

Inspection report for Sure Start Central Link

Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	362586
Inspection dates	2-3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Sue Pepper HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Deborah Jones
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not Applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY363360 The Beacon Nursery

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre staff and senior managers, the advisory board, health professionals, local community partners, user groups and parents and carers. They observed the centre's and partners' work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Sure Start Central Link Children's Centre operates from a renovated and extended church hall. The centre evolved from a local Sure Start programme. It was designated as a Phase 1 centre in 2006. It provides the full core offer of services with the support of the community outreach team and partners. The outreach team also operate from Windlehurst Cottage which is based close to the centre. The centre is part of the North West partnership in St Helens. A range of supporting services, including health and adult training courses are on site or within the reach area. Parents and carers are signposted to a range of universal and specialist services.

The majority of the population in the Sure Start Central Link ward is of White British heritage with a small percentage of minority ethnic groups. Recent figures show that 1,051 children under five years live in the reach area and 37% of these families benefit from the childcare element of working tax credits. This is an area with pockets of deprivation and some more affluent areas. One area falls within the top 10% least deprived in the country, whilst another is in the top 10% most deprived and disadvantaged. Several areas have high social and economic deprivation which falls within the top five per cent most deprived.

A high proportion of children enter school with skills below those expected for their age. The Early Years Foundation Stage is delivered through various groups. The centre and Windlehurst Cottage both have crèche facilities. The centre has close links with The Beacon Nursery which provides full day care and education for up to

64 children under five years of age of which no more than 27 may be under two years. The nursery is subject to separate Early Years inspection arrangements. The inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre is open from 8am until 6pm, Monday to Friday, 52 weeks of the year. The centre has an established advisory board which is made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents.

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

This is a good and improving children's centre which promotes good outcomes for children and families across all areas. The promotion of healthy lifestyles and the quality of the provision of care, guidance and support are outstanding. A typical view of users is, 'They go the extra mile here'. Consequently, the centre and its staff have an excellent reputation.

The centre workers are described by partners as a 'strong team'. The highly-skilled and effective family support team, day care coordinator, community participation worker and the children's centre educator work well together under the successful leadership of the centre manager. The strong volunteer programme complements the centre's good work. The centre has responded well to a period of change in the management structure and budget cuts. Self-evaluation of the centre is mostly accurate. This commitment demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

Effective systems are in place to assess most services and users' views are used well to shape future services. Data on the work of a core partner, Jobcentre Plus is not available, which hinders the centre's evaluation of their service. The development plans are comprehensive but not all are clear regarding the expected success criteria, which impacts on the centre's ability to measure its success rigorously.

This is a very inclusive centre due to good attention to equality and diversity. The centre was described as being easily accessible and parents and carers remarked

that workers are 'exceptionally good at making everyone feel very welcome'. Parental surveys overwhelmingly demonstrate that many families are highly satisfied with services provided. Attention to safeguarding is good. All parents and carers said they 'feel very safe' at the well-established centre and they described a feeling of a 'collective looking out for all children.'

Close partnership working is in place with most partners. Several outstanding health initiatives result in families adopting much more healthy lifestyles. Families in real poverty or who have difficult circumstances receive excellent support through effective early intervention and preventative work which helps to prevent further escalation of issues. This is when the centre's 'Think family' approach is at its best, resulting in practical support for those families who need additional help. The centre workers understand their community well and the difficulties that some families have to face. As a result, some parents said 'I wouldn't have got through without the centre, they help with everything here.'

