

Inspection report for Abbey Children's Centre

Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	367728
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

Centre governance	Spurgeons Christian Charity
Centre leader	Sheila Ajimati
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Abbey Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Abbey Fields Nursery and Out of School Care (EY340958)

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 the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

Abbey Children's Centre is situated in the north of Warwickshire in the town of Nuneaton. It is a phase one stand-alone children's centre and serves a community living in one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The centre is a split-site model and was designated in December 2005. It operates from a purpose-built extension, attached to the existing community centre, where the family support services are housed. The integrated childcare services are housed in a modular building at Abbey Infant School.

The centre is situated close to the town centre of Nuneaton. The area is served by a number of local amenities such as dentists, doctors and recreational areas. It also has places of worship, and an infant, middle and secondary school. The children's centre serves the Abbey ward within the district of Nuneaton and Bedworth, which is one of the most deprived areas in Warwickshire. The Abbey Ward is made up of a population of 7,200 people and nearly 1000 children under 5 years, of whom the centre serves 593. There are currently 74 lone parents using centre services. Unemployment is among the highest in the country with over a third of children leaving school gaining no qualifications. The children's centre serves a community that is culturally diverse, but over 90% are White British.

The centre provides the full core offer of a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training, early years childcare provision, advice and guidance. The skills and knowledge with which children enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage are below those expected nationally for their age.

The children's centre is governed by Spurgeons Christian Charity. The advisory group is made up of a cross-section of professionals, parents and carers. It is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. The children's centre's day-care provision was not inspected at the same time as the centre and was last inspected in 2009.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This highly effective children's centre serves the needs of its community extremely well. Care, guidance and support are particular strengths as a result of strong leadership, highly effective team-working and excellent partnerships with the commissioned services.

Leaders target and adapt the provision very well to meet local needs. They set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of the local community. The high-quality provision, together with effective family support, ensure that families, whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and who are disadvantaged by economic and social circumstances, benefit from an excellent range of services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

The centre is highly inclusive, with a strong commitment to equality and diversity. Users feel welcomed and have a high level of confidence in the staff. The centre is particularly successful in its work to support lone parents and children and adults with disabilities. As a result, the centre is making a positive difference to the lives of children and families. It is raising the aspirations and increasing the confidence of adults in the community by providing practical help and support for parents, children and families to help them achieve better futures.

The outcomes for children and adults within the centre's reach are outstanding. They are learning to lead healthy lifestyles. Attendance at antenatal and postnatal clinics is high. Parents participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build their confidence and develop their academic skills, contributing well to their future economic security. The high-quality nursery and crèche provision support parents in being able to access these courses extremely well. Children who attend the centre's 'Stay and Play' sessions and crèche facilities benefit particularly from focused support and an excellent range of play opportunities that help develop their communication and social skills.

Users say they feel extremely safe at the centre and many say it is their first port of call if they face difficulties. Adult users evaluate activities routinely. Where users make requests for services, the centre strives to provide them. Users say they feel listened to and respected.

The leadership and management of the centre are outstanding; there is a strong team ethos, and staff work together extremely well. Excellent inter-agency working by highly skilled professionals means that they identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at an early stage and intervene appropriately, which effectively pre-empts higher-level intervention. The centre makes excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework to target resources effectively. Safeguarding the users' health, safety and well-being is top priority. Leaders are reflective and the centre has successfully identified areas for improvement. They are aware of the need to reach and encourage more families to engage with the excellent range of services available, and to help new members of the advisory group to increase their understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The centre currently demonstrates that it has excellent capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Continue to develop innovative strategies to encourage more families to engage with the excellent range of services available to them.
- Ensure that all new members of the advisory group have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, so that they can effectively contribute towards shaping the high-quality provision.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The health and well-being of families are improving considerably. Parents, carers and children are developing an excellent awareness of healthy lifestyles. 'Baby, Toddler and Family Nosh' is a very well received session where parents and carers talk very positively about how this has helped their understanding of healthy eating while working to a budget. One parent reported, 'It's really good, I now make my own meals for my baby and family and it helps with budgeting.' The well-attended 'Fit

and Fabulous' sessions are a huge success. Users talk confidently and proudly about the weight they have lost and how their confidence has grown as a result.

The excellent partnership working between health visitors, midwives and family support workers result in positive outcomes for teenage mothers and those new mothers considered to be most vulnerable. Parents, particularly very young parents, say that they feel very well prepared for the birth of their babies and know what to expect after their babies are born. They have an increased enthusiasm towards breastfeeding and value the peer-group support available. As a result, there has been a rise in breastfeeding rates in the locality. The presence of speech and language therapists has allowed parents to discuss fears or concerns regarding their children's speech in a non-threatening way. As a result, parents attend clinic appointments and explore speech and language therapy.

