

Inspection report for Silkmore Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	365843
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Priscilla McGuire AI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Kate Sharratt/Stella Coyle
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	Silkmore Primary School Exeter Road, Stafford ST17 4EG
Telephone number	01785 246802
Fax number	N/A
Email address	sarah.lloyd@staffordshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Silkmore Community 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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the Community and Learning Partnership Coordinator, users, local authority managers, practitioners from the health services and other statutory organisations and partners from external organisations such as schools, the police, a local church and a housing association.

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

Information about the centre

Silkmore Centre is a Phase 2 centre in Staffordshire which shares the same site as Silkmore Community Primary School and is based in a single storey building. The centre offers universal and targeted services which are managed by a coordinator who is employed by the local authority which has responsibility for the governance of the centre. Nursery provision is offered at the primary school. Services at the centre are provided by partner agencies, some of which are within the local authority and some from the statutory, voluntary or private sectors. The centre does not directly employ any staff but receives strategic guidance from a management advisory board. A children's centre sub-group provides operational guidance to the centre coordinator.

Available data shows that the reach area is the second most deprived area in Stafford and falls within the 10% to 20% most deprived areas in England. Data also shows that unemployment within the reach area is higher than in the rest of the Stafford Borough. Most residents are of White British heritage and there is a significant number of lone parents within the area. There is also a high percentage of benefit claimants within the area. Most children's achievement at Early Years Foundation Stage is higher than national expectations.

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

Silkmore centre offers satisfactory provision which leads to satisfactory outcomes for users. The centre is still establishing its presence in the community but has made significant improvements to change users' attitudes and engage families. Much of the focus of the work of the coordinator, managers and providers has been to gain the trust of the community, before being able to reach the point of registering families as users. Improvements are evident in the increasing number of families that now use the centre and access its services out in the community.

The centre coordinator and local authority managers are committed to improving the quality of provision, and evaluation has led to improvements. Monitoring of provision and self-evaluation is based on evidence but is not a sufficiently rigorous. The self-evaluation process is not sufficiently informed by user's evaluations and data analysis. The centre uses qualitative information and some data to plan and monitor provision. Systems are now in place for the local authority to provide the centre with better quality data.

The children's centre sub-group of the management advisory board fulfils its supportive function but the role of the sub-group is still developing and parents have not yet been recruited. The local authority has produced a suitable proposal to strengthen the role of advisory boards of all children's centres in Staffordshire.

The partnership work with the local adult learning service has been particularly effective in providing courses to promote the personal, social and educational development of users. Initial assessment is used appropriately on courses to identify users' starting points. Individual learning plans and goal-setting are used well to help raise users' aspirations and help them plan progression routes to further learning or employment. A structured approach to providing information, advice and guidance as part of adult learning courses has also been effective in helping users make informed choices about their future.

Safeguarding and the protection of users are satisfactory, and procedures meet

statutory requirements. Recruitment checks are satisfactory. Providers ensure satisfactory assessment of the needs of families and, when appropriate, they use the Common Assessment Framework to provide early intervention and to prevent family problems from escalating. Case studies show that at times of crisis, families receive the support they need. However, the centre does not effectively evaluate the impact of its safeguarding or equality and diversity policies. The promotion of inclusion is satisfactory and the range of users reflects the community served by the centre.

The quality of care and support of both children and adults is good. Targeted support is offered to families and takes appropriate account of their individual circumstances. Referrals to providers such as the Parent Support Workers are effective in providing families with the support and care they need. Some families in the reach area are living with challenging problems but through the centre they have been able to access much needed support from a range of providers. Generic support, care and guidance are offered at health clinics, during parenting sessions and other activities. Due to financial constraints, Jobcentre Plus does not offer a direct service at the centre but telephone contact is available, which is known as a 'warm phone'. Similarly, the centre previously paid for hours to be provided by the Citizens' Advice Bureau to support users but the service is no longer available due to financial constraints.

