

Inspection report for Meadowfield Children's Centre

Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	366394
Inspection dates	7 – 8 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Jean Webb

Centre governance	Leeds Local Authority
Centre leader	Kathy Lightfoot
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Halton Moor Avenue, Halton Moor, Leeds LS9 0JY
Telephone number	0113 3368015
Fax number	No fax
Email address	kathy.lighfoot@leeds.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Meadowfield Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY315030 Meadowfield Children's Centre

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 the centre manager and staff, local authority, members of advisory board, health and education professionals, statutory partner organisations, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Meadowfield Children's Centre is in inner East Leeds and was established six years ago as a Phase 1 children's centre providing the full core offer. It is situated on a primary school site and is an amalgamation of two local primary school nursery classes, an early years centre and services previously offered by the Seacroft Sure Start Local Programme. The centre is on the periphery of the reach area and is in close proximity to another local authority designated children's centre and families access services from both centres. In addition, a Phase 3 centre is also operating within the extended services cluster. There are high levels of deprivation throughout the area. Forty two per cent of children live in workless households and 490 lone parents live in the reach area, of which 143 have children under five years of age. Most children enter early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age.

The area has seen a gradual change within the past few years from predominately White British to a gradual increase of black and minority ethnic families. Fifteen per cent of children under five and 32% of adults registered in the reach area are from a black and minority ethnic group. The area experiences high levels of crime with some relating to race-hate crimes.

The centre manager has been in post since April 2009. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority in conjunction with a partnership board and advisory

board that includes members of the local community.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is delivered through the centre's activities. The Ofsted report at Meadowfield Children's Centre from May 2006 judged the childcare provision as satisfactory. This report can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk

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

Meadowfield Children's Centre meets the needs of its users well and delivers good provision. All outcomes for children, parents and users are good. The impact on all users is improving and children, parents and carers are making good progress. Adults are engaged with learning in a combination of parent and child activities and adult education opportunities. The growing number of families from diverse cultural groups is having their needs met particularly well. This is clearly seen by opportunities to learn English in a safe learning environment and where learning English is linked to activities relevant to the family, such as leading a healthy lifestyle and playing with your child. Children and adults enjoy the activities and improve their skills.

Good quality resources are used for learning activities. Learning opportunities are integrated with other local children's centres and the school's extended services so there is a programme of activities for families throughout the year. Some groups, such as teenage parents are not accessing services fully and more needs to be done to ensure the range of activities meets their needs. The centre is highly regarded by its users and it has very effectively brought together the education, health and community services to ensure a highly responsive and coordinated approach to supporting families. This is accompanied by a full range of information and advice that is displayed and easily available and carefully placed so carers can self-refer to support services in a confidential manner.

The leadership and management of the centre are very effective with good governance arrangements in place and dedicated staff who are well managed and supervised. The skills of staff outside of those required for their role are used very

well and enable the centre to arrange a wider range of activities. The sustainability of the centre has been increased considerably over the last year by way of careful financial management. The partners working with the centre are very positive about the working relationship they have with the centre. The community police report that relationships have improved considerably and the trust now built up as a result of delivering services in the centre means that they can work together to improve the local crime figures. The centre tries hard to engage parents and carers but there is no parental representation on the advisory board and they have been unsuccessful in trying to set up a parents' forum. Further work needs to be done to improve self-evaluation and to develop the data so that can be used more effectively, as well as having better involvement of parents and partners. The centre has accurately identified the main areas for improvement and is taking appropriate actions which are already having an impact on outcomes. Targets for improving are realistic and challenging. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

Good safeguarding practice is evident throughout the centre and embedded very well in all practices. High priority is given to safeguarding and staff have good awareness by way of regular training and reinforcement by managers. The centre promotes an inclusive approach to children, parents and carers and celebrates diversity. They are knowledgeable about the different groups represented in the community and take care to meet their needs. The registration rates of some groups such as lone parents, dads and children with parents who have disabilities have increased.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the range of services to meet the needs of all groups by:
 - developing activities to attract groups such as teenage parents and dads
 - work alongside partners to raise awareness of the centre's services to all groups.
- Encourage parents and carers to take an active role in the services of the centre by:
 - developing more ways of engaging carers to voice their needs, aspirations and interests
 - set up a parents' forum and ensure representation on the advisory board.
- Improve the self-evaluation process by:
 - supporting carers and partners to contribute effectively to the self-evaluation
 - further develop the use of data to evaluate the longer term impact of different services
 - give fuller consideration of all the criteria important in leadership and management when carrying out a self-evaluation.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

