

# Inspection report for Creswell Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	366383
Inspection dates	23–24 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Marian Pearson HMI

Centre governance	Derbyshire County Council
Centre leader	Julie Stanley
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Gypsy Lane
	Creswell
	Worksop
	S80 4HY
Telephone number	01629 537396
Fax number	01909 708261
Email address	julie.stanley@derbyshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Creswell C of E Controlled Infant and Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Earlybirds Day 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 the centre coordinator, centre staff, parents and carers, members of the advisory group, representatives from the local authority and partner agencies. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Creswell Children's Centre serves an area of high deprivation in the Bolsover district of Derbyshire. The villages in the reach area were heavily dependent on the coal mining industry for employment and have seen a decline in prosperity since the closure of the pits. Over two thirds of the children under five years within the centre's reach area live in the top 10% of the most deprived areas in the country and just under a third of these children live in workless households. A high percentage of those in work have semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, with low wages, and a large proportion of the population have no qualifications. Evidence indicates that the children enter early years provision with levels of skills and knowledge which are generally below those expected nationally for their age. A higher percentage of the community than nationally have limiting long-term illness, are permanently sick or are disabled. Incidence of domestic violence and substance misuse is also high. Almost all families are of White British heritage.

The centre evolved from a Sure Start local programme and was designated in March 2006. Centre staff deliver a range of services, which include specialist family support services and activities aimed at engaging all families in the reach area. This work is supplemented by local authority staff covering several children's centres and staff from partner agencies including the health service, social care and local voluntary

organisations. The centre is governed and managed directly by the local authority with a district manager providing the principle local authority leadership.

The centre operates from purpose-built premises within the grounds of Creswell C of E Controlled Infant and Nursery School. The designated childcare provider for the centre, Earlybirds Day Nursery, is also co-located on the same site. This provision was separately inspected in August 2008. Its report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The centre bases some of its service delivery in the two other villages in the reach area, working in partnership with local schools. A number of activity sessions in Creswell village are currently being offered from the local library. This is a short-term arrangement due to the centre offering accommodation for the day-care nursery while an extension to their premises is completed.

## 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

Creswell Children's Centre provides good-quality services, which meet the needs of users and the wider community well.

Leadership of the centre is strong and provides a clear vision of improving life chances for children and families in its reach area. Users, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, speak with high regard of the practical support and encouragement they have received. A local advisory group member describes the work of the centre as 'exhilarating' and staff members speak of being 'proud to work at the centre' because of the difference it is making for local families.

A warm and welcoming environment is provided for users at the centre and in the outreach sessions at local schools and libraries. The centre has been extremely successful in registering a large percentage of the children in the reach area. Equality and diversity are promoted well and there is good access for all minority groups, especially disabled users and families with disabled children. Effective reciprocal arrangements for information sharing ensure a speedy response for

families experiencing difficulties. Centre staff liaise closely with other services to ensure they understand well the needs of local families. Assessment of needs is a strength of the centre with staff demonstrating a sensitive awareness of how to best engage with and support families during times of crisis and beyond. Users describe how staff make them 'feel part of a family' rather than on the receiving end of professional services.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Parents and carers report that expert advice and guidance are readily accessible to them to help deal with a range of problems. Advice and information provided directly by staff is supplemented by a wealth of high-quality information in the form of posters, leaflets and displays. A user from the Travelling community rated the care and guidance his family received as '10 out of 10'. Users recognise that staff constantly seek ways to engage with families and empower them to take control of their lives, standing back sometimes so that the families do things for themselves but always there if they are needed.

A focus on promoting good outcomes for users and families in the wider community permeates through all planning and management discussions. Consequently, users speak confidently of how the centre has encouraged them to lead healthier lifestyles and increased their awareness of how to look after their children. Safeguarding is given a high priority and users feel safe in using the centre's services. All required safeguarding checks are completed and good policies and robust risk assessments further assure users' safety.

Outcomes for adults in making a positive contribution to the centre and the community are satisfactory. Although inspectors found some evidence of users' views helping to shape service delivery, there is no formal mechanism for users to contribute to decision-making. Few opportunities are promoted through the centre for users to engage in volunteering, although where users have worked as volunteers, they report that the skills developed have helped lead to employment.

Partnership working between centre staff and local health and social care professionals is good. However, some partnership working has proved more difficult. Jobcentre Plus has been hard to engage and does not provide any direct service from the centre. Links with strategic health partners have also been less supportive. Health data for the reach area are not available, other than from local health professionals, and the centre coordinator reports that resource decisions have recently started to have a negative impact on outcomes for breastfeeding.