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that information on the impact of the Jobcentre Plus service is obtained to enable the centre to evaluate improvements in economic stability for families.
- Improve the centre's development plans to ensure all targets are specific and can be clearly measured to evidence success.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Families' learning about healthy lifestyles is outstanding. The uptake of immunisation in the area is above the national average. Strong links have been developed with 'St Helens Healthy Living' and the 'Health Improvement' team who help support people in making healthier choices such as giving up smoking. Excellent support is in place for mothers who wish to breastfeed which is leading to the uptake of breastfeeding constantly increasing. For example, 17 mothers have sustained breastfeeding out of 25 who attended the 'Breast Buddies' group. The breastfeeding champion goes to great lengths to ensure mothers-to-be are identified and the benefits of breastfeeding are known to them. Last year the 19% breastfeeding target was met, the centre is currently at 21% and now aiming to increase to 23%. Parents said, 'I wouldn't have managed without the help of the workers here'. Consequently, many parents have a good attitude to promoting children's well-being.

The vibrant café with its warm welcoming atmosphere prepares healthy home-made meals at low cost and this draws users into the centre. Obesity is above the national average but data show a slight decrease from last year. Parents and carers are increasingly gaining confidence to encourage their children to eat healthily by attending 'Lets Get Cooking' and 'Cooking on a Budget' sessions. Families have the opportunity to eat good quality food in a social setting alongside their family whilst

they seek advice. Some parents and carers said this was their first opportunity to sit down and eat a meal with their family and they described the experience as, 'perfect'. The relaxed community spirit is used well to engage mothers-to-be, targeted families and the wider community. This promotes good community cohesion. The excellent 'Kitchen Garden' and the 'Tots Plot' based at the allotments provide many worthwhile opportunities which include growing produce. Physical activity outdoors involves all the family and encourages them to develop a more positive attitude towards exercise and healthy living.

Parents and carers have built very trusting relationships with workers at the centre due to their very open and honest approach. They described the staff as, 'brilliant' and 'fantastic'. Very good early intervention and support helps to keep families from escalating further up the continuum of concern. Outreach workers are highly skilled and intuitive and volunteers are carefully matched to the families they support. Excellent attention to those families referred to the centre leads to good results. Children in need and looked-after children are successfully identified and supported well. Several parents stated, 'I don't think I would have managed without Sure Start'.

Children's understanding of how to keep safe is developing well due to staff actively engaging with them and providing them with gentle reminders. They learn about road safety through role play and outings. Some families feel much safer in their own homes after initial assessments have led to the centre providing them with safety equipment. Many parents and carers have completed 'first aid' training. The knowledge they have gained has contributed to the significant decrease in the number of children admitted to hospital as a result of an injury over the last three years.

Many parents confirmed that the centre's pilot of the new pre-birth 'Triple P' parenting programme had made a great difference to their confidence and helped them prepare to deal with children's challenging behaviour more positively. Attendance on parenting courses is good and learning early intervention strategies is an effective way of support and guiding parents to change behaviours and prevent issues arising. As a consequence of attending courses, parenting skills have improved and some reported that they had better relationships with their children now. Parents have a better understanding of the importance of communication and personal and social development, and therefore, they contribute more to these aspects of their child's learning.

Good volunteer training and work placements have led to many users developing their skills and experience. The provision of child care helps retention on courses. Teenage pregnancies are high and groups like 'Keeping In Touch' (KIT) and 'Connexions' provide advice for parents and parents-to-be. As a result, the number of young people returning to education has increased dramatically over the last three years.

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	1
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	2
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?

2

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding due to early intervention and effective partnership working. There has been a 25% increase of new birth visits made before a child is three months old. Parents typically said, 'I don't know what I would do without the centre'. There are many attractive and informative displays within the centre. Health colleagues are extremely positive regarding the centre's ability to empower particularly hard-to-reach parents to adopt healthier lifestyles. Home visits enable a more 'holistic view' of families' needs. For example, joint outreach visits with health colleagues prevent parents and carers having to repeat information and it enables them to consider and agree a plan of action to suit their specific needs. A large number of family contact sessions are held at Windlehurst Cottage outreach base due to its more homely appeal.