All outcomes for children, parents and carers are good. This applies to all groups, including those who speak English as an additional language. There is good take-up and attendance of a range of activities that are having a positive impact on parents' and carers' understanding and awareness of ensuring a healthy lifestyle for themselves and their children. This is in response to a relatively high level of child obesity in the area. The 'Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young' (HENRY) programme is particularly effective in changing lifestyles. All staff support the ethos of this programme and so there is continuous reinforcement of the programme's main messages in all activities. Children take the fruit that is always available in the reception area when leaving and this helps to reduce the temptation for parents to buy unhealthy snacks for their children. Parents and children also take part in swimming sessions organised at a local leisure centre. There is a lead developmental movement play practitioner in the centre and parents and children attend sessions based around this. There has been a very positive response to this and requests for more opportunities. There has been an increase in attendance at the weekly New Beginnings group where support is given for breastfeeding.

Parents derive considerable benefits from all the sessions in terms of enjoyment and learning parenting skills and the confidence to try different techniques. 'It was great fun'; 'I found new ways to deal with his behaviour and found they really worked! If I had not been on this course I don't know what I would have done'. There is good use of story bags and recordings of rhymes and songs in different languages for home use.

An increasing number of children are achieving 78 points or more on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and overall progress is good although achievement rates overall are lower than average. A two year old project has ensured that good improvements are being made in communication, language and literacy and in personal, social and emotional development. Children are well prepared for their transition to school and keep a diary with photographs of key points such as teachers, toilets, and their coat peg. Adults attending English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) classes achieve well and some adults have also improved their budgeting skills as a result of attending a course. Adults are signposted well to other learning opportunities and for those ready for work and training there is a very good weekly appointment service with Jobcentre Plus that helps parents and carers find work or vocational training. Although a relatively low number of adults request appointments the success rate for securing work or training is good. 'I had started to feel very isolated and did not realise I could do these things but after doing the ESOL course I am now on a health course with a placement as a ward assistant', said one parent who was clearly benefitting from her involvement with the programme.

The centre is a very comfortable and welcoming environment and parents feel safe and well protected. The centre is regarded as the hub of the community and is well

respected locally. Children use the space well and there are good improvements in children's social and communication skills. This also applies to parents and carers whose increase in confidence has encouraged them to take part in activities, such as helping to produce a DVD about their activities in the centre to be used as a city wide example of good practice in developing speech and behaviour. Parents' and carers' and children's awareness of road safety is increased by courses run by the local community police as well as the 'stranger danger' initiative for children. There is a high priority on safety by the centre and a designated staff member for domestic violence ensures that those parents and carers in need of support are encouraged to make the most of the centre. Children are given free places in day care and the centre ensures the coordination of all the key agencies when working with vulnerable families. Free safety equipment is issued and outreach workers are trained to carry out health and safety checks in the home. Families are supported very well through integration with other services such as intensive family support and there is successful reduction of risk. The centre works well and supports families referred by the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and also children with a protection plan.

The introduction of the Stephen Lawrence Education Standard has begun to raise awareness and understanding of different cultures and attendance was very good at its launch at the centre and local primary school. Children display positive and caring behaviour and older children interact well with the younger children when they are brought together as one group. Parents contribute to the resources at the centre and to decisions about centre activities and specific topics such as the use of any money that has been raised. However, despite many attempts by the centre there is no parents' forum or representation of parents on the advisory board.

These are the grades for outcomes

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	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
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 assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users is completed very well. The coordination between all relevant support agencies is highly effective,

including good use of the skills of those carrying out the assessments. The support plans are personalised and it is clear that staff know the families extremely well. Outreach workers are very effective in reaching families and use a variety of approaches and ways of engaging families to ensure they do not feel threatened or uncomfortable at being approached. Many families are contacted by way of leafleting in harder to reach areas and also by knocking on doors. This is done very well in liaison with other agencies and in particular where one agency's knowledge of a family and their needs is quite detailed.