The centre does not directly deliver courses for adults other than where these evolve naturally from other activities, such as users expressing an eagerness to gain accreditation of their learning following involvement in the sessions for adults and children to learn together. To avoid duplication of services, the centre signposts users to other local providers of adult and community learning. These agencies, and users themselves, anecdotally relate good outcomes for users attending courses, and detailed records evidence high retention and success rates for all learners. However, the centre does not communicate regularly with these local agencies to

systematically track outcomes for students signposted by the centre to assess how well they are developing skills which will aid their future employability.

Leaders and managers demonstrate a clear understanding of the need to constantly evaluate services to ensure a balance in delivering universal services with assessment of whether resources could be better used in targeted support for the most vulnerable families to narrow the achievement gap for the most disadvantaged. This clarity of purpose, the reviewing of services to achieve best outcomes for users and the high user participation rate result in the centre having good capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes for adult users in making a positive contribution to the running of the centre and in the local community by ensuring that:
  - users contribute to the governance and decision-making of the centre
  - opportunities are consistently promoted for users to engage in volunteering activities.
  
- Improve partnership working by:
  - strengthening links with the health authority in provision and use of data and Jobcentre Plus in delivery of services, to ensure that the involvement of these agencies positively supports outcomes for users
  - improving joint working with local agencies offering adult learning courses to implement tracking procedures for users signposted to the agencies to determine the effectiveness of their work in improving outcomes for users.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>2</b>
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Outcomes for children and adults using the centre's services are good and improving. A range of initiatives has been successful in promoting healthy lifestyles. As a result of a support group, breastfeeding has increased, with 44% of mothers still breastfeeding at six to eight weeks, which is higher than regional and national averages. The proportion of children who are obese in Reception Year is low compared with national averages and has decreased from previous years. Users report that attendance at basic cookery courses has resulted in them continuing to cook nutritional, cheap meals for their families at home. Exercise is also promoted through the recent introduction of swimming sessions and provision of a games console with keep fit programme for use at the centre. Immunisation rates are high, as any child not recorded by health visitors is followed up by centre workers. Both midwives and health visitors value their relationship with the centre which provides a safe and friendly base for delivery of their services. This has resulted in good take up of health services including the antenatal clinic, parenting craft sessions and baby clinic enabling any problems to be addressed at an early stage. Parents and carers value the support for their mental health conditions. A specialist group, 'Me, Myself and I', has helped to build self-esteem which has led to parents now taking charge of the

group themselves and helping to shape the development of the future meetings.

Staff carefully plan activities to include messages about steps to keep children safe, such as road safety awareness and protection while in the sun. A home-safety equipment scheme has been popular with families being able to access items such as stair gates at low cost. No road traffic accidents or hospital admissions for injuries to children aged under five years have been reported over the last two years in the reach area.

Parents and carers say they feel safe in the centre both in terms of physical safety and in raising any concerns they have about risks to children. They trust centre staff to help them to care for their children. The number of children on child protection plans is reducing as a result of effective joint working and use of the Common Assessment Framework as an early intervention tool. Centre staff acknowledge that their involvement with families has led to a number of children being taken into care where the child's safety and well-being were paramount. The centre has continued to work with the families of these children to support them in reducing risks to enable their children to return home.

Children's behaviour is good and they develop sound relationships with their peers and with adults. They show respect for others. Children attending activity sessions were observed to be confident, independent learners who were keen to participate in new experiences. They are well supported in their transition to school through 'Pathways to Nursery' sessions which focus on developing independence and listening skills, provide experience of group time and encourage choice and decision making. Records tracking the development of children who attend these sessions demonstrate the effectiveness of this strategy in identifying where additional support is required at an early stage. Tracking has been extended to children attending the centre's day-care provision and staff assessments are moderated to provide consistency of approach. The centre uses a standardised audit tool to ensure the quality of all its activity sessions. Early Years Foundation Stage profile results evidence an increasing number of children acquiring the level of skills and knowledge expected for their age. This is now above national averages for areas of high deprivation. There has also been a year-on-year success in narrowing the gap between the attainment levels for the lowest performing 20% of children and the rest. The centre explains one school's results which veer from this trend as related to a very atypical group of children.

As a result of attending the centre, adults acknowledge that their social and networking skills have improved. They have started to take responsibility for some of the sessions and make suggestions about delivery of services. Vulnerable users benefit greatly from the integrated approach of partner agencies and are beginning to improve their ability to make choices as they develop confidence in their own abilities.

Although Jobcentre Plus does not offer services at the centre, lists of employment vacancies are displayed on a regular basis. Alternative support in seeking

employment is offered through a local community agency which offers assistance weekly in preparing job applications and employment issues. Staff encourage users to access courses at the local training centre by accompanying them on their first visit. Positive examples were provided of success in taster work experience sessions leading to an apprenticeship for a teenage father, and two former volunteers at the centre shared how they had gained useful experience and developed routines to help them into employment. Users valued greatly the support provided by outreach workers in supporting them with financial management, helping them to set realistic budgets and to access benefits of which they were unaware. Practical support is available in reducing household running costs through the loan of energy monitoring meters.

