

Inspection report for Middle Ride Children's Centre

Local authority	Coventry
Inspection number	382102
Inspection dates	25–26 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Anthony O'Malley HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Cherrie Russell
Date of previous inspection	07-08 July 2010
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Woodlands Nest Nursery EY285531

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 staff, representatives from partner services and local authority representatives, as well as talking informally to parents and carers. They observed the centre's work including activities provided at the centre and in other nearby venues. They looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The centre is located in south-east Coventry serving an area ranked within 30% of the most deprived in the country. Over 26% (Coventry 16%) of the working population claim out-of-work benefits and 10% of households comprise lone parents with dependent children. Most children enter the nursery with skills below those expected for their age. They are particularly weak in communication, language and literacy. Most families living in the area are White British although many other minority ethnic groups are represented. The centre opened in August 2005 and provides the full core offer of services as a phase one Sure Start children's centre. The main site accommodation is limited to offices, and small community and group rooms. A self-contained satellite unit offering a community room, kitchen and toilet facilities is on site a St Bartholomew's Primary School in the Ernesford Grange area of the centre's reach. Activities are also delivered in larger spaces in nearby schools, community centres and the local health centre.

The centre has access to a crèche room in the John White community centre. Funded day care is provided on site for babies and under-fives at The Woodlands Nest nursery. The report for this provider can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

There are close links with other nearby children's centres and some staff work across

the bases. The centre is a local authority managed provision, which is supported by a partnership advisory body comprising parent, statutory and voluntary representatives.

At the time of the previous inspection, the overall effectiveness of the centre was judged inadequate because of weaknesses in its leadership and management. Since that inspection, one appointment has been made to the leadership team and the centre manager’s responsibilities for other children’s centres have been reduced. The partnership board formed under the original Sure Start local programme guidelines has been transformed into a partnership advisory board.

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

Middle Ride children’s centre provides satisfactorily for the needs of children and families. Weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection in the centre’s leadership and management have been addressed. The partnership advisory board and the local authority satisfactorily oversee the work of the centre. Systems for checking safeguarding records and policies are now rigorous.

Parents and users told the inspectors that they enjoy sessions at the centre because the staff are welcoming and friendly. They also recognise that the centre promotes community cohesion well through ‘Family Fun’ events and the opportunities it provides for parents and carers to share concerns. ‘It is great to hear how other prospective parents do things’ and ‘I learned a lot from finding out how others deal with the different stages of our babies’ are typical comments. The centre has good arrangements in place for safeguarding children. Staff are particularly successful at ensuring children and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable receive effective and timely support.

Outcomes for users, including the most vulnerable, are satisfactory. Services aimed at supporting parents with young children are effective. For instance, following a 10-week ‘Nurturing’ course parents and carers noted improvements in their parenting skills that gave them much more confidence when managing their children’s

behaviour. Similarly, the services provided in partnership with Portage for children with additional needs and disabilities are contributing well to improvements in children’s development and are highly valued by parents. However, there is limited evidence to demonstrate how the centre has helped adults gain skills and qualifications that increase their chances of securing paid employment and so improve their economic stability.

The centre manager leads the centre effectively and appointments since the previous inspection have led to a more effective distribution of responsibilities. Leadership and management are no longer too dependent upon the centre manager. Through evaluations of individual activities and case studies, leaders and managers have a sound understanding of the centre’s strengths and weaknesses. However, these evaluations do not focus on precise outcomes for users or consider the longer-term impact of provision. This limits their value when leaders plan for improvement. Plans identify appropriate priorities, but targets are not easily measurable and do not clearly identify the intended benefits for users. This prevents the local authority and the partnership advisory board from evaluating robustly the full impact of the centre’s work.