The range of activities serves the community adequately and the attendance for the activities is good and improving. Some users have been more difficult to engage, such as teenage parents, dads and childminders and more activities are required to meet the needs of these groups. Users already engaged have a voice in what activities will meet their needs, but this is less so for those not already taking part in activities.

Promotion of learning activities and opportunities to improve their education and learning is good. This is particularly the case for the many users who do not speak English as their first language. As well as ESOL classes there are good quality resources available to users to improve communication skills and help with communication between centre staff and parents. A 'thirty second postcard' records essential information such as important messages or ways to pronounce names for staff and these are exchanged between staff and parents. A multi-language dictionary has translation for key words for the many languages spoken at the centre by users. Adults are signposted very well to further education opportunities and supported very well if they want to attend courses outside the centre. 'I now see a future for myself' reflects the enormous journey some parents make from living day-by-day to attending classes in skills for life and progressing further and planning their future. Changes and development in the learning activities for children both indoor and outdoor have encouraged children to progress well and enjoy their learning and development. Learning programmes for parents and children are very well structured and planned and achievements are celebrated.

The quality of information, advice and guidance is high and users make good use of this service. 'I knew what I wanted to do but did not know how to get it. When I came to the centre they were very friendly, invited me in straight away and pointed me in the right direction.' There is a counselling service which is used at the centre and parents and carers can get immediate access if required. There is good signposting for help with issues, such as debt advice, as well as support with housing issues.

These are the grades for quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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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	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?

2

Governance and accountability arrangements are good. The arrangements are clear and all partners understand their roles in providing integrated provision. The roles and responsibilities of centre staff are displayed in the reception area and this helps users understand who is responsible for aspects of service and who to approach if they have enquiries. There are very effective support and challenge meetings and a clear line of supervision from strategic planning to delivery of service. The timing of the advisory board meetings have recently been changed to feed into the support and challenge meetings more effectively so they can also challenge and direct the services of the centre. The supervision of safeguarding and financial management is particularly effective and the centre provides good value for money.

There is a very strong focus by managers on providing good quality services and making sure the needs of all users are met well. Managers work very effectively as a team and there is good direction and support of staff. Staff are very committed and enthusiastic about their role. Regular early closing days are arranged to devote time to staff training. Weekly team meetings combine the sharing of information and development of staff skills. Data is used well by managers to plan and deliver services. Allocation meetings between partners ensure the follow-through support to families and provide the opportunity to discuss new referrals and how support for them may be effectively coordinated.

Staff resources and skills are used well by the manager and this has resulted in substantial reduction in ongoing costs from the previous years. The centre is good at taking advantage of any funding available for resources and so help to reduce ongoing costs. An audit of staff skills has enabled the centre to call on skills, such as sewing, playing a musical instrument and fluency in other languages that contribute to the services of the centre. The centre has also utilised the skills of the parents and carers and makes best use of their contributions often based on specific experiences linked to their different cultural backgrounds.

The centre promotes equality and diversity extremely well. There has been a very good response to the increasing numbers of black and minority ethnic groups in the area with a high proportion of these users registered with the centre. The achievement at level one of the Stephen Lawrence Education Standard is changing attitudes and making a more inclusive community. This has ensured the embedding of equality and diversity into the curriculum with such initiatives as multi-language

books and celebrations of different festivities and cultures. 'Makaton' is promoted throughout the sessions for children and there are Makaton prompt cards around rooms. Parents are positively encouraged to join in and take part in activities when they collect their children. Children with disabilities are supported well. Parents at work or in education and training are supported with childcare and crèches and these are also available to parents attending sessions or appointments.

