

Inspection report for Bishops Cleeve Library Children's Centre

Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	367752
Inspection dates	30 June – 1 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

Centre governance	Operational Services, CYPD, of the Local Authority
Centre leader	Rhian Morgan
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the 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

Bishops Cleeve Library Children's Centre is located on the outskirts of Cheltenham. It operates from one of Gloucestershire's libraries which is centrally based and well used by local residents. The centre was designated as a phase two children's centre in 2008 and serves the community in one of the 70% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The area has five primary schools and one secondary school.

The Bishops Cleeve ward is made up of a population of over 17,000 people of which the centre serves 951 children who are aged under five years. The area has below-average unemployment. There are 83 families within Cleeve St Michael with income deprivation affecting children. There are 90 lone parents within the reach area. The children's centre serves a community that is 98.5% White British, with the remaining population being from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre mainly provides the full core offer of a range of integrated services that include health, family support and adult training. The centre does not provide early years childcare provision. It offers advice and guidance to parents and carers on the day-care and childminding facilities available within the local community.

The children's centre is governed by the Operational Section of the Children and Young People (CYP) directorate of the local authority. The partnership board 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 centre operates from an office within the library and works in partnership with agencies to deliver new services or enrich existing ones. The local community room and other venues are used to run group sessions. It has established working relationships with other professional services to deliver a universal and targeted programme to meet the local community's needs.

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

This children's centre serves the needs of its community well. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Leadership and management are good and include very effective team-working and good partnerships with other services.

Leaders target and adapt the provision well to meet local needs despite the difficulty in obtaining accurate local data. They set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of the local community. The good-quality provision, together with effective family support, ensure that families, whose circumstances may have made them vulnerable or who are disadvantaged by economic and social circumstances, benefit from a good range of services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and all staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Users feel welcomed and have a high level of confidence in the staff. The centre is particularly successful in its targeted work to support children and families who are in most need of support. As a result, the centre is making a significant improvement 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, carers and children to help them achieve better futures. Although the centre responds very well to families who are referred to its services, it is aware that there are more families who might benefit from its services in the area and are taking action to ensure these families are able

to access the centre's services. .

The outcomes for children and adults within the centre's reach are good. Parents participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build their confidence and develop their parenting and life skills. Children who attend the centre's 'Stay and Play' and 'Bumps to Babes' sessions benefit particularly from focused support and a good range of play opportunities that help develop their communication and social skills.

Users say they feel safe when attending sessions and during home visits from staff, 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.

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. This prompt action and excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) ensure efficient use of resources. Safeguarding the users' health, safety and well-being is a top priority.

The centre's self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Evaluations about the impact of its work are largely based upon case studies and staff's knowledge of the families they serve. The views of users and staff are regularly sought and contribute to the centre's self-evaluation. The improvement plans show that priorities are based on a sound understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for further development. Although improving, the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the centre are not established well or robust. Managers are fully aware that all partners, including the partnership board, are not as involved as they could be in the routine evaluation of the outcomes of their service. Members of the board do not challenge the leaders and managers enough or contribute to planning for improvement of the centre. Since the centre opened, the leaders and managers have established a good understanding of the families in the reach area. They have planned services effectively to meet the specific needs of these users and delivered these within the community. As a result, the outcomes for users have improved. For example, the number of children on child protection plans and CAFs has been reduced and the centre has been successful in addressing obesity issues. Consequently, the centre currently demonstrates that it has good capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families who engage with the services available to them through the implementation of appropriate and innovative strategies to extend the centre's reach.
- Develop rigorous strategies for involving all leaders, managers and the partnership board in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the centre in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families in the reach area.

- Make effective use of monitoring and evaluation information to plan for improvement and to enable the partnership board to hold the centre to account effectively.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The health and well-being of families are improving. Parents, carers and children are developing a good awareness of healthy lifestyles. The allotment project is very well received by parents, carers and children. They engage in physical exercise as they walk to the allotment, and talk very positively about how the project has helped their understanding of healthy eating. They are provided with recipes and given the knowledge of how to prepare and cook vegetables, and some families are given vegetables and fruit to prepare and cook for their families. Some parents and carers now grow their own vegetables, contributing to helping them to cook healthy meals on a limited budget.