The centre’s promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Leaders check carefully the proportions of users from its target groups, such as teenage parents, lone parents and those from minority ethnic groups, who are attending the centre. This information shows that participation rates are variable. However, there is an upward trend in the number of families engaging with the centre. This is because it is more successfully communicating its services both to the wider community and to those groups in the reach area that have previously not accessed services. This trend and the improvements in leadership and management demonstrate the centre’s satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the ability of the local authority and the partnership advisory board to evaluate the impact of the centre’s work by ensuring:
 - plans for improvement include sharp and measurable targets linked to outcomes for users
 - evaluations of services, including those by centre partners, focus on outcomes for users and consider the long-term impact of provision.

- Ensure that adult learning opportunities enable increasing numbers of parents and carers to gain skills and qualifications that will contribute to their economic stability.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Through events such as ‘First Steps’ and the outdoor learning and play sessions, the centre helps users to learn about the benefits of healthy eating and exercise.

Personal accounts show that these are increasing users' awareness of the fun children have when engaged in adventurous play and the importance of brushing teeth regularly and properly. The Portage service contributes well to improved outcomes for children with disabilities and increases parents' confidence and skills in supporting their children's play and development. One parent commented, 'Portage has given us skills to have good play times with our child and use alternative play therapy.' However, the centre does not have evidence of how successfully its services and links with partners are contributing to national and local health targets. For example, the proportion of mothers sustaining breastfeeding in the local area is low but it is unclear how effectively the centre is helping to improve this outcome.

Children in the centre and when walking to, and playing in, the local woodland show that they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The carefully targeted safety voucher scheme enhances the safety of families in their own homes. Robust systems are in place to support children and adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Outreach workers, in partnership with the health and social care teams, secure the early identification of families with additional or special educational needs. During fortnightly 'Raise, Share and Review' meetings, staff monitor closely the progress of children subject to the Common Assessment Framework and families in challenging circumstances. The effective alignment of services and the expertise of staff ensure the most vulnerable families receive the support they need and that their outcomes improve. There is also strong evidence of better outcomes for children with child protection plans and for looked after children.

There are suitable opportunities for adults and children to play, learn and have fun together in sessions such as 'Blissful Babies', 'First Steps' and 'Dad's United'. Children are keen and active learners. The centre has recently reviewed how it plans its sessions and assesses the impact of provision on each child's progress. 'Learning Journey' booklets capture learning. This strategy now enables the centre to demonstrate the impact of some of its sessions. Provision for children in the linked nursery is raising the children's skills, including their communication, language and literacy skills, to levels closer to those expected by the time they start school.

Through their membership of groups such as the parents' partnership board, parents and carers have appropriate opportunities to contribute to decision-making and a small number benefit from serving as volunteers. The centre's role in the community is growing as result of events such as the 'Multicultural Lunch', which attracted over 100 local residents from the full range of ethnic groups.

The centre responds well to individual requests for information regarding benefits and outcomes for some of the most vulnerable families. These are improving due to increased access to childcare through Family Tax credit and Two Year Old Funding. However, the centre recognises that while it signposts users to adult education and training providers, it has limited evidence of how successfully it is supporting adults in the area to gain qualifications and find employment.

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

Until recently, participation rates in centre activities had been low, particularly among groups such as teenage parents. The centre is now tracking the engagement of different groups with its services more closely and using this information to assess how well its provision is meeting needs in the area. This analysis has led to the introduction of 'Nappi' sessions for teenage mothers, and consultations with users are helping to shape the provision to meet their individual needs. The centre has also acquired funding to secure the use of the 'Hut', a community resource to deliver young parents' services. This initiative involves close working with the youth service and demonstrates the centre's readiness to work with partners for the benefit of the wider community.

A satisfactory range of activities supports parenting skills and the development of babies, toddlers and infants. Comments made by parents and carers include, 'I have learned how to encourage my child to talk' and 'Today's session has helped me feel confident about weaning.' Childminders draw upon the centre's expertise and resources such as the sensory room to improve the quality of childcare. There is less evidence that provision is helping a significant number of adults improve their future economic well-being through, for example, engagement in courses to improve literacy or numeracy skills.