Good assessment systems set high expectations for those families who are most vulnerable or hard-to-reach and so ensure that additional support is swiftly provided. This dedication to helping these families to succeed has paid dividends as the centre data shows a 20% increase in the number of families and children registered from the most deprived areas. Good systems are in place for joint assessments of any children with additional needs and respite crèches provide children with the necessary stimulation and give parents a much needed break. Disabled parents and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly well supported. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used well to ensure appropriate support is given to families and children where it is most needed. 'Learning journey' assessment records are being introduced to all groups in order to improve and standardise systems. This is intended to enhance the sharing of information when children attend several settings.

Parents and children enjoy attending drop-in sessions and groups like 'Share', 'Funky Feet' and the 'Musical Minis' where they can join in the fun of learning together

through play. Crèche, key and link workers know children well and they tailor learning and development opportunities to meet children's individual needs. As a result, children are developing good skills for the future across all six areas of learning.

Good quality day care is provided in the nursery off site. The range of services and activities provided are regularly changed to meet service users' needs. Several parents have been trained to conduct research into the difference Sure Start services have made to families' lives, which has produced many positive affirmations of the centre's good impact and has led to several developments and changes in services. For example, the thriving breastfeeding support group was re-named 'Breast Buddies' which parents suggested was a more positive name. Families from minority ethnic backgrounds are well supported and access 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL) classes. The children's 'Voices' group provides an opportunity for young people to have fun and develop their own ideas; they say that they value being 'really really' listened to. The role of men is promoted through 'Men And Their Children' (MATCH) which encourages the involvement of males spending quality time with their children. Fathers and grandfathers attend a good range of outdoor activities and events enjoying greater involvement with children. Good links have been made with some local schools but not all schools in the reach area. The centre is working towards building stronger partnerships with all schools in order to promote children's more seamless transitions into school.

The centre has recruited two trainees using the 'Future Jobs Fund' programme. A good variety of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) courses are delivered at the centre. Accredited and non-accredited parent training programmes are delivered each term. Parents' and carers progress is monitored and adult training is generally well attended. Recruitment using the modern apprentice scheme has had some success with an apprentice obtaining permanent employment within the local authority. The centre is committed to providing future training opportunities and achievements are celebrated.

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	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

The local authority has agreed a new model for the management structure and governance of the centre, which it is implementing. In times of uncertainty all staff were positive and staff morale was high which led to the outcome-driven services to users being unaffected. The dedicated staff team are described by partners like 'the cavalry' due to their prompt and efficient response to difficult situations. Most partnerships with other agencies are strong which leads to more integrated provision and better working practice.

The centre manager has the passion and drive to make a difference to improving the life chances for families in the reach area. Her vision is to create particularly strong leadership skills within those members of the senior leadership team. She is a reflective practitioner who has a solution based approach to any barriers and is instrumental in helping to standardise 'good practice' across the borough by piloting new ways of working. She is described by a partner as an 'enabler, who can give direction and is a gentle source of affirmation to others'. Performance management and supervision are well-established and regular meetings ensure a good flow of communication is promoted. New ideas are valued and welcomed in the planning and co-ordination of services. Gap analysis has been used well to analyse where more work can be done to engage those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The manager acknowledges that data could be used even more effectively to set specific targets which can then be clearly measured to clearly show success.

The centre is actively encouraging more parents to join 'Parent And Children Together' (PACT) and the advisory board to help them with their decision making. The PACT group offers the centre strong support through advertising, fund raising and arranging fun events and activities. The advisory board is multi-agency and includes a range of partners; the centre is working on further increasing membership to strengthen the challenge and support already in place.

Established evaluation of most services enables staff to monitor the impact of the difference made to families' outcomes. The manager is aware that some services do not provide evidence of their impact and this has been requested to further strengthen knowledge of the difference they are making. Financial monitoring is carried out regularly. Volunteers are a real strength, they are carefully matched to the families they support to enable greater empathy of different situations. Some volunteers have subsequently become 'home grown' members of the centre staff. Sharing of staff skills, expertise and resources with Moss Bank Children's Centre and the other partners is effective and promotes good value for money.

