

Inspection report for Meadow Children's Centre

Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	365698
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Smith HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Katherine Osborn
Date of previous inspection	None
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Meadow Brook Playcare

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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, representatives from health services, partnership agencies; the staff team; the children's centre qualified teacher, nursery staff and representatives from the local authority. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Meadow Children's Centre was designated in April 2008. The children's centre provides the full core offer of services. It is a phase two children's centre and is situated in the grounds of Saxmundham Middle School. Most services are run on the site, but there is also some outreach provision at other venues in the reach area. The manager was appointed in December 2009. She also manages one other children's centre serving the Framlingham and Leiston cluster area. Local childcare provision is provided by Meadow Brook Playcare, which also shares the site, and this was inspected in October 2008.

The centre serves a rural community which has seen an expanding population over the last few years due to the building of a private housing estate on the edge of the town. The great majority of the population within its area is of White British heritage. There are relatively low levels of disadvantage in the centre's reach area. Levels of worklessness and the proportion of families on benefits are comparatively low.

Levels of attainment of children on entry to early years provision are broadly in line with that expected nationally. An advisory board acts as a link between the centre's users and the local authority, which is responsible for governance.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good. Some aspects of the centre’s work aspects that are outstanding. This is a well-regarded and forward thinking children’s centre that provides a range of good-quality services for the families in its locality. The friendly and inclusive approach of the staff allows all to feel welcome and involved. One parent, reflecting the views of many, said, ‘I think it is lovely, a fantastic place to go.’ Parents and children appreciate the exceptionally encouraging and enabling attitude of staff, and many users told the inspectors how their confidence and self-esteem has grown because of this.

A strength of the centre is the good leadership provided by the centre manager. She leads by example and sets high standards for others to follow. Although the manager has only been in post for a relatively short time, there has been a rapid increase in the number of families registered with the centre and accessing the services since her appointment. This is due in part to her ability to establish priorities quickly and her focused approach. Staff are passionate about their work, teamwork is strong and together staff demonstrate a good capacity to improve. They are enthusiastic, committed and hard working in the pursuit of shared goals. They have a high level of expertise supported by good-quality professional development.

Excellent partnership working with a wide range of providers, particularly health and social care, is making a significant contribution to improving outcomes for users. There is strong evidence of at least good outcomes in all areas, and some of these are outstanding.

The centre has been very proactive in promoting the ‘Two-year-old pilot scheme’ which has resulted in a high level of younger children attending childcare. Children who attend the activities offered by the centre are making excellent progress in all areas of learning, given their starting points. Parents and carers are able to access a wide range of courses, which include literacy and numeracy skills, emotional well-being, baby massage and parent craft. Users are also signposted to specific and generic courses aimed at improving their employment opportunities. However, the centre recognises that it lacks a systematic approach to the provision of adult

learning to support an increased numbers of parents and carers into paid employment and improved economic stability.

The centre employs exemplary safeguarding practice. Child protection procedures are followed rigorously to protect children's welfare. There are excellent protocols and partnership working between key agencies to share relevant information and provide a cohesive approach to inter-agency working.

Users experience outstanding care, guidance and support. The guidance given to users is superb and staff work hard to give an exemplary level of individual support to those who are in need. Users are confident that they can turn to staff in times of crisis. The centre is inclusive and users benefit from positive relationships as they and centre staff treat each other with respect and consideration.

Despite having to operate without a full complement of staff due to the current local authority procedure on recruitment, centre staff work successfully together to meet the needs of the children and their parents and carers. Staff are deployed effectively to ensure that the high-quality provision, services and activities offered by the centre are very well used and reach the most vulnerable groups in the community.

Self-evaluation processes are used well to enable the centre to reflect on the quality of provision and take account of the views of partner agencies and users. The centre is collecting a wide range of data and this is developing to include the longer-term impact of services on users. Although, data are beginning to be analysed, leaders are not yet systematically using data to plan future activities and services.

At the time of inspection there was only a limited parent representation on the advisory board to ensure that users are fully involved in decision making and ongoing developments of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that parents and carers are more involved in the decision making of the centre by increasing parent and carer membership on the advisory board.
- Ensure that adult learning opportunities support increased numbers of parents and carers into paid employment and improved economic stability.
- Ensure that the findings from data analyses are used more systematically when planning services.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre offers a good range of child and family services which promote children's, parents' and carers' emotional well-being, physical health and understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles. Staff provide strong role models that successfully support children's positive behaviour. A culture of respect is evident throughout the centre.