Safeguarding of children is well prioritised and is well embedded in all the systems and practices of the centre. Appropriate risks assessments are completed to protect children, carers and staff. There is a very helpful summary of the safeguarding policy for parents and carers. Training for staff and managers is very good, all completing up to the equivalent of level two as well as additional specialised training, such as the dangers of shaking babies. The manager recently attended a workshop on sexual abuse and to ensure maximum impact had to take at least one partner along who had not received such specialist training. The manager is trained in value-based interviewing when recruiting new staff. This helps to ascertain staff attitudes to children and their care. These attitudes are considered to be as important as the technical knowledge and understanding of a potential recruit. Managers and staff are regularly supervised. A recent safeguarding audit by the local authority highlighted some relatively minor gaps in training and an action plan has been put in place to rectify these areas.

When evaluating the centre's services, data and user comments are used effectively to plan improvement actions. Self-evaluation is quite accurate and the process involves all staff. Data collected by the local authority are still evolving and so it is not possible to evaluate the full impact of services. Carers and partners, such as childminders, are not sufficiently engaged in the self-evaluation process. Children's views are well represented as a result of staff being trained to listen to and observe children so they can identify their preferences and needs. As a result of this, the children's play areas were changed and other improvements made.

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	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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	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

The Ofsted report for the linked school, Meadowfield Primary School, was taken into account in the outcomes and provision judgements. The overall effectiveness of the school was judged satisfactory.

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 Meadowfield Children’s Centre on 7– 8 April 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we looked at the centre and its resources as well as its plans and documents. We talked to a number of you and the professionals that work with you. We found the centre to be a very welcoming environment with a great deal of good information and advice readily available. We also saw that the centre asked for your feedback about the activities you take part in and what you feel about the centre. Your response is that you feel staff are friendly and helpful. Everyone was very willing to share their experiences with us and your experiences are extremely positive. You told us that your experiences mean you have a better understanding of how children learn, and feel more confident in how to encourage positive behaviour. You told us you have had the opportunity to learn and improve your education and feel better prepared in life skills, such as budgeting.

Your children are progressing well in their communication skills and their personal and social development. Children are supported well and staff involve you well in their activities and development. You feel very safe in the centre and have had help and support to ensure your safety in the home. You are secure about the safety of

your children at the centre. We also came across work that parents and carers had done for the centre to improve their resources.

You also told us how much you enjoy the activities and have great fun and make new friends. The services have stopped many of you from feeling isolated. You particularly enjoy the HENRY (Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young) and it has given you ideas on how to encourage a healthy lifestyle. There is a range of activities for you to choose at this and other local children's centres. Some of you choose to attend this centre rather than the one in your own catchment area. Some groups, such as teenage parents and dads, are not coming to the centre and the centre needs a wider range of activities are required to encourage them to do this. You feel well supported by the centre and the centre is good at signposting you to others who can support you. The centre is good at working with partners in health, education and the community to make sure they assess your needs well and arrange a very personalised plan of support. The staff have a high level of expertise and get to know you all well.

The people in charge of running the centre are providing a good service. The managers have worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. They work enthusiastically and set high standards to ensure good outcomes. They work well with the centre's partners and ensure they work together for the benefit of families. There are good resources for learning and the managers make the most of the skills of their staff as well as encouraging you to contribute using the skills you have and sharing different cultural practices and language. They ensure that safeguarding of children is a high priority and also make sure staff are well trained in safeguarding. They have produced a user-friendly summary for you regarding child protection.

The centre tries hard to include everyone and is good at promoting equality and celebrating the very different types of users of the centre. They have introduced an education standard that makes sure everyone has the opportunity to take part in activities and benefit from the services. Multi-language books and a dictionary have been produced for use by you. The centre also uses and promotes using 'Makaton' – a type of sign language - to make communication between everyone as easy as possible. They have made good links with the community police to help raise awareness of safety in the community and work together to the benefit of the community. The centre looks at data carefully to help them understand better who is using the centre and the benefits they get from using the centre. They then use this data to make changes and improvements.

Managers and staff have tried hard to engage you and all users of the centre to contribute to how services should be delivered but there is no parents' forum and there are no parents on the advisory board to help make decisions about the centre. The centre needs to find other ways of helping to make this happen. It also needs to make sure all partners can get fully involved with helping the centre decide what works well and what needs to be improved. We have asked the manager of the children's centre, her senior staff and the local authority to look at how they can make things even better.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We are very grateful and wish you every success in the future.

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