

Inspection report for Mackworth Morley Children's Centre

Local authority	Derby City
Inspection number	362520
Inspection dates	1-2 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Brian Padgett HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Acting Centre leader	Mrs Stephanie Scarborough
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Ashgate Nursery School

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 additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff, parents and carers, representatives of the local authority and members of the centre's advisory board.

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

Information about the centre

Mackworth Morley Children's Centre is managed by Derby City Council and achieved designation in March 2007. It serves the districts of Morley and Mackworth to the west of the city centre. The majority of the population, around 94%, is of White British heritage. There are small numbers of families from minority ethnic groups, the most numerous being Black African and Polish. Most families from minority ethnic backgrounds live in Morley, closer towards the city centre. A high proportion of families live within the 30% most disadvantaged circumstances and there are over 300 children who are 0-4 living with parents who do not have work. Levels of social and educational disadvantage are above average. Children usually enter early years provision with developmental levels lower than those of most children of their age. A very small number of children with special educational needs and/or a disability attend the centre.

The centre is a Phase 1 children's centre that is required to provide the full range of prescribed services for children and families, called the 'core offer'¹. The centre

¹ The full core offer to include integrated learning and childcare (48 weeks, 10 hours a day minimum), family support including outreach, child and family health services, links with Jobcentre Plus and quick and easy access to wider services.

shares a site with Reigate Primary School. The designated provider of childcare and early education is located within Ashgate Nursery School in Morley. Services are also provided in other venues in the locality at Brackensdale Nursery, Rydale Nursery, Reigate Nursery, Sure Start at Humbleton, and at the Step in Family Centre in Morley.

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

The centre provides satisfactory integrated services for children and families. It cannot yet demonstrate measurable success in raising children’s levels of attainment on entry to school or in narrowing the gap in attainment between potentially underachieving children and others. Nevertheless, there are signs of rising levels of language proficiency among children. Consistent development and improvement have been disrupted by many changes of leadership since the centre was designated.

Under new and more stable leadership, the centre is providing an improving service with, for example, more effective linked working between the centre and local schools and childcare providers. This is appropriately supported by the children’s centre teacher and the play team. Parents and carers attending the centre are in no doubt that staff make a positive difference to their lives, and to those of their children, through the activities they provide and by linking with other children’s services, especially health services. Provision for families facing difficulties and therefore at risk of underachievement is strong. Children are kept safe by the centre’s rigorous procedures for safeguarding.

Links with the centre’s major partners in education, health and social care are generally effective. Family visitors have immediate access to support from social care staff for children and young people as they are based at the centre. Although not based on site, links with health visitors are well-established and work well. In contrast, the level of integrated working between the centre and midwives is low. The absence of joint working with midwives gives rise to some concern, since two

aspects the centre aims to improve are to enhance provision for teenage parents and raise breastfeeding rates, which are areas where midwives are involved.

Suitable activities and courses are provided at a number of locations across the two districts. These help ensure that parents and carers do not have to travel too far to access courses that are of interest and relevance to them. On the whole, this works well. Arrangements for providing adult education are not always as successful, as they are only currently provided at one venue, in Morley. Some parents and carers from Mackworth make the journey, but others, who would like to access the courses, say it is too far.

The two districts served by the centre are very different and separated by a major truck route, the A38. The needs of families in the two districts are often different. These differences explain, in part, why it has proved difficult to draw parents and carers together to contribute to the centre's development in its advisory board. At present, there is no parents' group or parents' representative on the advisory board and this is an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

The new manager has made significant progress in establishing fundamental systems to root the centre's work firmly in what is required to meet the needs of children and families, especially the vulnerable. She has built on the existing, effective work of the play team and family visitors, who provide, respectively, the universal and targeted services. The feeling of staff is that the potential for making a positive difference to children and their families has never been as high. A useful start has been made on self-evaluation and audit, but plans are not based on sufficiently rigorous evaluations of improvements in children's development levels following activities and courses. The local authority provides clear data for the centre, based on indicators for the locality, but these are not sufficiently refined to help the manager identify which aspects are of concern and, therefore, are in urgent need of attention.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the rigour by which the impact of the centre's activities is assessed by:
 - providing the centre with centrally-held data on children and families in the area in a form that is easier for centre leaders and managers to judge whether action is required of them (for the local authority)
 - routinely measuring the development in children, and impact on parents and carers that takes place over time as a result of each programme of activity or course
- Develop ways to engage parents and carers in the strategic development of the centre's direction and improvement and ensure its relevance to the community.
- Improve integrated services for children and families by the greater involvement of midwives in the work of the centre, particularly in relation to increasing breastfeeding rates and in providing for teenage parents (for the

local authority working with its health partners).