Improving health outcomes are the result of good partnerships with health services which ensure that the majority of local families are benefiting from the wide range of activities offered. This includes breastfeeding support, baby massage, weaning advice and antenatal drop-in clinics. Mothers report that they value guidance and gain a greater confidence when breastfeeding due to the good quality of support provided. High levels of families are engaged with universal and specialist services as appropriate, and the take-up of immunisation is very high, helping to ensure the welfare of young children.

Good use is made of the recently developed outside play area at the centre to promote physical activities and providing opportunities for users to grow vegetables. This enables users to develop a pride in growing and eating their own fresh vegetables.

Parents and carers feel that their children are extremely safe while attending the centre. This is because the children's centre is an extremely safe and secure environment where children's well-being is given the utmost priority. Staff work hard to successfully build secure and attached relationships with children and parents and carers. Outcomes for children subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework processes are excellent due to the highly effective multi-agency 'Team Around the Child' (TAC) approach. Information is shared and referrals made to professionals and services where necessary to ensure all are fully informed and needs are addressed with consistency and rigour. A significant majority of parents are developing an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe through activities and services provided by the centre. In addition, an increasing number of children are being kept safer within their homes because of access to safety equipment through the centre and health visitors.

Children and parents join together to enjoy playing and learning in a welcoming environment, for example in the 'Play and Stay' sessions and the 'Explorers' sessions. Parents value resources such as 'story sacks' and initiatives such as the 'book of the week' as they develop a greater understanding of how to support their children's learning in their own home. Children are happy and confident in their interactions with adults in the childcare provision. Children are well supported as they move into provision into school life. As a result, children start school with extremely positive attitudes towards learning which enable them to make rapid progress towards the early learning goals, given their starting points. Early Years Foundation Stage performance data show year-on-year improvement. The proportions attaining the levels expected of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are above the Suffolk average. The gap between the lowest attaining 20% and the rest is being reduced steadily.

Parents are raising their aspirations and gaining confidence in their abilities and skills through the interaction they have with staff at the centre. The extremely positive relationships formed between staff and families nurtures adults and their children to become extremely confident and self-assured. Significant numbers of users of the

centre are being supported to explore the training path they need to follow in order to achieve their goal of obtaining university places or gaining employment. The centre is effective in signposting users to help them access further training and gain qualifications.

The centre is effective in ensuring that users make a positive contribution. Users are increasingly being encouraged to participate in the decision making of the centre. For example, parents requested more groups for babies and the centre established the 'Little Treasure Group'. Although, a parent has recently volunteered to take up the role of chair of the advisory board this is the only parental representative and the board's membership of external partners outweighs that of parent and carer members. This makes it difficult for parents and carers to be fully involved in the decision making process.

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	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has excellent systems in place for assessing the needs of children and families. Signposting and referral to services and courses are swift and effective. Frequent referral meetings with all relevant partner agencies provide an extremely well coordinated approach to supporting families in immediate crisis. Staff often play a leading role in implementing the Common Assessment Framework with excellent interaction with other agencies. Positive links with social services ensure any child on a child protection plan is fully supported.

The fully inclusive approach and very welcoming environment ensure that once users are registered with the centre, they go on to engage with many different services. The centre is highly effective at assessing the needs of individual users sensitively. The quality of care offered to families in times of crisis, such as parental separation, terminal illness, housing issues and financial needs, is excellent. There is high-quality personalised support for families identified as being vulnerable as a result of their particular needs.

A good range of services and activities are delivered by the centre, or on their behalf, to ensure there is a good balance of universal and targeted services provided to meet the needs of the community. Although practical opportunity to prepare healthy meals is covered with the young parents groups, the centre has identified that it does not provide the same opportunities to other users and opportunities to the young parents group is not available on a regular basis. The centre intends to introduce a healthy cooking group to remedy this.

Outreach services are becoming increasingly effective at engaging those users who are hard to reach; this ensures that most families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances access relevant services. Staff actively celebrate the achievements of children and parents alike in scrapbooks of photos which are stored in the reception area for all to see.

Users have easy access to a good range of information, guidance and advice regarding topics which are relevant to them. Staff show users high levels of respect. For example, they are extremely sensitive to the fact that users may wish to access information privately and they enable this to happen. They display information regarding personal issues such as domestic violence and sexually transmitted diseases within the toilet cubicles so users can access these without being observed by others. All staff are highly skilled at supporting users and regularly 'go the extra mile' to ensure users are able to make positive changes in their lives.