A particularly strong aspect of provision is the well-organised outreach support given to families at times of crisis. The centre recognises that a significant number of parents and carers are reluctant, or unable, to visit the centre or enrol on structured activities for their children. In such cases, outreach workers support families in their own homes. They signpost families to appropriate services and encourage them to join relevant activities organised by the centre. Outreach workers also accompany families on visits to essential appointments, for example hospital visits, debt advice and support groups. Strong links with the local social care team ensure that expert advice is available when concerns about children's welfare arise. The centre is

weaker at demonstrating the quality of its guidance in areas such as dental services and immunisation rates for children or smoking cessation and finding employment for adults.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre manager has led the centre well following the previous inspection and ensured that all of the areas graded as inadequate have improved. Satisfactory governance and accountability arrangements are now in place. However, at present not all members of the partnership advisory board are aware of the centre's key objectives. They recognise the need for training to ensure that they are able to play their part in improving outcomes, strengthening partnerships and holding the centre to account. The board has established rigorous procedures for monitoring the quality of safeguarding. The recording of recruitment procedures meets all requirements and effective risk assessments are in place. Leaders at all levels are committed to promoting equality and celebrating diversity. The centre targets resources appropriately to provide effective support for children and families identified as being at risk. Case studies demonstrate that these partnerships improve the welfare and outcomes of families at risk because of domestic violence, mental health and alcohol abuse.

The publication of an action plan following the previous inspection was slow but the local authority is providing a suitable level of challenge and support through its meetings with the centre manager. For example, it agreed with the centre the need to involve more users in evaluations of its services and to be able to show how these evaluations inform service delivery. Observations of practice and records of incidents demonstrate that the centre is competent in challenging discrimination at all levels. Centre data show that an appropriate number of lone parents, families living with disability, fathers and asylum seekers are accessing services.

The centre has strong local relationships with key partners, such as health, education and social care, and these underpin the effective outreach provision for vulnerable families. However, these are based upon goodwill and professionalism at a local level more than a strong strategic approach across the city. For example, partners do not systematically share relevant data on outcomes with the centre, or evaluate how their partnerships with the centre are helping to meet local and national priorities.

The impact of leaders on users' outcomes is satisfactory and so the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
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	3
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

Funded full day care is provided on site for babies and under-fives at The Woodlands Nest nursery. In February 2011, Ofsted judged the nursery to be 'outstanding'. The report for this provider can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Middle Ride on 25–26 May 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your centre. We would like to thank you for talking with us about the centre and its services. When your children's centre was inspected in July 2010 its overall effectiveness was judged inadequate because of weaknesses in its leadership and management. We are pleased to tell you that it now provides satisfactorily for the needs of children and families. The centre is now governed appropriately and records show that it checks carefully the suitability of everyone who works there.

You told us that the staff are welcoming and friendly and that they organise plenty of enjoyable community events. You also like the opportunities the centre provides for you to share your experiences as parents and carers. The centre is particularly good at ensuring staff have a good understanding of the steps to take to protect children. The family support team and other services work together well to help families during particularly difficult times.

The centre staff have strong local relationships with a range of partners, such as health and social care, to support children and their families. We were particularly impressed with the quality of sessions, such as 'Blissful Babies' aimed at supporting parents and carers with young children. There are also effective services to help children with disabilities and their families. We found less evidence, however, that the centre is helping adults in the local area improve their skills so that they feel confident enough to sign up for further education courses and gain qualifications that will help them in the future.

The centre's leaders and managers have a sound understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They are working hard to build upon the improvements they have made since the previous inspection. For example, they are now planning more sessions for young mothers and are keen to get even more families using the centre.

We know that when you engage in activities run by the centre you often share your views on how successfully they met your expectations. Leaders and managers do use these to help plan for the future. We have asked them, however, to check even more carefully exactly how you and your children benefit when you use the centre's services. For example, it would help the centre plan for the future if it knew exactly how many of you stopped smoking following support in this area from the centre and its health service partners. If the centre had such information, it would be able to include in its improvement plans precise and measurable targets for doing even better.

We would like to thank everyone who spoke with us during the inspection. We were grateful that you shared your thoughts about the centre. We would like to wish you and your families the very best for the future.

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