Partnership with the local primary schools is highly effective in improving outcomes for children. The local primary school speaks extremely highly about the excellent partnership working and the positive effect the children's centre has in contributing to improved outcomes for young children. Excellent transition arrangements between home, childcare provision and school enable children to settle very well, having a positive impact on their learning and development.

The comprehensive range of activities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together enables them to develop skills that will help in the future. Evaluations of the success of courses and activities are highly positive. Parents and carers speak very highly about how much they value the excellent nursery and crèche provision, without which many adults would be unable to access the courses available. These lead to significant all-round improvements for families, for as parents' and carers' skills are improving rapidly, so are those of their children. Case studies and other evaluations indicate that family learning is greatly improving outcomes for parents and carers. For example, parents' improved literacy skills enable and encourage them to spend more time with their children at home reading, consequently developing their speech and language skills. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile data show a continued trend of improvement in narrowing the gap between the outcomes for the most vulnerable groups and others.

The importance of the role of fathers is promoted very well. The 'Men Behaving Dadly' sessions, supported by a male worker, provide a very wide range of learning and fun activities for fathers and children to enjoy together. The very positive impact of this work is reflected in the number of fathers who engage with the service and speak very highly about how they feel and how much more confidence they have in their very important role as a father. The setting supports parents with disabilities to ensure they are included and involved in their children's lives. Volunteers are extremely valued. Parents and carers say that without their help and support they would feel isolated and excluded from the community and their children would suffer.

Excellent procedures ensure that children are very well safeguarded. Families with

children on child protection plans and looked after children are extremely well supported. Well-trained and skilled staff make excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework to target resources effectively. The excellent partnership working between all agencies ensures the early identification of children's and families' needs. The early intervention strategies implemented have resulted in a decrease in the number of children requiring child protection plans and have increased parents' and carers' confidence in their ability to care for their children. Parents and carers say that they feel very safe in the centre and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties.

Partnership working with health visitors, local community police support officers, the fire brigade and other partners is helping most successfully to raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. For example, trained family development workers undertake safety visits to homes and the centre provides home-safety equipment to its families, contributing to a reduction in the number of accidents in the home. Some parents and carers have been subject to domestic violence and abuse. Family development workers provide excellent support in these circumstances and the centre works well with agencies to resolve situations and to protect children as well as parents.

Behaviour across the centre is excellent. Children in the day-care provision and crèche are very well behaved and relate well to one another. Parents, including fathers and young mothers, commented on how their confidence as parents has improved as a result of the activities offered by the centre. Visits to 'Stay and Play' sessions provided compelling evidence of young children and their parents and carers bonding well and children developing their play, exploration and communication skills through a variety of interesting activities, chatting happily together about what they were doing. Parents and carers played with their children, and talked with each other and with staff about their children's development and interests. Parents and carers all said they feel that they have a voice within the centre and that services meet their specific needs. The centre has helped parents into learning, training and employment, and several parents said that their economic stability and independence had improved greatly as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided.

Parents and carers say they feel 'included' and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence, aspirations and achievements as well as their children's progress and development. Parents talk passionately how the staff support them through difficult times and that without help from the children's centre, their lives would be very different.

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	1
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	1

their personal and social development	
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

The centre team knows and understands its community extremely well and this informs very high quality provision. The centre works exceptionally well with their partners to improve the life chances, and personal development of parents and children. Meetings took place during the inspection with a wide range of the centre's users, including childminders and many parents. Each one expressed great appreciation of the support they receive through the centre and of the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves.

The centre's early years practitioners demonstrate exceptional specialist skills and an excellent understanding of the requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage. This promotes children's learning and development extremely well. The centre also promotes individualised, purposeful learning for adults which helps move them on to further learning, education or employment. All users' achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. Experienced family development workers operate in the centre and also go out into the community; they have an excellent understanding of the community and its needs. 'The outreach workers have enabled my child to go to the park to play' said one parent who needed particular support to leave the home.

The assessment of needs and the tracking of progress are extremely good. Interventions that are used and the progress of all vulnerable families are well documented and monitored, and provide a bank of case studies to help subsequent evaluations. The centre is exceptionally effective as a facilitating resource for the families and children. It has outstandingly good links with family and children's services: statutory, community and voluntary. Through these, it provides very effective support for all of the most vulnerable groups, such as teenage parents, lone parents, families in crisis and those experiencing domestic violence.

The centre is highly successful in meeting the needs of the wider community. They are effectively reaching all groups and are fully aware there is scope to extend this further to engage with more families. The centre manager and staff are extremely sensitive to the particular needs of the centre's culturally diverse community and have made great efforts to include all families into the centre. For example, the centre is proving very successful in enabling parents coming into the area from other countries, such as Poland, to integrate within the community through using the crèche facilities and shared outdoor play area.

