

Inspection report for Measham Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	365812
Inspection dates	27–28 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Sheelagh Barnes AI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Paul Harrison
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	Bosworth Road Measham, Swadlincote DE12 7LG
Telephone number	0116 305 5993
Fax number	0116 305 5993
Email address	Paul.Harrison@leics.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Measham Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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 parents, staff, outreach workers, health workers the Locality Partnership Coordinator, the Senior Local Authority Strategy Leader.

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

Information about the centre

This is a small Phase 2 centre which has been fully operating since January 2009. The centre has no up-to-date data on the proportion of local unemployment or families in receipt of benefits since 2008, when the figure was broadly in line with the national picture. The families who live around the centre are mainly of White British origin. A significant number of Polish families have moved into the area, many of whom speak English as an additional language.

The centre is open five days a week for 48 weeks of the year. It shares a site with a local primary school. There is no linked commissioned childcare. Children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are in line with those expected for their age. The centre is funded by the local authority and children centre's resources. The local authority has maintained ultimate responsibility for the governance of the centre. The body responsible for locality governance is the Locality Commissioning Partnership.

The centre works within a cluster of seven other centres in the north west Leicestershire area. The cluster is managed by a children's centre coordinator with strategic oversight provided by a Locality Partnership Coordinator.

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

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

4

Main Findings

Overall, the centre is inadequate in meeting the needs of the community, though arrangements to secure the safety and health of children and users are satisfactory. The centre is well maintained and helpful information for parents and carers is displayed in the reception area. The staff are welcoming and the majority of parents are happy with the support the centre provides. A range of activities is run in conjunction with the seven other local centres. Some of these, such as the high quality toy library and the play-bus, maximise the use of available resources over a wide geographical area. Provision across the eight centres does not take sufficient account of the long travelling distances required of users to access the activities on offer. Bus fares are reimbursed on request.

Safeguarding is satisfactory. All staff and volunteers are checked appropriately to ensure children’s safety. Risk assessments are undertaken for the majority of activities and security arrangements are good. Regular safety checks are conducted to maintain the good condition of resources. Regular courses for parents and carers focus on healthy eating and encourage children to make wise food choices. Good hygiene routines are established.

A few activities are provided directly by the children’s centre and others by commissioned services. However, the centre does not monitor systematically the quality of the provision. There is significant variation in the quality of sessions because not all those who deliver them have a full and accurate understanding of the needs of very young children.

The hard work of staff is insufficiently focused on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in the area. Health and outreach workers monitor thoroughly families with new born babies. The needs of all other vulnerable and target groups are not analysed or monitored as rigorously. The centre lacks pertinent information about the precise groups within its reach and it does not strategically provide resources when a need is identified. For example, the area surrounding the centre has comparatively high rates of teenage pregnancy but the centre has not responded to

support these potential users. Hardly any fathers attend groups at the Measham centre. The centre has little current accurate information on the characteristics of the area served, such as the proportions of families where no-one is in work. Analysis of such data was undertaken when the centre opened, but it is not regularly updated.

Apart from first aid, no adult accredited courses are undertaken by the centre. Posters and leaflets provided by Jobcentre Plus direct users to the services of other agencies but the take up of sessions is not recorded. Information is not kept about the centre's success in narrowing the achievement gap between adults. As a consequence, the centre lacks incisive tools to measure its impact on the community. The centre has provided effective sessions in translation and support for the Polish families new to the area and uptake of this provision is developing well. The centre does not formally self-evaluate its provision or impact and the development plan for the current year has not yet been created. The previous year's development plan contained no measurable targets by which success could be reported.

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate. Governance and accountability responsibilities are not consistently understood. Local health services support and develop integrated provision but other partners are not fully engaged. While staff are appropriately supervised by their own agency, the centre fails to manage and coordinate their contribution. The centre's management processes are inadequate because of weaknesses in self-evaluation; a failure to identify the needs of local families; a lack of clear targets and strategic planning to improve the lives of all vulnerable families in the reach area; insufficient rigorous monitoring of the quality of services offered; and a failure to measure the impact of actions taken. In addition, no parents are involved in the Locality Commissioning Partnership and there is no opportunity for them to put forward their views on the direction and the development of the centre. Although diversity is celebrated and discrimination tackled, the centre cannot guarantee to meet the needs of all equally well.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Gather information more effectively to:
 - ensure that services and activities are based on a sound analysis of needs
 - establish the current needs of the community and identify vulnerable groups
- Set clear and measurable targets as part of strategic development planning.
- Monitor the quality of provision more systematically so that:
 - the centre is fully aware of the quality of both directly provided and commissioned services and activities
 - action can be taken where needed to improve the quality of provision and ensure it meets the needs of users.
- Use data and its analysis to measure the impact of actions more rigorously.
- Involve parents and carers more in setting the direction of the centre by:

- empowering parents so that they feel able to make suggestions to improve services and activities
- providing parents with opportunities to meet as a group to put forward their views on the direction and development of the centre
- supporting parents to take an active role in governance of the centre on the Locality Commissioning Partnership through providing them with appropriate training, support and induction about their role and responsibilities.

