

Inspection report for Summer House Children's Centre

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Linked school if applicable	N/A
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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 centre co-ordinator and senior co-ordinator, parents, health representatives, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, the local authority representative, front line staff, members of the outcomes groups and a range of children's centre partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Summer House was designated as a children's centre in March 2006 and built on a Sure Start Local Programme. It is a phase one centre offering the full core offer, with childcare provided through a linked early years setting. It is situated on the site of Leamington Primary and Nursery School. There are approximately 862 families with children aged birth to five years within the centre's reach area. The majority of families are of White British heritage. The centre is located in one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas of the country. There are high levels of unemployment within the centre's reach area, with increasing numbers of children under five living in workless households.

Data suggests that people leave school with few qualifications, often resulting in low paid work leading to a high number of families claiming both in and out of work benefits. Children's levels on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are well below those expected for their age with 34.5% attaining profile scores of 78 plus points, although results show an improvement in narrowing of the gap by 3%. Communication, language and literacy scores show an improvement but at 45.9% are below local authority and national averages.

The centre's governance is currently provided by Nottinghamshire Community Health. This will move to Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust in April 2011 which will be the newly formed provider arm for healthcare in Nottinghamshire. There are three

outcomes groups in the centre covering the aspects of Every Child Matters, which include enjoying and achieving, healthy lifestyles and staying safe, making a positive contribution and economic well-being. These groups have the dual role of advisory board for the centre. There is a parents' forum, and parent and carer representation on each of the three outcomes groups. This is one of two centres managed by the centre coordinator, with centre staff working across both this centre and the New Woods centre. There are 11 centres in the district managed by the senior coordinator, and 58 centres in the Nottinghamshire local authority area. The centre also runs sessions in the Eastside Community Centre.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

The excellent support provided by this outstanding centre helps users to address the stresses and difficulties they face in their everyday lives, improving both their situation and the outcomes for their children. Centre staff are highly adaptable and offer flexible provision for families to meet their specific needs. This is based on excellent assessment of individual needs resulting in individually tailored services and support. 'I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for the centre' and 'this centre has been a lifesaver' are typical comments from users.

There are excellent partnerships with local agencies resulting in extremely well co-ordinated provision. As a result, best use is made of resources to enable the centre to continue to meet users' needs in challenging times. Safeguarding is given the highest priority at the centre. Systems, policies and procedures, services and partnerships ensure the well-being and safety of users, exemplify best practice and have led to impressive improvements to users' well-being.

There are very small numbers of families of Black and minority ethnic backgrounds in the community. The centre rightly identifies this as a priority for the coming year and has plans to further engage with, and support, these families. Where the centre identifies needs for the minority ethnic community they are very quick to put appropriate support in place, such as supporting parents to understand the school system in England. Children and parents with special educational needs and/or

disabilities are well supported and every effort is made to ensure they are included in all the centre's activities.

Outcomes are outstanding in nearly all areas. Where they are good it is because the impact of some of the services and support cannot be clearly seen as yet. For example, there is a culture in the reach area of bottle feeding children, with breastfeeding rates declining. As a result, the centre has introduced short-, medium- and long-term plans and has also trained parents as peer supporters. This is intended to help support mothers who may be struggling to continue with breastfeeding. However, plans are in the early stages and their impact is not yet evident on breastfeeding rates.

Users have plenty of opportunities to engage with the centre, challenge them and make decisions. There is a strong parents' forum and parents and carers are represented on each of the outcomes groups that focus on specific aspects of the centre's work such as 'enjoying and achieving'. All parents spoken to say that they can talk to staff about any concerns or with any ideas for activities and improvements. There is a comments box and a 'you said-we did' board for users to put on suggestions, ideas or concerns. However, although professionals think the Outcomes Groups meetings will be more effective and better targeted, the new governance arrangements are still in the early stages.