Taking into account the satisfactory outcomes and provision, the centre's effectiveness is satisfactory. This, together with the proven commitment to continuous development, indicates that the centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the role and function of the advisory board. to ensure it supports, challenges and holds the centre to account for its work.
- Improve the quality and analysis of data and use this to improve outcomes for users.
- Improve the rigour of the monitoring of provision and of self-evaluation.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Outcomes for users are satisfactory. Practitioners at the centre work effectively together to promote positive outcomes for users. Families benefit from sessions such as 'cook and eat', 'parent yoga' and 'baby massage' that promote healthy living. One parent who attends 'cook and eat' sessions with her child said: 'I've learnt how to make fresh soup.' and another said that previously her children would not eat fruit but since learning how to make fruit kebabs, her children now ask for fruit. Parents also benefit from attending the 'well baby clinics' where they receive health checks for their babies and guidance and advice from health visitors. Data is not available

for all the national health indicators within the reach area but practitioners use regional data, local intelligence and information from health visitors and from users to organise provision that meets needs.

Users feel safe at the centre. Access to the centre and to rooms is rigorously controlled. Risk assessments are carried out as appropriate. Partnership working with agencies, such as the police and the fire service, is effective in promoting safety in the home and in areas of the community where anti-social behaviour has been a significant problem. Practitioners are trained to carry out assessments using the Common Assessment Framework and these are effective in identifying the most appropriate interventions for families. Families with children on child protection plans receive effective support but statistics about the number of children on child protection plans is not provided to the centre on a regular basis.

Children who attend the nursery on site make good progress. The headteacher from the primary school has observed the significant improvement in the achievement of children and their behaviour since their parents started to attend the centre. The headteacher also commented on the significant contribution the centre has made to preparing children for school, particularly in relation to their speech and language development. Children's behaviour has also improved as a result of parents' participation in parenting programmes. Parents enjoy and benefit from the adult learning sessions offered at the centre. Courses such as 'GO4IT' have helped parents develop their confidence, their self-esteem and set goals for the future. The course is designed to help learners identify their existing skills and abilities, build confidence, self-esteem and set goals for the future.

Parents enjoy learning with their children at the centre. They have also improved their social and economic well-being since attending adult learning courses at the centre. The progress of some parents is impressive. For example, one parent who is now attending a Level 2 childcare course at college and working as a volunteer in the nursery at the centre said: 'I was a single parent with four children and did not finish school so it was a big deal for me to go to college. Just getting through the college door was bad enough but with support I was able to do it. I could not have done it without the centre.' Another parent who is now enrolled on an access course plans to go to university to study midwifery. Another parent who attends a mathematics course at the centre said: 'Before, I did not have a clue what fractions and root meant but now I understand what they all mean'.

Parents contribute to decision making at the centre but do so informally and through evaluations and consultation rather than through representation at governance level. Nevertheless, the centre has made significant progress in engaging parents from a reach area with multiple social barriers to overcome and has also had to challenge negative perceptions and suspicions about the centre's role. It recognises the representation of parents at governance level as a goal.

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	3
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	2

How good is the provision?

3

Practitioners at the centre, such as the Parents Support Workers and the Early Learning Family Support Workers, satisfactorily assess the individual needs of users and use the Common Assessment Framework appropriately to assess the level of intervention or support that is required to improve the lives of families. Case study evidence shows that assessment has led to intervention and improvements in outcomes for families.

Provision to help children and adults learn and develop is satisfactory. The suitable range of activities is planned appropriately to take account of the needs of children, adults and hard to reach groups. Holiday activities, such as 'bingo' sessions, have been planned in response to consultation with the community and have been successful in engaging non-users and promoting centre services to the wider community. Outreach work is satisfactory and provides support and intervention to vulnerable families and hard to reach groups. Provision is flexible. The centre offers a changing programme of activities and events which reflects users' interests and needs. After consultation with users, changes have also been made in the way activities and events are advertised.

The planning of provision is improving and the centre is beginning to collect qualitative case study evidence to demonstrate impact of provision on individual users. Partnership working with the local adult learning service has been effective in providing a menu of adult learning courses that meets the needs of the community and of individuals. For example, unemployment rates are high in the area and courses such as 'Employability Skills' and courses for English and mathematics have helped learners develop skills to increase their chances of employment.

Care and support for users is good. Practitioners make a sensitive and individualised

response to the needs of users. In times of crisis, the support that is provided is good and leads to improved outcomes for families. The Early Learning Family Support Workers who focus on outreach work and the Parent Support Workers provide good support to users, particularly those who have little knowledge about the support that is available to them. They also signpost users to other services when appropriate. Health visitors and other practitioners also provide effective signposting to other services such as smoking cessation or services of Citizens Advice Bureau that are offered at other venues. Case study evidence from the centre and from a local authority evaluation report demonstrates the effectiveness of the Parent Support Workers in providing good quality care and improving outcomes for families.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The managers at local authority level and the coordinator for the centre have a good knowledge of the community. They have a good understanding of the reasons why members of the community have been reluctant to use centre services. They continue to use personal contact, publicity and community research to break down barriers and plan provision that is responsive to the needs and interests of the community. As a result of the persistence and commitment of the centre co-ordinator and other managers, local perceptions are changing and participation rates are increasing.