Attention to safeguarding is high priority. A wide range of policies underpins effective guidance. Robust recruitment and vetting procedures are in place and good attention is paid to promoting safe working practice. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively to safeguard and support families whose difficult circumstances

make them vulnerable.

This is an inclusive centre. Regular opportunities are provided to learn about different festivals, other cultures and beliefs. The centre has developed good relationships with St Thomas Church's parishioners and childminders. All families and members of the wider community are welcomed and valued. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are extremely well supported because superb attention is given to meeting their individual needs. Inequalities are tackled well. For example, a two-year old drop-in group was provided for children who did not meet the threshold of the two-year old pilot scheme.

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	2
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 Sure Start Central Link Children's Centre on the 2 and 3 March 2011 and we judged the centre as good. We found the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the quality of care, guidance and support to be outstanding. Families who need additional support or whose circumstances may make them vulnerable are given quick and efficient support. Excellent outreach work is extremely well supported by volunteers. Many of you told us about the wonderful support you have received. This is because the centre has high expectations of you all and staff are determined to provide you with the very best support they can.

You expressed high levels of satisfaction with the centre and your regular attendance shows how much you value the good quality provision and resources. We can see why most of you are highly satisfied with the services provided. Some of you told us, 'Staff genuinely care here and really look after you'.

The centre is easily accessible from the town and well-established in the community and the workers have formed many good links with partners. The centre staff, health colleagues and adult learning services combine their professional experience, knowledge and skills extremely well to meet your individual needs effectively. They work closely together to assess any difficult situations. They know what support they, or others, can provide for you in times of crisis and have built many trusting relationships with you and your families due to their open and honest approach. A few of you told us what a huge difference the centre has made to your lives.

This is a very inclusive centre where everyone is highly valued and difference within the community is celebrated. The promotion of equality and diversity is good due to the close attention paid to equality. The centre provides a safe place where families can be sure to receive an extremely friendly welcome and outstanding quality care, guidance and support. Those of you we spoke to in the community café told us you appreciated, 'always seeing a friendly face' and the great services that you can rely on.

The centre is extremely successfully in promoting healthy lifestyles. The inspectors thoroughly enjoyed eating healthy meals alongside you in the excellent café facility, which is very welcoming and promotes community cohesion well. We can see why some of you who were attending for the first time said you would definitely come back again. Low cost bags of food provided by 'Shoots' are very popular and enable many families to regularly enjoy eating more fresh fruit and vegetables. We know many of you have enjoyed attending the superb 'Kitchen Garden' and the allotment where you can enjoy many worthwhile and enjoyable experiences, which include growing flowers, fruit and vegetables yourselves.

Those of you who have joined the baby massage groups were positive about the benefits of using massage to improve relationships with your baby. We can see the

'Funky Feet' group, where physical activity is promoted, is a great success as the attendance at this group has more than doubled.

You said that the 'Chit-Chat' group was great fun and very supportive in increasing your understanding of the importance of play and how young children learn and develop. The 'Triple P' courses in particular are well attended and have helped to develop your confidence and self-esteem and taught you better ways of managing your children's behaviour. The courses have helped many of you to develop a more positive attitude to life.

It was a pleasure to see how hard some of you have worked who have joined the PACT group arranging family events in the community and running successful fund raisers. The centre is hoping that more of you will be interested in becoming more actively involved in decision-making and supporting the success of the centre. We have asked the centre to make sure that all their development plans have clear goals which can be easily checked so that staff can gather evidence of the centre's success.

Many of you have trained to be volunteers and your work greatly enhances that of the centre workers. We have asked the centre to make sure any services Jobcentre Plus provide for you are monitored to ensure they know the type of support you receive which may lead to future employment.

We would like to thank everyone who was willing to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and wish you every success in the future.

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