Some aspects of its provision are innovative, such as developing links with the probation service to support families with young children, and working with benefit advisors and Citizens Advice Bureau to support families with debt problems or ensuring they receive benefits to which they are entitled. The partnership with the primary school is very strong. The centre works productively with a wide range of professionals, such as health visitors, midwives, speech and language therapists and social workers, and has successfully supported young people and parents into adult learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

'This setting has flourished as a result of the dedication of staff and management – it has grown with the community' said one key partner. The centre manager provides exceptional leadership and management for the centre, and is praised for her 'can do attitude.' Leaders are fully focused on the needs of the immediate community. Their expertise and the skills of a united staff team combine to ensure that a high quality of service is provided across the centre's operations. Robust, regular and effective supervision supports the personal and professional development of staff very well. All staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

Safeguarding is their highest priority and at the heart of what they do. The safety of children and their families is embedded into the ethos of the centre. Senior leaders are highly effective in ensuring children and families are safe. This is through rigorous attention to child protection, vetting and recruitment procedures. It is also the result of a sensitive approach to the variety of needs the centre's users present, which ensures that families feel comfortable with staff and protected. The children's centre is an integrated part of the community it serves. The centre's work to promote equality and tackle discrimination against vulnerable groups is of a high order. The centre makes a very positive contribution to community cohesion and the breaking down of barriers between families of different backgrounds.

Teamwork among staff is excellent and morale is very high. Staff are well qualified and experienced. The centre is bright and welcoming and is highly inclusive. The building is well equipped to put on family learning courses, activities for parents and carers and crèches for children. The manager has been instrumental and highly successful in improving the quality of provision. A refurbished crèche room within the

adjoining Hatters Space community centre and the centre's outdoor play area has been totally redesigned and refurbished to a high quality; both provisions promote inclusion for all families and children with disabilities. The new extension to the centre has improved outcomes for users and staff. Space both indoors and outdoors is utilised extremely well and the learning environment throughout the centre is of very high quality. The centre provides effective value for money services through working in partnership with other agencies and commissioned services. The centre meets its community's needs extremely well and extends its services to those living outside its designated area. They are fully aware of the need to reach and encourage more families to engage with the excellent range of services available and are taking positive steps to address this.

The centre has very well established and effective governance. Members are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role in the community. Development planning is aligned to local and national indicators for children and families. The centre also has an effective advisory group made up of a good cross-section of members representing a range of interests, such as educational providers, the local authority, the health service, and parents and carers, and an established but developing parents' forum. All are actively involved in promoting the high-quality provision. The advisory group's accountability arrangements are very clear although not all new members are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Evaluation and consultation are robust and effective in shaping future services. Monitoring is an integral part of the setting, with all sessions and activities evaluated systematically and the responses publicised to all users. All stakeholders contribute and their views are valued, acted upon and used to drive improvement.

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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
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	1
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	1

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	1

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

The children's centre has full day-care early years provision situated on the site of Abbey Infant School. Abbey Fields Nursery and Out of School Care (EY340958) were inspected in May 2009. The inspectors judged the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision as outstanding and effectively meeting the locality's needs. The inspection report for this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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 Abbey Children's Centre on 15 and 16 June 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding. We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

The centre manager and her dedicated team have provided families with an excellent range of services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. Those of you who spoke to us said that you feel the centre is extremely supportive and staff are very kind and caring, and give you very good advice. Most importantly, you said it helps improve your lives, particularly for those of you who are facing difficult challenges. Your children's centre staff team meets regularly to discuss the centre's work and to plan for improvement. All staff place importance on you and your families and provide a listening ear for you. They are keen to create a warm and welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you very much value the centre and use the services regularly.

Staff listen to what you have to say about the centre and what you need. The centre offers an excellent range of services and activities which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals.

Those of you who use the centre are now much more able to stay safe and healthy and to provide for your families. Staff provide you with access to training and home visits and give advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your home to keep your children safe. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by encouraging mothers to breastfeed and by giving advice on preparing healthy and nutritious meals.

Those of you we spoke to are particularly proud of your achievements. These ranged from becoming better parents and carers, through gaining qualifications to entering voluntary or paid work because of the skills you learnt at the centre.

The children who use the centre are also exceptionally well catered for. This means they settle very well into the local nurseries and make excellent progress because they have benefited from the centre's services. The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Mini Messy Monsters' and 'Friday Families Stay and Play'. You told us how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked the centre manager and local authority to devise ways to increase the uptake of users so that more families can benefit from what the centre provides. We have also asked them to ensure that all new members of the advisory group have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, so that they can contribute effectively towards shaping the high-quality provision.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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