How good are outcomes for users?

4

The centre provides adequate support to users in improving aspects of the health and well-being of children and families. However, the quality of provision is variable and not always well evidenced. Courses are run on weaning and healthy eating. The centre provides effective services for children with speech and language difficulties. Breastfeeding initiation and sustaining rates indicate that there has been a positive impact in breastfeeding support services across the north west Leicestershire area as a whole. Access to children's development checks, especially for those people from the Polish community, has improved. However, there is no smoking cessation support and no monitoring of how many people stop smoking. No data is available on immunisation rates. Antenatal services are not run on site, but users are directed to other appropriate centres. There is insufficient consideration of the provision for users with mental health needs, although individual vulnerable users, such as those experiencing post-natal depression, are supported effectively by health services. Despite the rate of teenage conception in north west Leicestershire being the highest in the country, plans to reduce such incidents or provide effective support for this group are inadequate.

Child protection is given a suitably high priority. All staff have undertaken training, which is updated regularly. The centre's child protection policy clearly states the named person responsible and notes what actions to take if there are any accusations against staff. 'Home-Start' undertakes suitable checks on all their volunteers. Staff are trained in first aid and a first aid course was also run for parents. One parent remarked that the training was 'inspirational'. Risk assessments are undertaken for activities and for the different parts of the centre. Although fire safety procedures are clearly displayed they are not frequently practiced. There has been one review under the Common Assessment Framework recently which is being monitored well. However, a recommendation for an early years placement identified in October has been slow to be processed.

The enjoyment and achievement of young children who attend the linked primary school is good. However, the centre does not record the progress or development of the children who attend the sessions it runs. Records are not kept of the achievements of adults whom the centre signposts to other provision, such as adult learning. The enjoyment and achievement in the sessions observed varied significantly. As a result of such variation, achievement and enjoyment are

inadequate. Users do not make sufficient progress in developing skills to prepare them for the future. A course to develop adults' confidence is attended currently by only four people. Case studies of those receiving individual support from the Citizens Advice Bureau, run at the centre, indicate that a few of these users have improved their prospects. No overall records are kept at the centre of those obtaining work or qualifications through courses to which they have been directed. The centre does not know how many parents and carers are improving their economic stability and independence.

Most children in the sessions observed, show satisfactory understanding of the needs of others. Staff treat all with respect and this is generally reflected by parents and carers. Users are given the opportunity to comment on the sessions they have attended. However, there is no means by which the opinions of parents and carers can directly influence the direction of the development of the centre. The Locality Commissioning Partnership which is responsible for all eight centres has no parent representatives. There is no forum for users to discuss strategic development. As a result, users do not have sufficient opportunities to express their views and contribute to decision-making.

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	4
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	4
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	4

How good is the provision?

4

The assessment of the needs of children who are served by the centre is not undertaken systematically. Although some professionals evaluate the needs of the children who attend sessions they run and modify what they do accordingly, others do not. Children's development is not tracked formally as the same children do not always attend. Some services delivering commissioned courses are insufficiently aware of young children's needs and development. As a result, some sessions are noisy and fail to move learning forward appropriately.

Assessment by health services ensures that requirements are met satisfactorily.

Worthwhile courses are run for healthy eating and in support of those with specific needs, such as post-natal depression. However, the centre does not have a sufficient knowledge of its users' needs. The centre's contribution to the assessment of the needs of families in the reach area is inadequate. This lack of understanding has a negative impact on what the centre provides for users.

Because of weaknesses in the use of assessment, the range of services does not meet the needs of the most vulnerable, although the needs of Polish families are being met well. The needs of teenage parents and pregnant teenagers are areas acknowledged by the centre as requiring development. Very few fathers attend courses or activities at the centre and no courses are run specifically for them. The centre has no up-to-date information on the proportions of workless households in the area since 2008, or the percentage reached by the centre. Although individual advice is given through interviews with the Citizens' Advice Bureau on the benefits available, no systematic coverage of this need is made and no overall records are kept of families who have been helped. Learning opportunities provided, particularly for adults, do not lead to measurable improvements in learning, development or raising standards, such as increasing the percentage of those in work.

