, if support is required. This is particularly valuable for helping those who feel they have nowhere else to turn.

The centre is very good at finding ways to support individual children and families and offers a rapid response when urgent help is requested or a critical need is identified. Provision is enhanced through the committed work undertaken by the family support team. Its members are dedicated in trying to reach those in the community who they know are in crisis. The strong outreach team are very well respected in the community; as one parent said, 'They are brilliant, they treat us like equals, listen to our needs and do whatever they can to help us'. The centre has started to make valuable inroads in establishing relationships with the Eastern European community. They have recognised and supported the willingness of parents to work as translators. This has not only resulted in some families attending courses and activities in the centre but also having the confidence to approach the centre in times of crisis. A parent commented through a translator that by attending a course at the centre she has made new friends, and started to understand more about her child's behaviour which had, prior to coming to the centre, been causing her some concern.

Good assessment in stay and play sessions focuses well on children's needs and ensures their activities are interesting and relevant to their lives. The centre teacher works closely with the parent and toddler group to plan activities that link to the Early Years Foundation Stage. This has led to some purposeful learning for both parents and children.

Most health workers who are actively involved with the centre, such as the community nursery nurse, the behaviour psychologist and speech and language therapists provide a valuable service to children and families. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and child protection plans are well embedded and the staff at the centre contribute fully to protecting children and providing appropriate support. The centre is committed to removing barriers to achievement. A concerted effort has taken place to encourage children from the Traveller community to take up funded nursery education places. This effort by all the staff, particularly the family support worker who works directly in the community, along with the local schools, has been a resounding success as nearly 100% of the children are now in early education and entering school with skills and knowledge comparable with their peers.

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Good leadership is at the heart of the centre, so much so that the acting management team have seamlessly continued to focus on promoting good quality services that reflect the needs of users in the absence of the centre manager. Both users and staff speak highly of the family support team leader. He is well respected and trusted by all who encounter him; as one staff member put it, 'The nice thing about this centre is as front line workers we are really well supported. If we put forward a project proposal, management always support us'. This comment epitomises the drive and commitment of not only the leadership but of all staff to bring about improvement to the life chances of families at risk. The centre is very successful in thinking outside the box and does not simply rely on the funding made available to them from the local authority. Staff work as consultants in a wide range of settings throughout the local authority, and also raise funds by sponsored walks. The business manager is highly effective in identifying funds to assist with free transport and childcare to help families attend courses and activities in the centre and at the satellite sites.

Performance management arrangements for front line staff are secure with regular reviews and opportunities for professional discussion. The centre is responsive to the training needs of individuals to develop and build their skills to help promote good practice. Clear service level agreements are in place with Barnados who take the lead role in working with teenage mothers in the area. The centre is kept well informed and are only too willing to offer any additional support if required. While the centre often demonstrates 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. Data are collated but are not being used sufficiently to identify gaps in the provision and set clear targets to bring about improvement where it is most needed.

The centre actively promotes equality and celebrates diversity, for example, in ensuring that activities are relevant and accessible for all parents, including those who work. The centre is particularly successful at actively involving fathers in their children's lives. Following a recent 'dads into nursery' day, a father commented 'Had a great time, well organised wonderful insight into my child's development. Yet

another good reason why this nursery is head and shoulders above the rest'. Children with special educational needs are integrated fully into the centre's provision and, consequently, the provision is inclusive. Managers are striving to ensure the development of the centre is more appropriately matched to local need. They have targeted and successfully secured a resource in the new Sandal Magna school to help build and establish links in the South Asian community.

The centre is committed to the concept of integrated service provision, building the team around the child. However, while some key partners are fully committed to an integrated approach, health visitors and Jobcentre Plus input is minimal which means that not all partners are aware of the key issues affecting the reach area. This lack of a true integrated approach means that the centre, while doing all it can, cannot wholly guarantee that children are not slipping through the net.

The centre's comprehensive range of policies and procedures are well embedded in the centre and applied routinely. Safeguarding arrangements are good and comply with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board requirements. Clear procedures are in place for reporting child protection issues and are fully understood and followed by all staff and key partners.

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	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	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	2

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Castle Children's centre on 29 and 30 September 2010 and spoke to many of you about the centre's work. We really enjoyed chatting to you in meetings around the centre, at Portobello Community Café and at the Traveller's community. We learnt a great deal. You expressed your views very clearly and they were very helpful to us. First and most important, we are pleased to tell you that the centre provides good support to you and your families. We were pleased to see that many of you recognise this and are using the services that the centre provides.

The centre does some things well. For example, the way it helps you to develop your understanding of child development and healthy eating. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities provided through the centre. You told us that staff are friendly, hard working and give you excellent support. We agree with you. Families who are facing complex or difficult times receive excellent support. In fact, staff provide excellent care, guidance and support for all centre users. It is clear to us that staff in the centre know the local families and the wider community and we can see how the centre is working hard to reach all of you to ensure that they do everything they can to make a positive difference to your lives. Everyone we spoke to told us how much the centre had helped you and your families. It was really encouraging to hear that many of you feel less isolated in the community and have been able to socialise more by attending courses at the centre. We were particularly impressed by how much the centre has done to raise attainment for children in your area as they enter their first year in school. This is a tremendous achievement and one which we are sure you are equally proud of.

The staff work really hard to make the centre as good as it can be. To help them we have suggested that the leaders ensure that the targets they set are more specific and measurable and focused on improving outcomes for all families in the area. By doing this, they will then be in a stronger position to see how well they are doing to meet all your needs. While there are many good key partners working with the centre, such as CAMHS and the social work teams, we found that the health partners and Jobcentre Plus do not always work together to share information and help the centre prioritise and identify where help may be needed for the most vulnerable families in your area. We have asked the local authority and its partners to address this.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and wish you all well for the future.

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