

Inspection report for Shirebrook Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire County Council
Inspection number	367146
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Rachael Flesher HMI

Centre governance	Derbyshire County Council
Centre leader	Caren Rice
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Early Birds – Carter Lane Neighbourhood Nursery EY283029

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 parents and carers, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, the advisory board and the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Shirebrook Children's Centre is situated on a shared site with Shirebrook Adult Education Centre and Early Birds – Carter Lane Neighbourhood Nursery. It is located in the town centre of Shirebrook, in the Bolsover district of north-east Derbyshire on the border with Nottinghamshire. It serves a community where 84% live within the 10% most deprived areas in the country and the remaining 16% live within the 20% most deprived areas in the country. Families face issues of unemployment, low levels of skills, social deprivation, poverty, crime, domestic violence, alcohol and drug misuse, obesity and unhealthy lifestyles. The proportion of families in the community receiving benefits is high as is the number of teenage pregnancies. The proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. The centre serves an area where 96.5% of families living in the centre reach area are White British and the remaining from Black and other minority ethnic groups. The recent developments of a local site have provided accommodation for traveller families and this community although small is growing.

The full day care element of the provision is provided on site by Early Birds – Carter Lane Neighbourhood Nursery. Children enter the early years provision with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age.

Shirebrook Children's Centre shares an advisory board with two other children's centres in the locality, which is made up of representatives from various professional partnerships and the local community, parents and carers and centre staff. The children's centre is governed by Derbyshire County Council and led and managed by a children's centre co-ordinator, who also manages the two other children's centres in the locality. The centre is a phase one children's centre and provides the full core offer.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Outcomes, quality of provision and leadership and management, are all satisfactory overall, with some areas judged to be good. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is also satisfactory leading to satisfactory overall effectiveness. The centre has the ability to steadily improve outcomes and provision based on what it has accomplished so far. On the whole, self-evaluation provides the centre with an accurate appraisal of its effectiveness and what it needs to do in order to secure further improvement. It gives those in charge a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and enables them to secure steady continuous improvement. Plans for the future are well targeted to bring about further improvement to outcomes and provision, although some targets set are over ambitious. The centre has focused on improving areas of weakness, gaps in provision and outcomes although progress in achieving these targets has been steady. Some users and partners evaluate the outcomes of their service and provision and contribute to the centre's self-evaluation process. Actions taken to tackle identified weaknesses are steady but effective in delivering improved provision and outcomes. Staff development and training is effective and appropriate to meet current and future needs. Those working in the centre are committed to bringing about sustainable improvements and have confidence in the centre coordinator to provide effective leadership. The local authority asks challenging questions of the centre coordinator to improve provision and outcomes. However, data are not fully utilised in order to more effectively monitor performance and improve outcomes.

Safeguarding is good due to the centre having in place effective policies and

procedures, well trained staff and robust systems for assessing the needs of users. Strong partnerships and information sharing systems with a range of professionals and services also contributes to this. This ensures children and other users are safe and their welfare assured.

Equality and diversity are promoted and the centre fulfils its statutory duties. The levels of families from the centre's reach area engaging with the centre and accessing activities and services are relatively low. However, those who are accessing services are the most vulnerable from the most disadvantaged areas. Due to the concerted efforts of the centre staff and partners there has been a significant upward trend demonstrating the centre's capacity and commitment to improve user engagement and take up of services. However, barriers to access remain and reasons for these are not fully explored in order to secure better take up of services, through early intervention, particularly pre-birth, and improve outcomes for more families.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase participation of a broader community by:
 - exploring and breaking down barriers to access
 - consulting and engaging with families including those hard to reach.
- Improve early intervention pre-birth to support better outcomes for the community by:
 - the Primary Care Trust providing data to the children's centre on the location of all expectant families.
- Further utilise available data to monitor performance more successfully and improve outcomes.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Outcomes for users are satisfactory, with the centre achieving good outcomes for the extent to which users stay safe. The promotion of healthy lifestyles has improved the understanding and take-up rates by children and their families, contributing to the reduction in child obesity rates. There has been a significant rise in families engaging in universal and specialist services as appropriate but the overall figure remains low. There are a very low percentage of mothers initiating and sustaining breast feeding and a high proportion of women smoke during pregnancy. Despite the targeted work provided by the centre services and partners to address these issues, there has been no significant improvement. The centre acknowledges that it needs to engage more of the community with universal and targeted services and become involved with

families early, particularly pre-birth, in order to secure early intervention and initiate prevention strategies. However, the centre is not currently provided with information on expectant parents by the Primary Care Trust to enable them to identify these families. The centre provides effective support for children and families regarding issues with speech and language development which has had a positive impact on their outcomes. Families with young children are well supported through the joint working and information sharing between services.

Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others and are developing a good understanding of how to keep safe. Children and adults are effectively safeguarded when using the centre services. Parents and carers have a good understanding of how to keep children safe. The centre provides safety equipment to those who most need it and good quality information and guidance to help prevent accidents in the home. Through the highly effective partnership with the fire service, the centre has significantly contributed to the 75% reduction in domestic fires in Shirebrook. Users feel safe to share their concerns with the centre including concerns regarding the welfare of children in their community. Parents and carers show improvements in their parenting skills. Children subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework processes are supported well with the effective tailored package of support they receive from relevant professionals and inter-agency working.

Children are making satisfactory progress from their starting points and are prepared adequately for school, particularly those accessing the pathways transitions project. One parent reported, 'The centre has helped my child be ready for school through the pathway project. It did her the world of good.' However, the achievements of children who have accessed children centre services, shown by those gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales with at least six points in each of the scales for personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy are low and not rising rapidly. The centre has a strong focus on narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest but this is not narrowing quickly enough. Most users enjoy the opportunities to play, have fun and learn with their children, for example through parent and toddler sessions. The centre has supported some users to improve their educational and personal development. Users report their engagement with the centre is enjoyable.

Children demonstrate positive behaviour and are developing sound relationships. The centre supports users to volunteer in the centre and within the local community. Some users are engaged in the governance of the centre and due to a recent recruitment drive more will be joining the advisory board and parents' forum in the near future. There are good opportunities for users, including children, to contribute their views, for example through 'leaf your comments', 'chill and chat' sessions and surveys. The centre is beginning to establish its role in the community and community cohesion is improving. However long standing barriers to accessing children's centre services remain, despite the efforts by the centre to engage more children and families.

The centre supports those with financial problems well, particularly helping them to budget better and tackle their debts. Though this remains an ongoing issue for many families the centre has helped many parents and carers to improve their economic stability and independence. Some users are engaged in training and adult education programmes and some parents and carers have been supported to find employment. Consequently, children's well being is beginning to improve.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre staff and key partners have a good understanding of the issues facing families living in their community. Generally, the range of services and activities meet the needs of users and the wider community and are on the whole of good quality. Good partnerships ensure assessments of the needs of children and their families are robust and well informed. Common Assessment Framework processes are used very well by centre staff and most agencies, ensuring a multi-agency approach to addressing these needs and securing a positive impact on the outcomes and welfare needs of children and their families.

Participation and attendance rates, although satisfactory, are variable. Thirty two per cent of the reach area is accessing universal services. Seventy five per cent of the outreach work is supporting the most vulnerable families living in the 10% most deprived area, many of whom are reliant on accessing services through home visits. Although these figures are low, user engagement, particularly with those who are hard to reach has risen dramatically in the past two years. The centre demonstrates a strong commitment to improving their reach and taking past performance into account they have the capacity to continue with this upward trend. The centre has identified its target groups and has begun to track how many users, and from which groups, it has established contact and engaged, but limited long term evidence is available to date. The centre is meeting the needs of some of the targeted groups of

users well, for example, teenage parents, fathers and children from minority ethnic groups.

The quality of care provided to users is good. The centre supports the most vulnerable users who are engaged in the centre services very well. There is effective, tailored support for users to develop the well-being of their families. In times of crisis families feel well supported, with the centre adopting a personal and caring ethos to ensure their welfare. For example providing bedding, clothing, food and accessing emergency funds. A good range of information and guidance is provided and outreach visits are highly valued by users. As some users reported, 'Staff have given me so much help and support, especially the person who did the home visits.' 'I don't know how I would have got through it without Sure Start' and 'I'm overwhelmed with the support I receive.' One parent of a child with learning difficulties and/or disabilities reported, 'Staff have been brilliant with me and the kids.'

The centre has evidence of how it has raised aspirations and expectations in some families. One user reported, 'Without their support I would not have been able to go onto courses and become a volunteer.' Users also report they have been supported to develop personally with one stating staff 'build confidence' and 'The centre supports you to move on.' However these are relatively low in number. Some professionals reported the community has low expectations and low aspirations and there are unmotivated parents.