*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>3</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?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre knows its families extremely well. Good reciprocal arrangements for information sharing ensure a speedy response for families experiencing difficulties. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively to highlight the main concerns and ensure referral to other specialist agencies as appropriate. Detailed records are maintained of the centre's work and liaison with other agencies which evidence the effectiveness of this support. A majority of cases are closed within six months as families are encouraged to attend groups at the centre. Recent data indicate that, during the past year, 41% of those receiving individual support from outreach workers also attended groups at the centre. The centre has recently introduced a graded care tool with some referred families to provide parents with a more user-friendly understanding of their needs and what action is required. This gives the family better ownership of the plan and a greater sense of achievement when the action plan is completed.

Activity sessions such as 'Stay and Play' are well resourced and offer an attractively set-out environment which maximises learning opportunities. Staff skilfully model

good interactions to enhance parents' understanding of how to play with their children. As a result, parents and carers typically report that their children are developing good social skills, are better behaved and now eat fruit and drink water at home. Children's creative abilities feature prominently in displays around the centre. The centre and learning providers each hold award events to celebrate users' achievements. All activities are well planned and linked to promoting good outcomes for users. Parents and carers were proud of the water bottle toys they had produced in the sessions to use at home and explained why the mobiles they had made were black and white as these were the colours babies were first able to recognise. They appreciated ideas which could be extended at home such as using pans and wooden spoons instead of expensive toys as well as the extensive range of toys such as sensory equipment which they could not afford at home.

The centre coordinator is very aware that, as the needs of families change, there is a need for services to change and flexibly adapt to meet these needs. Through identifying what a family with additional needs required from peer support, staff have facilitated the development of 'Fairstart'. This has developed into a support group where parents and carers can share experiences and concerns and seek advice from professionals with appropriate expertise. Professionals recognise that parents and carers attending this group seemed relieved to have somewhere to share their concerns and are more accepting of their children's needs. They identify that this reduces tensions which can be a barrier to learning. The swimming group was set up in response to a user's lack of self-esteem to take her child swimming during sessions open to the public. This is now a popular group and staff have been able to identify month-on-month progress in social skills and confidence for many of the children and adults attending the sessions as well as gaining skills in the swimming.

Children influenced the setting up of a support group to enable siblings of disabled children to have 'the opportunity to express their emotions in a safe, non-judgemental environment'. All evaluations from these sessions, in the form of pictures, are very positive. Services for young parents have evolved from a targeted group to supported integration into more universal sessions. Additional help is also offered on an individual basis by outreach workers. Research into the needs of fathers in the reach area is currently being undertaken by one of the outreach workers as the district 'dads' worker' post is vacant and this has been identified as a gap in service provision.

'Everything I need they go out of their way to help with,' and, 'A support you can count on,' were common users' views on the work of centre staff. However, it was also recognised that staff needed to be honest and would 'tell things straight'. It was particularly appreciated by users that staff were not judgemental and would still treat everyone with respect even when things had not gone well on a visit. Families with complex needs reported that they had received invaluable advice relating to debt management, re-housing, benefit claims, funding for childcare places and household items such as bedding, access to courses and practical support in everyday activities such as accompanying them to make an appointment, travel on a bus or visit a supermarket when these were difficult for them. One family with additional needs



shared their worries about caring for their premature baby: 'They don't come with a manual and we didn't know how to look after him. The staff helped us a lot to learn how to do this.' Other users reported that their lives had improved greatly as a result of involvement with the centre identifying that 'my life has changed completely since I came here.'

*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>1</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>1</b>

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

<b>2</b>
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The centre benefits from efficient leadership and management at all levels. The staff team are confident, knowledgeable and demonstrate a useful complement of skills and approaches which makes them successful in their work, particularly with the most vulnerable families. The staff maximise their individual strengths and use these effectively to develop their peers' skills and understanding of the centre's work. Supervision and team meetings, both locally and at a more strategic level, are recognised as being helpful in providing opportunity for professional support and clarity in direction.

In addition to staffing, other resources are equally well utilised with community rooms used for outreach work. An exception is the on-site dental surgery which is currently not in use. Evidence was seen of ongoing requests to the health authority for a decision on the future of the surgery to ensure best use of this space. The centre demonstrated a good awareness of environmental and energy saving initiatives. In using its resources well and providing good outcomes for a high number of users in the reach area, the centre provides good value for money.