Providers are contracted by the local authority to deliver services and arrangements for the delivery of services are well understood. However, not all providers are aware of the full range of services and activities offered at the centre. Strategic and operational management are satisfactory and line management and accountabilities are clear. A business plan produced by the local authority for Phase 2 and 3 centres identifies intended outcomes for the centres and also how impact is to be measured. A useful development plan identifies specific actions that the centre has to take. A children's centre sub-group of the management advisory board fulfils the role of the advisory board but its role as a 'critical friend' which supports, challenges and holds the centre to account is still developing. The representation of users on the board is also still to be secured.

Performance management is satisfactory. Systems are in place to monitor the quality of provision and to provide line management support to the coordinator who manages the provision and the contracts for providers. Quarterly reports from providers are used by the centre coordinator to monitor the quality of provision. Evaluation is ongoing but is not a sufficiently rigorous and systematic process. However, decisive action has been taken when, for example, poor performance of providers has been identified. This has led to an improvement in the satisfactory value for money that the centre now offers. This is because the provision is a better match to users' and community needs and interests. Partnership working is satisfactory and the centre works with a range of partners such as schools, the fire service, the police service, churches and a housing association. The quality of partners selected to provide services is improving. Consultation with the wider community through personal contact, evaluations and also through a local community research project is contributing to the centre's increasing effectiveness. The project is helping the centre to capture the views of users and the wider community. It is hoped that findings from the research will inform the further development of provision.

The promotion of safeguarding is satisfactory. Statutory requirements are met. Safeguarding is actively promoted and providers are given a 'policy pack' to promote the centre's standards of work in relation to safe practice. Early intervention to protect children is a priority for all practitioners but information sharing about support work with individual families, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable is not always shared. Equality and diversity is satisfactorily promoted throughout the centre, and the inclusion of all groups is promoted appropriately. Users with learning difficulties or disabilities receive the targeted support they need to ensure they are not excluded from activities. A 'dad's group' has been organised to try and attract more fathers to the centre. The centre has contributed to narrowing the gap in achievement of those children who achieve 78 points on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and those who do not.

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	3

agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	
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	3

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

The inspection team met with the lead inspector who was carrying out a concurrent inspection of the primary school. The findings of this inspection were taken into consideration when making some judgements about the children's centre.

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 Silkmore Children's Centre on 8–9 February 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection. We found your children's centre to be welcoming. The practitioners at the centre have a good knowledge about your community and understand well some of the challenges that you and your community face on a regular basis.

We found that the range of services and activities offered at the centre to be satisfactory. We know that many of you enjoy and have benefited from sessions such as 'cook and eat' and 'parent yoga'. We also know that you enjoy holiday activities that the centre organises and you also like being able to stop and have a chat and refreshments in the community cafe.

Some of you that we met told us about the excellent progress you have made on the adult learning courses you attended. We found the opportunity you have to attend adult learning courses at the centre to be a real strength of what the centre has to offer. Courses are giving you the opportunity to increase your confidence but also to gain qualifications. For some of you, being able to go to college for the first time has been a life-changing experience. It has also given you the opportunity to progress to employment.

We were impressed with the care and support the centre offers, especially when life becomes difficult. Practitioners at the centre use their expertise to provide support when you most need it but also know where to go if they need to obtain help from other organisations.

Workers at the centre know the community really well. We have asked them to obtain more statistical information about the health and other characteristics of the area, so that they can provide an even better service for you. We have also asked them to monitor the quality of the activities in a more rigorous way to ensure that they know which ones to improve. We want the centre to offer you and the rest of the community the best possible service.

We know that you feel comfortable in expressing your views about what needs to change at the centre and we know that your views are valued and have led to changes in the timetabling of activities and also in the way courses are advertised. We know that the centre is still establishing its role in the community and is constantly seeking to make improvements. As part of that process we have asked the managers to strengthen the way the centre is governed.

Thank you once again for your contributions during the inspection, and we offer our best wishes to you all for the future.

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