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	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Good governance and accountability arrangements are in place at a strategic and management level. Professional supervision and management arrangements are aligned and relevant information is shared well. There is good support and challenge for the manager through the annual conversation and regular line management meetings. There are clear links between strategic planning and service provision. Systems for monitoring the centre's performance and demonstrating the impact on

the services and activities on improving outcomes are sound, although the use of available data to provide more robust evidence and ensure targets are identified accurately is not fully developed. The centre's development plan sets out the priorities, targets for improvement, how and when they will be delivered and the resources required to deliver them. However, the centre coordinator acknowledges that some targets are over ambitious, and as a result remain areas for development. The centre has recently begun to evaluate the longer term impact of the provision on outcomes but this is not fully embedded.

The safety and welfare of users is given high priority. Strong policies and procedures are in place to ensure the safety and health of users, staff and partners. Good arrangements are in place to ensure all staff and other professionals delivering services from the centre are safe and suitable. Protocols and practices for assessing needs, making referrals and sharing information between relevant agencies in order to protect children are very effective. The Common Assessment Framework is well utilised and supports improved outcomes. The centre promotes equality and the inclusion of all children and their families, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and celebrates diversity.

Strong partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of a range of services. Partners report the communications between partners agencies have improved dramatically since the centre coordinator came into post. There is a clear commitment to information sharing from the majority of partners ensuring the best support is provided to the children and families of Shirebrook. Partners report the centre coordinator has 'done a fantastic job' and 'made a big difference'.

Together with partners the centre provides a wide range of well-attended community engagement events and partners actively promote the centre and signpost families to the centre services and activities. However, longstanding barriers to accessing Sure Start services remain prevalent in the Shirebrook community. The local authority, centre and partners need to explore and challenge this further and encourage better take-up of services and activities to achieve better outcomes for more families.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. Staff are well-deployed and flexible in their roles. Provision and services offered by the centre are adequately utilised. Resource planning is managed well and takes into account the need to develop sustainable services. For example, by training centre staff to ensure targeted activities and services may continue. The centre works effectively with other services from the private, voluntary and independent sector. The available space at the centre is well utilised by a range of partners. Users report they receive a 'personal welcome and greeting'. Despite staff being very friendly, the accommodation itself is perceived by many users and partners as not conducive to a warm and welcoming centre and is difficult to locate.

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	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	3
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	3

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 Shirebrook Children's Centre on 30-31 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection. We found your children's centre to be welcoming and friendly. Your safety and welfare and that of your children are given high priority. Professionals regularly share information and work very well together to make sure they understand what you need and you get the right support quickly. This is having a positive impact on your families. Your centre has sound evidence of how it has improved the outcomes of many families in your community. However, to better demonstrate that they are achieving success, and are correctly identifying and meeting your needs, more use needs to be made of the available information. Your centre has been asked to improve this.

You and your families are developing a good understanding of how to keep yourselves and your community safe, through the advice and guidance provided by the centre. You are developing healthier lifestyles, a high proportion of children are immunised and fewer children are obese. However, mothers who take up and continue to breast feed their babies are low in number and a high proportion of expectant mothers smoke during pregnancy. Despite the work of your centre and services this is not improving rapidly. Your centre wishes to provide support to expectant parents so it can encourage healthier outcomes earlier. However, it does not receive information to help it do this. Your local authority has been asked to improve this.

Your centre is supporting your children to be prepared for school and you told us how much you value the pathways transitions project. Your children are making satisfactory progress and inspectors were clear that you and your children enjoy your time at the centre. Some of you told us how your centre has helped you to develop personally and educationally. 'Without their support I would not have been able to go onto courses and become a volunteer.' 'Staff 'build confidence.' and 'The centre supports you to move on.' Your centre supports many of you with financial issues such as debt and helps you to manage your money better and get the benefits you are entitled to.

Your centre provides many opportunities for you to tell them what you think about the centre and the services provided and involves you in deciding what activities and services it needs to provide you with. Your centre is supporting many families who are vulnerable and most need their help. It also works hard to reach out to more families and encourage them to use the centre services. However, the numbers of families in the Shirebrook community engaged with the centre and services are low. Professionals tell us that the groups in your community are reluctant to engage in the centre and services and as a result are missing out on getting the support and guidance they need to improve their lives. Your centre has been asked to improve this.

Many of you told us how your centre has supported you, particularly in times of crisis. Some of you said, 'Staff have given me so much help and support, especially the person who did the home visits.' 'I don't know how I would have got through it without Sure Start' and 'I'm overwhelmed with the support I receive.' One parent of a child with learning difficulties and/or disabilities reported 'Staff have been brilliant with me and the kids.' We agree that the quality of support provided by the centre is

good. You also receive a lot of support from the centre in your homes which you highly value. However, not enough of you are coming into the centre to use the services and activities provided for you. Your centre and other professionals work closely together, care about you a great deal and are committed to improving your outcomes; often going the extra mile to help you when facing times of crisis.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

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