Data provided by the local authority have recently improved greatly. The centre coordinator has systematically reviewed available data to identify characteristics of the population and progress towards outcomes for children and families. Together with users' evaluations, community intelligence and information gathered from health professionals locally, these are used effectively to inform development of services and revise interim priorities.

This has resulted in accurate self-evaluation, with the centre coordinator and local advisory group confidently stating the centre's strengths and demonstrating clear understanding of the centre's priorities. The local advisory group and the local authority provide robust support and challenge for the coordinator and acknowledge

their responsibility for holding the centre to account.

All legal requirements for safeguarding are met with enhanced Criminal Record Bureau disclosures obtained for all centre staff and third-party confirmation that others working directly with users have been appropriately checked. Safer recruitment procedures of Derbyshire County Council are followed. Good practice was evident in recording of accidents which are reviewed on a regular basis to determine any trends and further action required. Clear procedures are in place to ensure that safeguarding training is kept up to date and this is supplemented by an e-learning package for those waiting to attend courses. Staff have accessed a range of courses to enhance their understanding of wider safeguarding issues such as safeguarding vulnerable adults, domestic violence, safe sleep and substance misuse. This has led to a better understanding of the needs of some families and setting up of specialist self-help groups such as the 'Me, Myself and I' group which is available for those experiencing emotional health problems.

The centre offers fully inclusive services to children of disabled parents and families with disabled children. To support users whose literacy skills are limited, posters around the centre are well illustrated to aid understanding and staff have adopted ways of seeking meaningful evaluation of sessions to ensure that all users are able to give feedback. An increasing number of Polish families using the centre and day-care provision are welcomed and provided with information through dual-language posters. Resources, displays and community events such as the celebration of Chinese New Year and 'Creswell has Talent' help to promote awareness and understanding of the diversity of our society.

User engagement is very high. Almost 100% of children registered with the centre accessed services over the last six months. A childminding network is available at district level for local childminders and they attend 'Stay and Play' sessions, but the centre has little direct engagement with them other than this. Users' views are listened to and acted upon, such as the inclusion of speakers in the 'Fairstart' group for parents of children with additional needs. A questionnaire sent to all families of under fives in the reach area provided a better understanding of the needs of the wider community. Embryonic strategies, such as the development of one-off focus groups and a parent and carers' group attached to the designated provider, are in place to support the development of users' confidence and ability to contribute more effectively in the governance of the centre. One user highlighted that, 'The centre always wants to involve you and make you feel special – like being asked to help interview for staff and speak to inspectors.'

*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</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>community</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>3</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>2</b>

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

None applicable

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 Creswell Children's Centre on 23–24 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit we learned a lot about the centre's work from talking to you and meeting with members of the advisory group, centre staff and other professionals who work with you. We also looked at some of the centre's paperwork.

We heard how much the centre has helped you and your families. You told us that you feel safe at the centre and know how to share any concerns you have about risks to children. We discovered that you now lead healthier lifestyles as a result of the swimming sessions and the cookery courses which have encouraged you to

provide healthy meals. Some services, such as the 'Stay and Play' sessions and the story-time at the library, are valued by many of you. You told us they provide you with resources and ideas to help you play with your children and understand better how they learn. The 'Pathways to Nursery' sessions are helping children to develop the skills which they will need to help them to be ready to learn quickly when they start school.

The staff provide you with outstanding advice and support, for example in helping you to develop your confidence as parents or providing help with financial concerns or housing difficulties. This is because they understand your needs well and work effectively with colleagues from other agencies to identify which staff can offer the best support. We were very impressed by the way the staff develop services such as 'Fairstart' and 'Me, Myself and I' to meet the differing needs of each family.

We also heard how some of the centre's staff spend most of their time working with families who need extra support. This is sometimes provided in your own home and at other times will involve a member of staff working with you to encourage you to come into the centre to mix with other parents and carers or to visit the local community training centre. For more vulnerable families, in times of crisis, the team of staff working from the centre will work closely together to make sure that you have any help you need quickly.

We know that you feel able to say what you like about the services you attend and how these could be made better still. However, there are no opportunities for you to say how you think the centre should develop and what it should be planning to do next so we have asked the centre to look at how you can get more involved in taking decisions about the centre. We have also asked the centre to provide you with opportunities to volunteer as those who have volunteered in the past have told us how useful they have found the skills they developed and the experience they gained when looking for employment.

The centre staff work well with local staff from the other agencies such as midwives and health visitors but there are ways in which some agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus and the health authority, could work more closely with the centre. We have asked these agencies to provide more information and services so the centre can help you even more. We have also asked the centre to communicate more regularly with local training providers so that when centre staff suggest you attend courses, they can follow the progress of your learning and success in gaining qualifications.

Thank you to everyone who took time to meet or speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions with us provided us with lots of useful information to help us with the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre. We wish you and your families every success for the future.

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