

# Inspection report for Central Shropshire East Children's Centre

Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	365763
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Walsh

Centre governance	Shropshire Local Authority
Centre leader	Julie Duncan
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Crowmoor Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, support and outreach workers, health and education professionals, and representatives of the local authority, the advisory board and the steering group. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation and spoke with users of the centre.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE**

Central Shropshire East Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre which is located within an annex of Crowmoor Primary School. It was designated in 2008 and became fully operational on the current site in April 2009. The centre's main administrative base is in Shrewsbury. The head of the centre reports to the local authority and has responsibility for seven centres. An advisory board oversees the work of all seven centres and various steering groups also contribute to governance. In addition to the facilities in the centre, a satellite centre is being developed at Mereside Primary School and a play bus is used to bring activities to more rural areas. The centre provides the full core offer. A team of health professionals is based on site.

The area served by the centre is relatively large and contains pockets of social and economic disadvantage, where the proportion of children living in workless households is higher than average, as well as more affluent neighbourhoods. Children start Nursery in the co-located primary school with lower levels of knowledge and skills than are expected for their age. The population served by the centre is largely White British with very few families from other ethnic heritages.

## 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

Central Shropshire East Children's Centre provides a good service for the young children, parents, carers and families who live within or just beyond its reach area. It is particularly good at supporting potentially vulnerable families and their children. Strengths include the centre's work with teenage parents, preventative work relating to domestic violence and the way that the centre involves and supports fathers and other males within the family unit. The range of services that is offered is good and results in good outcomes as families deepen their understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles, keep themselves safe and develop essential skills for employment or the next stage of education.

The centre is effective in raising levels of attainment for young children, particularly in enhancing their social skills and improving their communication skills. Children greatly enjoy their time at the centre, as they learn by taking part in exciting activities and make new discoveries. Effective action has been taken to assist children to make better progress, including extensive work on ensuring that children's speech develops well. Consequently, there has been a recognisable reduction in the number of children in the locality whose attainment is particularly low at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Partnerships with local health workers are particularly strong and these, together with a good range of activities that encourage the development of healthy lifestyles, have resulted in good improvements relating to national indicators for health.

Parents, carers and families appreciate the good-quality support and advice they receive. They especially value groups such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Bumps and Babes' which assist them to support their children's development, and these activities are well attended. Users' satisfaction rates are high. Nevertheless, the number of families, who access the provision when measured across the whole reach area, although improving, is still relatively low. Consequently, there are a number of children under five who do not get the opportunity to access this good-quality provision. The use of the play bus does help to get more users to access services. Additionally, the centre is developing provision at another local primary school, but there is still more to do to ensure that services reach more members of the local

community.

The centre meets safeguarding requirements well and promotes equality and diversity successfully. It is rigorous in the way that it ensures that children and others with special educational needs and/or disabilities are able to access a full range of services and are not disadvantaged. The analysis of the needs of those who use the centre is good, but the centre has not yet fully investigated why it is not reaching enough members of the community. Currently, parents and carers have limited opportunities to contribute to shaping the development of the centre. Nonetheless, leaders and managers have worked well to establish good provision that effectively meets the needs of those who attend the centre, and the capacity for further improvement is good.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the extent to which parents and carers contribute to decision-making and the governance of the centre.
- Reach more families in the area served by the children's centre.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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High-quality personal support for families makes a good contribution to the emotional health of parents, carers and children. Although the number of children who join the Reception year and who are obese is slightly above average, obesity figures for children in the locality are decreasing, illustrating the success of the centre's health education programme. Rates of sustaining breastfeeding are also improving, reflecting the way that recent training for staff and associated health professionals has improved the quality of support that the centre is able to provide for new mothers. Parents and carers also report that activities such as baby massage delivered in 'Bumps and Babes' sessions has also helped them to bond with their babies and provided emotional support at times when they may be potentially vulnerable. Good support for teenage parents, including a high-quality partnership with local health professionals, who are very proactive in the local area, ensures that conception rates for those who are under 18 are falling, and there are relatively few teenage parents having second pregnancies. Additionally, the strong partnerships with health professionals have also helped to improve immunisation rates. These are now above average, including immunisation rates for mumps, measles and rubella.