Parents and carers told inspectors how much they value the centre and view it as an integral part of their community. They take ownership of the centre and are proud and appreciative of the benefits it has given their families. Many parents commented on the amount of friends and social and emotional support they receive from attending the centre regularly and this has enhanced their confidence as parents. Unfortunately, due to the current restrictions on recruitment by the local authority, centre staff do not have any spare capacity to provide the level of supervision required to offer the accredited volunteer programme in the centre. However, plans are in place to remedy this. Subsequently, the centre will increase opportunities for users to gain confidence and boost self-esteem. In addition, the centre is exploring new partnerships with providers of adult education courses to increase opportunities for parents and carers to develop skills which will help them into paid employment and so improved economic stability.

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	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1
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How effective are the leadership and management?

2

A strong sense of teamwork exists among all staff. They are enthusiastic, motivated and show a commitment to improving outcomes for users and striving towards high-quality services. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Procedures for performance management are thorough and used well to develop the skills and expertise of centre staff. Staff value the supervision and professional development opportunities they receive.

The local authority provides a clear framework for the centre and effective oversight. Governance and accountability are clear. The advisory body is comprised of an appropriate range of professions so members have a good understanding of the centre's role and responsibilities. It progressively provides the centre with more challenge and support.

The centre manager has clear objectives to drive forward improvement. For example, the centre proposes to establish the Community Parents Volunteer Scheme to provide formal training for volunteers within the centre to strengthen opportunities for them to gain future economic well-being.

Self-evaluation is supported by some evidence of the impact the centre is having on the lives of its users. For example, the centre is gathering evidence of impact through some case studies. The process for evaluation involves others who work and are engaged in the centre. Staff gather a wide range of data to support the development of the centre's effectiveness and seek the views of users through a range of evaluation processes. However, this is currently not used systematically in the planning of activities and services.

The centre is successful in promoting equality and respect for diversity. This is evident in the construction of the 'Welcome Poster' which is proudly displayed in the reception area. Users of the centre united to produce welcome signs that reflected the different languages of the current users of the centre. There is a commitment to providing an inclusive environment and removing barriers. For example, the centre provides support for users who would otherwise find it very difficult to access important services and activities through providing funding for transport and childcare. This prevents the isolation of those who live in very rural areas. The centre provides a crèche in order for parents and carers to access courses such as first aid.

Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust, and vetting and recruitment practices are rigorously applied. Highly effective procedures are in place to monitor children's safety and well-being. Staff exemplify high-quality practice as they see safeguarding at the heart of the centre's work. Good inter-agency partnership ensures excellent

support is given to families in times of crisis.

The quality of resources is excellent and these are deployed very effectively to provide a fully integrated package for service users. Very effective use is made of the accommodation at the centre and staff are deployed extremely well to support users when accessing services. They provide a range of engaging activities for the children, which enable parents and carers to talk to and support each other.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	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	2

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

Inspectors took account of the report for Meadow Brook Playcare which was inspected in October 2008. The setting was found to be good.

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 *Meadow Children's Centre* on 30–31 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that the care, guidance and support that staff offer you are outstanding. Many of you told us that the staff support you well and are always ready to listen. Staff work well as a team and are doing their best to help you make positive changes to your lives. You told us that you value the welcoming, safe environment and the range of services. Those in charge show a strong commitment to improving the lives of you all and they are working extremely hard with other professionals to do so.

Partnerships with key agencies are also highly effective in order that they can offer you the correct support and guidance, particularly when you may be feeling vulnerable or experiencing a crisis. One parent told us, 'Without the centre I would never have got through it, the centre has made a massive impact on me and my family.'

Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust and centre staff do all that they can to make sure you and your children are safe. For example, all staff are trained in how to safeguard children and leaders make sure that all those working at the centre are suitable to do so. You told us that you feel extremely safe. Some users have undertaken training so that they can support mothers when breastfeeding. You told us how much you valued their support when you needed it the most and appreciated that they encouraged you to continue to breastfeed your baby for longer.

You told us how you and your children highly enjoy and benefit from opportunities to play and learn together when you attend sessions at the centre from 'explorers' to 'Baby Babble' as well as the excellent resources you can access at the centre such as the 'story sacks'.

We noticed that you have opportunities to share your views about the services provided, but the inspectors have asked the centre to get more users of the centre to be part of the advisory group.

The centre staff gather lots of information about what you think about the services available and they use this information to plan activities for you and your children. They also collect a wide range of other data. We have asked them to ensure that the findings from data analyses and your views are use more systematically used in planning services. In addition, we have asked the centre manager to increase the

opportunities for you to study an appropriate range of courses to help you gain qualifications and improve your employment opportunities.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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