The centre carefully evaluates the impact of each activity and individual service provided. With this information and a culture of self reflection, the centre has an accurate understanding of the progress it is making towards achieving the challenging targets that have been set. Staff have a very detailed understanding of the impact of their services on users. Consequently, the centre demonstrates an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Continue to develop relationships with the Black and minority ethnic community to ensure:
 - those who do not speak English as their first language are fully included and encouraged to take part in the activities and services provided by the centre
 - families are fully involved in the centre, are able to challenge the centre and be part of the decision-making process.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The health of users in the centre's reach area is improving in many ways. For example, the rate of childhood obesity is declining for those in the Reception year but this is still to be seen in older children and adults. The take-up rate for immunisations is improving and at 98.4% is above national and local authority levels. Users talk enthusiastically about the support they have had to improve children's

diets and the excellent baby massage classes that improve and support attachment and emotional well-being. The centre makes excellent use of its outdoor space, and provides interesting activities such as 'Wriggle Jiggle' to encourage children, parents and carers to be active, resulting in enhanced physical and emotional well-being. Parents and carers are keen to extend these activities to include buggy walks as they can see the impact of the physical activity in which their children are engaged.

The ability of parents and carers to ensure that their children grow up in a safe environment is well developed. This is due to the extremely high priority that the centre places on the safety of children and families. All children have a home-safety assessment from the health visitor at about nine months of age. Those who are eligible also receive home-safety equipment. Any safety concerns are shared with centre workers, with parent's agreement, so that specific support and guidance can be given where needed. Users say they feel very safe in the centre. Parenting sessions such as the 'Incredible Years' clearly show significant and sustained improvement to families' lives. The centre can provide evidence where its work with the hardest to reach families has resulted in engagement with the centre. Evidence shows that in some cases the intervention and support of the centre, especially through their outreach work, has helped to prevent children from being taken into care. The strong partnership with social services ensures that children with a child protection plan are extremely well supported, and services are effectively coordinated. The Common Assessment Framework is used very well for the early identification of children's additional needs and to ensure coordinated service provision where there is multi-agency involvement. Many of the centre staff are trained as lead professionals and all follow the assessment toolkit to ensure assessment of need is consistently applied.

The percentage of children achieving 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile is lower than the national average, although the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is reducing. Excellent partnership working has been established by the centre teacher with the childcare team, the linked setting and childminders to improve children's learning and development, especially in relation to communication, language and literacy. This can be seen in the improvement in children's learning profiles. It is anticipated that this work will be further reflected in the profile scores this year. The centre has set up transitions groups to ensure children are very well prepared for their transfer into nursery and primary school. The centre has now handed over the running of the groups to the schools but staff are still on hand to support them. They also spend time in the school so that parents, carers and children have a face they know when they start there. The success with these groups has resulted in other schools in the area, including secondary schools, implementing a similar programme. The centre's teacher is currently engaged in identifying those families who have not taken up their entitlement to the Nursery Education Grant to ensure that all children in the reach area are well prepared for starting school.

There is a wide variety of courses and activities designed to support parents and carers in their engagement with children's learning and development, and they are

having a real impact. Parents and carers are rightly proud of the confidence they now have to influence and support their children's development. There are excellent individualised packages of training for basic skills to support those who are hardest to reach and whose own experiences of education have been poor in the past. This includes one to one sessions for those who need individual support in improving their basic skills.

Parents and carers start by participating in activities and many go on to attend training courses leading to some gaining qualifications. The accredited volunteer training helps to prepare parents and carers for work and they are keen to put something back into the centre for all the support they have received. Parents and carers say that the 'Incredible Years' is an exceptional programme that is changing the way they manage their children's behaviour and support their development. One parent commented 'I felt useless and alone before but after the training I feel much better about myself and how I can support my children'.

Children's behaviour is exceptional, resulting in positive relationships with staff and with each other. The parent helper programme provides a first step for many parents to further engage in the life and work of the centre. Many of these parents go on to volunteer with the centre and say that they have gained so much from the centre they want to give something back. Parents and carers say that the centre has helped them to make new friends and feel less isolated. They will turn to the centre in times of crisis and sometimes just for reassurance. Translation and interpretation services are provided for families with little or no English. Increasing participation rates show 100% registration with 58% accessing services. The centre acknowledges that it has been hard work to get some families to engage as nearly all of them fit the hard to reach criteria. However, the centre has taken the time to build the trust of people in the area. This is now having an effect on their engagement with the centre, although staff know that there is still more to do. There is a strong parents' forum, known as 'Parent Voices in the Community'. Some of these parents and carers are also members of the three outcomes groups. The centre encourages users to comment on post-it notes that can be placed in a confidential comments box or displayed on the 'you said-we did' board. Explanations are always given where requests cannot be met. There are very few minority ethnic families in the reach area with the latest local area data showing 35 families of the 862 are from minority ethnic backgrounds. These families are spread across the estate. The centre has gained the involvement of an expectant parent who has English as a second language, and who is keen to secure greater involvement from minority ethnic families.