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Children, parents and carers attending courses and activities enjoy them. Children's behaviour is good. As the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage² are developed in the nursery classes and early years providers within the area, outcomes are beginning to rise. Signs are strongest in the area of children's language and communication skills, as a result of the work to promote talking. Children's personal, social and emotional development, and the well-being of parents and carers, appears to improve after activities and courses, but the centre is not measuring the gains that have been made. There has been no significant improvement in attainment scores in the area, when assessed at the end of the children's reception year. However, smoother transitions from nursery or childcare have been a focus of the work of the centre, enabling children to move to reception classes with little loss of progress.

Children's health is enhanced in all its aspects, through healthier eating of fruit in particular, through regular checks by health visitors and by increasing the amount of exercise they and their parents take. This is set to improve further as the outdoor provision in settings and in local schools is undergoing improvement, enabling children to spend more of their time learning in the fresh air.

The progress children and their families make in feeling safe are good. The robust arrangements made by the centre for the health and safety of all using the sites, along with particular courses for women experiencing domestic violence, help improve these outcomes. There were no children with child protection plans or who were in the care of the local authority at the time of the inspection. However, family visitors provide well for a full caseload of vulnerable families. In part, this is due to their commitment and also because they are well trained in the procedures to protect and provide for vulnerable children and their families.

On the whole, although children are helped to make more positive relationships, there is little evidence that families are contributing to the development of the centre, as no parents or carers sit on the advisory board. There is solid evidence that parents and carers are making progress towards economic independence through their involvement with Jobcentre Plus and in the uptake of literacy and numeracy courses. Some teenage parents are back in formal schooling. Children are beginning to score more positively on attainment scales at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, although this is tentative at present and may vary naturally from year to year, as each cohort is different.

² The Early Years Foundation Stage sets the mandatory standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five.

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 care, guidance and support for children and families are strengths of the centre's work. Reception is very welcoming. Inspectors heard directly from parents how critical the support of family visitors was for them in improving the often difficult situations they found themselves in, and how centre staff enabled quick and easy access to other services. Within nursery classes in local schools and in early years providers, provision is improving, due to the work of the play team and the children's centre teacher in implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Every Child Matters agenda. During the inspection, children in the designated early years provider at Ashgate Nursery School enjoyed a wonderful time in the snow with their practitioners. Each child was appropriately wrapped up against the cold, lending weight to the adage that 'there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing'.

Within the centre and at the various alternative venues, a wide range of courses are provided, covering all ages of children from birth to four years. There are no ante-natal classes. Very often, play team workers and family visitors are joined by colleagues from health, either health visitors or the Community Nursery Nurse. Early learning sessions for babies and toddlers are particularly popular, and several families have achieved accreditation and recognition for their progress in supporting early learning and development. Parents said how much they enjoyed learning together, as a family.

There are areas of provision that are less strong. At present, the different needs of the two communities of Mackworth and Morley have not been fully recognised and provision adjusted accordingly. Work with fathers, once provided and still a priority for the centre, is currently lapsed. Provision for teenage parents is a priority and has led to the appointment of a 'champion' as an advocate for this vulnerable group. More remains to be done to provide more than the basic, popular courses in literacy and numeracy, and to forge better links with colleges. On the other hand, the link with Jobcentre Plus is strong, and regular sessions provide easy access for lone

parent interviews, information about moving into work and benefit advice.

While the centre is at an early stage in the engagement of the community to find out what it wants, it is now well geared to assess the needs of, and provide for, the more vulnerable children and families. Centre management holds regular multi-agency meetings to discuss such families and to provide targeted support. Family visitors are appropriately trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and work consistently from a 'toolkit' rolled out across the city by the local authority.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leaders and managers promote equality and safeguarding satisfactorily. There is a strong commitment to inclusion in all its forms. This is exemplified in the involvement of the centre manager and family visitors with the centre's partners in regular meetings. These meetings decide how vulnerable families and their children are to be supported and protected. Within the centre, there are rigorous procedures to ensure staff are suitable to work with children and that they undertake up-to-date training. The health and safety of staff, parents and carers and children are promoted well, and there is a careful examination of the risks involved in activities before they are undertaken. Although there are few families from minority ethnic groups in Mackworth, centre leaders ensure that material displayed around the centre fully represents the diversity within present-day England.