The quality of care and support given to young children and users who have identified needs is adequate although variable. For some families the support is making a discernable difference, for others the impact is more limited. Support for a few families, through outreach services, has helped them in a time of difficulty or crisis. However, support for those who wish to give up smoking or seek work is not strategically planned and delivered.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	4
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	4
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	4
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?

4

The local authority has retained overall responsibility for the leadership and management of the centre. The lines of decision-making are clearly defined and known to all. Each separate agency supervises its own staff, but this approach is not yet fully integrated into the centre's management process. Some key partners are

engaged in supporting and developing integrated provision, but other partners are not yet fully engaged. There are systems to enable all those responsible to work satisfactorily together in an integrated manner. Contractual arrangements and service level agreements between partners are understood. Safeguarding arrangements are secure and satisfactory. Child protection arrangements are appropriate and training is fully up to date. The policy and procedures are given a suitably high priority.

While there is a wish to do the best for all users, good intentions are not supported by systematic, strategic development planning or rigorous monitoring. Development planning does not link effectively with an accurate measure and analysis of users' needs. The plan for the current year is incomplete. General statements are made in the plan for 2009/2010, such as improving the rates of breastfeeding mothers, but these aims are not supported with measurable targets. Local needs analysis is weak. This restricts the ability of the centre to target services effectively towards narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged families and others. The extent to which resources are identified and targeted at specific and current needs lacks drive. The use of resources such as the toy library is effective. However, there is too little emphasis on systematically matching the use of resources to the measured needs of the most vulnerable in the area. As a result the centre provides inadequate value for money.

Centre staff are focused on promoting equality and diversity and this aspect of the centre's work is effective with Polish families. Because the centre has insufficient up-to-date information on the community it serves, it is difficult for it to accurately evaluate how well it reflects the needs of that community. Some generalities about the most vulnerable groups are known, but effective steps are not taken to engage with key target groups, such as those families who have no-one in work or pregnant teenagers. No systematic equality impact assessments are available.

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	4
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	4
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	4
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3

The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	4
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	4

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

The inspection of Measham Primary School.

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 Measham Sure Start Children's Centre on 27–28 January 2011. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Thank you for helping us to find out about your children's centre. You told us about the things you particularly liked and about the work the centre does. We know many of you have enjoyed some of the sessions greatly. We also know that the centre helps you to keep your children healthy and that a number of you have enjoyed the sessions on tempting your children to eat more healthy food such as vegetables. We agree that the centre is bright and attractive and the staff are welcoming. You told us that you feel safe at the centre and so do your children. We judge that the safety and safeguarding at the centre is satisfactory.

There are a number of things that we want the managers of the centre to improve. One of them is to give you a voice in what the centre does and how it develops. We know that you are asked for your views on what you think about the sessions you attend, and some of you also write in the comments book. We have asked the centre to include some of you on the advisory board, as happens in other centres. This way you may have more input into what the centre does.

When the centre was set up, there was an analysis of the needs of your community. This information was used to plan the provision to meet your needs. This information has not been rigorously updated. The centre does not have an up-to-date, accurate view of the community and those who need help. We have asked the centre leaders to make sure they have a more accurate knowledge of the needs of the families who live within the reach area so that they can plan the most appropriate courses for you. We know some of the other centres run courses that you can attend, but that this can mean you having to make a long bus journey.

The centre's planning states what it hopes will be improved, but it does not say clearly what the current position is and by how much the leaders want each aspect to be improved. This lack of clarity makes it difficult for managers to evaluate whether improvement has been as good as they had hoped. When staff direct you to what is being delivered at another centre, we know that they do not always follow up to find out if you managed to get there easily and if it was what you wanted. The staff know some of you very well and the support given is just what is needed. For example, the help given to those of you who speak Polish is good. Many of you have also had good advice from the Citizen's Advice Bureau representative. We have asked the centre to provide more of you with advice on benefits and financial support.

Some of the people who run courses for you and your children have a great deal of experience and knowledge of the needs of very young children and how they learn and develop. This understanding is variable and some sessions are noisy and do not help children to listen, learn and concentrate. At present, the centre expects all the groups who run courses to monitor how well they are run for themselves. They keep a record of how many attend and what the course is dealing with. We have asked them to also check the quality, on occasion, so that they can make sure it is always good enough.

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