There is a good emphasis on helping children and parents to be aware of how to keep themselves and their families safe. Parents and carers say that they feel very safe and secure in the centre. Relationships between staff and users of the centre are warm and supportive. The confidence of parents and carers is improving, and they are beginning to be more enterprising. For example, parents who have used the centre have helped to establish a toy library in the adjacent primary school. Good-quality support is provided for children who have child protection plans, and staff

support families who are facing challenging circumstances well. The proportion of children on the child protection register has recently decreased. The centre possesses a number of case studies which show how well individual families have made progress in their personal and social development, acquired skills for the future or improved their economic stability or independence. Support for those at risk from domestic violence has been particularly effective and repeat incidents are declining. Workers are good at identifying children with additional needs and providing support that has a positive impact on their educational or physical development. They are also good at helping parents and carers to access appropriate services. Parents report that attending first-aid courses run by the centre has helped them to feel more confident when dealing with minor accidents.

Children make good progress in their learning when they attend the centre's provision and demonstrate good behaviour and good relationships. They grow quickly in confidence and make good progress in improving their speaking and listening skills. Not only has the proportion of children reaching national expectations at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage improved, children are also attending school more regularly as many parents and carers wish to actively support their children's education. The centre has also helped parents and careers to develop their confidence in their own abilities and to raise their aspirations. Back-to-work courses ease the transition into working life and the centre helps parents and carers to overcome barriers and to become more actively engaged in education or to access the world of work. Teenage parents are encouraged to re-engage in education. A higher proportion of adults in the area are now gaining level 1 qualifications, but the proportions gaining level 2 and level 3 qualifications have not improved as significantly.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

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

**How good is the provision?**

**2**

Information about the children's centre is distributed by midwives. Health visitors also

inform parents and carers about the good range of services offered by the children's centre. However, staff are aware that they are not reaching enough families with children under five who live in the area served by the children's centre. Even so, effective partnerships with health and other professionals mean that the centre is good at identifying and supporting the most vulnerable children and their families. This is because the Common Assessment Framework is used well and there is excellent communication with a wide range of agencies,

The activities provided in the centre are of good quality and promote purposeful learning, enjoyment and development; ultimately, they successfully improve parenting and life chances. Many activities focus on improving children's health. For example, recent training concerning healthy exercise and nutrition for the really young has improved staff expertise and ensured that they are well equipped to support families in regard to improving levels of fitness. Programmes have been available for parents to attend, including a 'Food for Thought' course, which focuses on nutrition, and 'Growing Bodies Moving Minds', which encourages toddlers to be active. The play bus, is valued by parents. Larger-scale activities have included a 'Get Active Day', which was recognised by parents as a 'brilliant success'. Families are encouraged to make more effective use of their incomes through courses such as 'Make Money Matter'. Additionally, the centre signposts users to where they can access expert advice that will help them to take responsibility for managing their debts. Many activities are attended by fathers and other male family members.

'Stay and Play' activities have a clear focus on developing children's language skills and their personal and social development. These sessions provide good opportunities for children to make discoveries through play, and the activities provided are closely matched to children's needs and interests. Occasionally, there are fewer opportunities to learn about number than other areas of learning. Changes in the family room have allowed the centre to promote physical development more effectively. Good links with the speech therapy service mean that children who are failing to develop normal speech patterns can be quickly identified. The centre is successful in signposting users to advice, in making referrals to other education and training providers and in providing support for ways back into employment.

Potentially vulnerable families are usually quickly identified and receive individual support that often involves eliciting the support of other agencies in developing a whole package of care. Additionally, parents and carers are offered very good quality support in times of crisis, including access to a counselling service. Highly skilled and targeted support is provided for teenage parents, domestic abuse survivors and children on child protection plans. Good links with the local special school and one of the other children's centres which is close by contribute to support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and help to ensure that these children can access appropriate care. The centre ensures that good-quality information about any aspects of parenting, including keeping children healthy and helping children to develop their speech, is freely available to parents and carers. The access to good-quality information is helped by good links with the Family Information Service.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