The new centre manager has put essential systems in place to provide adequate professional supervision for staff, particularly so that caseloads and interventions are reviewed and revised.

Leaders deploy their resources appropriately and achieve satisfactory value for money. The play team and family visitors are active across the whole area in several sites and schools, delivering courses and undertaking outreach. Partnerships are well established, with good relationships with health, local schools, social care and the voluntary provider, Action for Children, from whom the centre commissions services at the Step in Family Centre in Morley. The links with midwifery are weak. Closer working with a nearby children's centre, also led by the same centre manager, is

beginning to benefit centre staff. The programme of activities includes sessions of minimal and no cost, but significant impact, such as the 'Walk About' programme to promote healthy exercise within the local area. The programme was highly valued by parents and carers who had taken part.

Centre leaders have appropriately high expectations for what they want to achieve but self-evaluation and action planning to achieve these aims are inadequate. An aspect for improvement is the more frequent and rigorous use of data, to set targets, provide measurable signs of improvement, and to use the results in evaluating success or otherwise. This is beginning. The children's centre teacher uses the data from the 'Every child a talker' (ECaT) programme effectively to evaluate progress with partner schools and early years providers.

Much has been achieved recently, but there remains much to do. At present, inputs into the leadership and management are almost entirely in the professional hands of centre leaders and associated partners. Without a good representation from the community, the advisory board is not functioning effectively. The local authority and centre management are aware of the issue. They have plans to move forward to involve users in the strategic development of the centre. This remains a pressing priority.

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	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	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	4
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	4

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

The designated provider of childcare and early education for the Centre has its base at Ashgate Nursery School. It was inspected along with the nursery education provided by the school in March, 2010. The overall effectiveness of the combined provision was judged to be 'satisfactory'.

The centre shares its site with Reigate Primary School.

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 Mackworth Morley Children's Centre on 1-2 December 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

This was the centre's first Ofsted inspection. Thank you to those parents who braved the snow and talked to one of the inspectors during the inspection. Your views helped us come to our judgements.

We could see that Mackworth and Morley are two quite different areas, separated by Kingsway, a major road (the A38). We were told that the two districts have little in common and that families in the two areas have different needs. The centre uses a number of venues in both areas to provide activities for parents and carers near to their homes. Although this works reasonably well, adult education classes are only currently provided at the Step in Family Centre in Morley and some of you told us that the Family Centre was too difficult to get to if you lived in Mackworth.

It seemed clear to us that the centre is making a positive difference to children and families. Staff provide a wide range of activities that help children to become healthier, safer, enjoy learning and start to develop the skills and attitudes they will need to succeed in later life. We saw this happening in sessions for one- and two-year-olds, and in a Stay and Play session. Parents and carers are provided with good quality advice and support to become better parents, to learn about how children develop and to enjoy their children more.

The centre is getting better at linking with the local schools and their nurseries and with local providers of childcare and early education. The children's centre teacher

supports transition for children joining nursery and is helping improve the quality of education within childcare and nursery. For example, the outdoor areas are much more interesting places for children to learn in now than they were before.

Links with health services are good, particularly with health visitors. There are disappointingly few links between the centre and midwives to help improve breastfeeding rates and support teenage parents in the area. Staff link well with a range of other services, such as Jobcentre Plus, to make sure families get the information they need about benefits, jobs and training opportunities. The families with the greatest needs receive strong support from the family visitors and through their network of links with other agencies, including social services, some of who are based within the centre.

At present, the difference that joint working appears to make to the lives of children and families has not worked through into higher levels of development when children enter schools. Nor has it narrowed the gap in attainment between what the most poorly performing children achieve and the rest. There are signs that children are beginning to achieve more. For example, the work going on to promote children's talking is beginning to have an effect on children's communication skills when they enter school.

We have asked the centre to identify whether its work is making a difference by getting staff to measure more carefully the progress in children's development that takes place when they attend activities and courses.

We have also asked the centre manager to take control of measuring progress so that she can decide what to do next, and reach more children and families. The local authority has a part to play here, in providing the centre manager with information in a form that will alert the manager and partners to where the need for action is strongest.

The centre has had many managers since it opened. Change is often positive, but we think that the centre has had too many changes in leadership and that this has held it back from achieving all it might have done. Even so, the play team, the family visitors and the administrative staff have continued to set about their work in an efficient and effective way, supporting families and building links with Derby's services for children and families, including with the local schools.

A new manager has been leading the work of the centre for eight months. She has made a very promising start. Staff feel more confident about their work now than at any time in the recent past.

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