The centre has established close links with adult learning and training providers. The local college runs courses at the centre. Case studies show that where parents and carers have started by accessing centre services, they have completed training and gone on to an accredited volunteer course. This has resulted in some parents gaining employment, including working in the centre itself. The Capacity Building Worker links specifically with families who have had bad learning experiences and have no confidence to go to a group session. One-to-one sessions are provided, leading to literacy and numeracy qualifications. There are excellent links with Jobcentre Plus

and also with Connexions. The lone-parent advisor refers parents and carers to the centre if they have barriers to getting back into work. She also provides information that helps the centre to identify and prioritise removal of these barriers. The advisor attends the centre monthly to hold interviews and mix with the parents and carers in their group sessions. Plans are in place for the centre to provide support at the job centre when parents attend interviews there. The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has been an excellent partner, helping families with problems of debt and benefit entitlement. Over £242,000 worth of debt were dealt with in the past year and £75,000 of benefits claimed due to CAB work. However, this centre service is to end in three weeks due to cutbacks. The centre is investigating all alternatives to on-site support. The CAB services will still provide advice but no longer in the centre. They are still waiting to hear about this service at the Eastside Centre and are also looking at other alternatives for counselling and debt advice.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

Outreach and centre staff are extremely successful at using activities such as home visits and 'Stay and Play' sessions to carefully assess users' needs. From the very first home visit, which is offered to all new parents, needs are carefully assessed. Services are then very successfully personalised to ensure improvements to the health, safety and achievement of users. Consequently, users gain great trust in centre staff that enables them to gain confidence and engage successfully in the services offered. Partners from other agencies comment on how the work of the centre has supported families and made a difference to their lives. One partner, who has worked in the area for over 25 years, says that she has seen slow but steady improvements in the area and worries what would happen without the centre being there.

By working in a firm and persistent way, the centre ensures that those who are hardest to reach, and need support the most, do in fact receive it. Case studies show the centre has been successful in engaging some families where other agencies have not succeeded. Evidence shows that families often turn to the centre in times of

crisis as they are confident that they will be well supported and their well-being is of the highest priority. Parents and carers can give clear examples of where support from the centre has had a real impact on them and their children. 'I only wish it did not stop at five' was the comment from one parent who has greatly valued the individual support she has received from the Health and Family Support Worker.

Partnership working ensures that childcare provision to support access to courses is effective. This enables those who are isolated to attend sessions in the centre to promote their own learning and enjoyment and that of their children. The 'Rowdy Robots' encouraged fathers to be fully involved in their children's play. More consultation is being carried out to ensure the timings of activities for fathers meet their needs. The centre has access to a room in the fire station and use of the outdoor area, including a pond, which is to be used for fathers to meet and play with their children. Fathers also attend sessions such as 'Baby Massage' and healthy eating. Fathers spoken to say that they are made to feel welcome at all the centre's services and activities and enjoy being fully involved in their children's learning and development. The centre's teacher provides targeted and effective support to early years providers in the reach area. She works closely with the linked childcare provider to ensure the quality of learning and care provided to some of the most vulnerable children in the area is of a high standard. Engagement with teenage parents is improving and the centre has plans to take services to young parents and carers where they do not feel able to come into the centre.

Users rightly recognise the centre as a place of great safety. The centre has very successfully established itself as the first place to come if users need help and advice. As one parent reported: 'You feel that you are listened to and that you know your children best'. When you walk through the door you receive a very warm welcome and greeting from reception staff. The centre knows who to get in touch with and, if staff are not able to help, they know who to contact. Users report how much they enjoy socialising with the friends they have met at the centre.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
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?