The centre leader is very experienced and leads a team of highly professional staff who work well together. The leadership is strongly focused on providing a good range of services, particularly for potentially vulnerable users. High expectations are shared by all staff. They are enthusiastic and channel their efforts to good effect and manage themselves and others well. Professional management systems are used effectively to monitor the work of the centre and there are clear lines of accountability. There is a comprehensive overview of the work of the seven children's centres in the area and this informs strategic planning and service provision, but specific plans for Central Shropshire East Central are not as robust. Much of the data that are available to the centre provide information at county level or relate to outcomes for the town of Shrewsbury. There is limited information available that directly relates to outcomes for the reach area. Additionally, the centre has not pinpointed exactly where its users are coming from but relies mainly on anecdotal evidence. Although the centre is relatively good at targeting its services, focusing on those with the most need, it has been less successful in encouraging the wider community to engage with its services. The centre routinely seeks the views of those who use the centre and they express high rates of satisfaction. However, the centre has yet to develop a range of mechanisms to seek the views of the wider community. Consequently, it has not established exactly why so many families do not make the best use of the good provision available within the centre.

The advisory board is fairly new and oversees the work of all seven centres. Although there are two parents on the board, neither is from the area served by Shropshire Central East Children's Centre and, in the absence of a parents' and carers' forum, those who use the centre have limited opportunities to contribute to decision-making on key matters which affect the centre. However, the centre does seek feedback from parents and carers on the quality of its services and makes use of this information in order to refine what it offers. For example, it extended the support it offers to those who are at risk from domestic violence at the request of users. Partnerships are pivotal to the centre's good work. In addition to the good partnerships with the majority of primary schools within its reach area, there are also good links with independent providers, childminders and one of the local churches. Communication with professionals in neighbouring authorities is also good.

Staff have a conscientious approach to safeguarding. All staff have their backgrounds and identities carefully checked. Staff training is thorough and staff are highly sensitive to child protection issues. Early intervention, together with effective multi-agency work, is helping to protect children's emotional health. The centre successfully promotes equality and diversity. The inclusion of all children and families, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is central to its work and all parents and carers are made welcome irrespective of their background. The centre offers good value for money because it makes very effective use of the skills of staff who move seamlessly between working in different centres and provides good-quality support for those families in the reach area who face the most challenges.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **SUMMARY FOR CENTRE USERS**

We inspected the Central Shropshire East Children's Centre on the 15–16 March 2011. We judged the centre to be good overall.

We would like to thank all the people who spoke to us when we visited the centre. Many of you told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very helpful.

The children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping children and their families particularly in the immediate vicinity. Throughout the inspection, those of you we met were keen to tell us how you and your children have benefited from activities like 'Stay and Play' and 'Bumps and Babes'. You said they have helped your children's confidence and language development and improved the way you interact with your babies. We were also impressed by the case studies which showed how the lives of many families have been improved through links with the centre. You told us that the centre provides you with good-quality emotional support and is good at helping you in times of crisis.

The centre works well with its partners. Its work with local primary schools is helping children to improve their personal development and communication skills. The strong focus on helping children to talk is very successful. The partnership work with health professional is particularly effective and is helping to ensure that more children lead healthy lifestyles, are of normal weight and have the immunisations they need. It's clear from your comments that the recent 'Get Active Day' was a great success. Centre workers and health professionals are able to offer new mothers good quality support. As a result, more of you are able to continue breast feeding beyond six weeks.

The centre is good at providing opportunities for you to develop the skills that will help you find jobs in the future and helping you to maximise the money you have. It is also good at making certain that you know how to keep yourselves and your children safe. Its work on reducing the impact of domestic violence and supporting teenage parents is particularly good.

The centre is well managed by an experienced leader who is supported by an enthusiastic staff. Together, they work well as a team to make sure that activities are of a high quality and effectively improve outcomes for children and their families. They listen to the feedback given by those who attend activities and use that information to enhance the quality of provision when necessary.

Despite providing good-quality activities that improve outcomes for children, too many families with children under five who live in the area served by the centre are not making full use of this good-quality and well-managed provision. Also, the centre does not provide parents and carers with sufficient opportunities to contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre. We have asked the children's centre to improve these aspects of their work.

Thank you again for the time you took to come and speak to us. It is clear from these conversations and the written feedback that you have supplied to the centre that those of you who use the centre's facilities are highly satisfied with what it provides.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).