1

There are strong links between strategic planning, management and provision. Regular meetings between the senior coordinator and the local authority ensures

everyone is clear about the centre's aims and enable all those responsible to work in an integrated way. There are clear lines of accountability and all staff are clear about their responsibilities. Staff receive excellent day-to-day management and guidance from the centre coordinator but also have access to effective professional supervision related to their specific roles. Centre staff have lead roles, with excellent opportunities for professional development that arise from focused and supportive management arrangements. The monthly meetings and the annual conversation between the senior coordinator and the local authority ensure that both have a joint understanding of the aims of the centre. This results in well-aligned priorities that identify both local and national needs. It also ensures services have the most impact and resources are targeted effectively. The outcomes groups include partners such as health, schools, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, and parents and carers. However, although the 'enjoying and achieving' outcomes group has been running successfully for nine years, the other two outcomes groups are yet to meet. Professionals say they think the new structure will help the meetings to be more focused and targeted but this has yet to be demonstrated.

Partner agencies hold the centre in very high regard. A very effective relationship has been established so that the centre can ensure that services are of a very high quality for the users. Feedback is regularly sought from partners about the impact of the centre and if there is anything they can do to improve. Consultation events include a simple form for children to express their views such as through the use of 'smiley' faces. The centre ensures that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported and have an equal opportunity to communicate their views. Sign language is used throughout the centre's work and the sign of the month is displayed in reception and other areas encouraging staff, children and parents to learn new signs to aid communication.

Excellent use is made of both quantitative and qualitative data. Responses from users and case studies are expertly combined to shape services. The centre coordinator rightly considers that numbers are only the starting point for analysis and that further interrogation of data is needed for it to be meaningful. This guarantees outstanding value for money because services are so accurately targeted to users' needs. The centre uses a range of measures very well to demonstrate clearly its success in improving lives. Staff constantly evaluate, monitor and reflect on their provision through rigorous, searching analysis and self-challenge. The centre is fully aware of the literacy issues in the area and ensures that all users have the opportunity to put forward their views and receive information through face-to-face support from centre workers.

Safeguarding practice and protocols for making referrals, sharing relevant information and helping families in time of crisis are exemplary. All staff have attended safeguarding training and know what to do if they have any concerns. This ensures that all staff are aware of child protection issues and are well supported by the systems in place. Risk assessments are detailed and consider not only the physical safety of users but risks related to lone working and managing crisis. All required checks have been carried out and the centre is rigorous in its monitoring of

access to the centre. This ensures users are safe and can feel confident that their children are being well cared for. Social services rightly see the centre as a place of safety and hold contact meetings at the centre.

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	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
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	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Summer House Children's Centre on the 9 and 10 March 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

The very strong leadership of the senior coordinator and the centre coordinator, alongside the work of the dedicated team, have provided you and your children with a wide range of excellent services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs.

Many of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities, and have benefited from the services provided through the centre. Those of you who spoke to us said that your children's centre is a friendly and welcoming place. Many of you added that you do not know what you would have done without the support provided by the centre.

Those of you who use the centre are now very much better at staying safe and healthy and providing for your families. Many of you are working very hard to improve your skills because of the encouragement of the centre staff. Your children are well catered for through the activities such as 'Parent and Toddler' and 'Under ones group' to help you to better understand how to support their learning. This, plus the well organised transitions groups, means that they settle well into local nurseries and make much better progress than they would if they had not benefited from the centre's services. It was good to see so many fathers becoming involved in the activities in the centre.

We think that with the centre's encouragement many of you now make an excellent contribution to the centre services and the life of the community. It was very pleasing to speak to so many confident adults who take pride in their achievements. These ranged from being more able to deal with children's behaviour to gaining employment. Some of you are very rightly proud of becoming volunteers to enable you to give something back to the centre for all the help and support it has given you.

The care, guidance and support that you and your children receive are excellent. This is because the staff are very successful at helping you to decide how to improve your lives and then making sure that you access the right services to do this. Those of you we spoke to said how much they appreciated that there is always someone to help when you need advice. Many of you who have felt isolated and alone with your problems say you have made friends as a result of the centre's work.

The centre coordinator and all the centre staff understand your needs extremely well, and those of your children, and they check carefully that they continue to do an excellent job. They show that they are determined to improve the lives of users even more. They have an impressive track record so far, so we have no doubt that the excellent work will continue.

There are very few families from Black or minority ethnic communities in your centre's reach area. Some families are now becoming more involved in centre activities but we have asked the centre to continue to develop its work with these families so that they can fully benefit from centre services and become more involved in its work.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts and feelings about the centre. We would especially like to thank those of you who welcomed us into your homes and allowed us to observe the individualised support offered by the centre. We wish all of you and your families the very best for the future.

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