The effective partnership working between health visitors, midwives, youth service, connexions and family support workers result in positive outcomes for teenage mothers and those new mothers considered being most vulnerable. The baby massage sessions have successfully contributed towards early attachment and positive relationships between mothers and their babies. Parents say they have an increased enthusiasm towards breastfeeding and value the support available.

The centre liaises closely with the 12 local pre-school providers and 21 childminders within its reach to support access to early years provision for children and families. Partnership with these providers and primary schools is very 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 good 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 positive. Parents and carers comment about how much they value the 'Stay and Play' and 'Bumps to Babes' sessions. Case studies and other evaluations indicate that family learning is improving outcomes for parents and carers. As one reported: 'The staff are so helpful, supportive and friendly. The activities provided are very stimulating and help the children learn essential skills.' Headteachers report that children are making good progress by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and, therefore, the gap between the outcomes for the most vulnerable groups and others is narrowing.

The importance of the role of fathers is promoted well. Staff use innovative ways to engage fathers in activities with their children. For example, through the 'Allotment Project', 'Supastrickers', 'Baby Massage' and 'Stay and Play' sessions. The visits to Cotswold farm park and Bristol Zoo were a huge success and well attended. The

positive impact of this work is reflected in the number of fathers who engage with the service. They 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 and carers with disabilities well to ensure they are included and involved in their children’s lives. Volunteers and their contributions are valued by parents, carers and staff. For example, the Women’s Institute help at ‘Bumps and Babes’ and have formed friendships with individual families.

Good procedures have been implemented to ensure that children are well safeguarded. Families with children on child protection plans and looked after children are extremely well supported. Good partnership working has resulted in effective early intervention strategies and increased parents’ and carers’ confidence in their ability to care for their children. Parents and carers say that they feel very safe during sessions 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 to raise children’s and families’ awareness of safety in the home and their communities. For example, visits to homes are undertaken by ‘Home Safety’ and families are provided with home-safety equipment, contributing to a reduction in the number of accidents in the home. Some parents and carers have been subject to domestic violence and abuse. Community Family 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 and carers.

Parents and carers comment on improvement in their child’s behaviour as a result of the support from family support workers and other professionals. Fathers and young mothers commented on how their confidence as parents has improved as a result of the activities offered by the centre. Parents and carers said they feel that they have a voice within the centre and that services meet their specific needs. The centre has helped some parents and carers into learning, training and employment. Some said that their economic stability and independence had improved as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided. However, access to opportunities leading to employment, such as working with Jobcentre Plus and working towards qualifications are limited.

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 and carers talk about 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	2
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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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre team knows and understands its community well. The centre has forged strong links with the library staff which has proved to be very successful in reaching the community. The centre works well with its partners to improve the life chances and personal development of parents and children.

Meetings took place during the inspection with a range of the centre's users. 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 small staff team demonstrate good understanding of the requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage and promote children's learning and development well during sessions.

The assessment of needs and the tracking of progress are very good. Interventions that are used and the progress of all families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are well documented and monitored, and provide a bank of case studies to help subsequent evaluations. The centre has very 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 successful in meeting the needs of the wider community. They are effectively reaching all groups and are fully aware that there is scope to extend this further to engage with more families. The centre manager and staff are sensitive to the particular needs of the centre's community and have made efforts to encourage all families into the centre.

Partnerships with the local primary schools are strong. The centre works productively with a wide range of professionals, such as health visitors, midwives, speech and language therapists and social workers.

The centre's systems to gather and analyse data are at an early stage of

development. As a result, and because the locality is subject to extensive housing development, the centre is basing its evaluation on data which is out of date and unreliable. For example, some of the data received from the local authority is not sufficiently up to date to enable the centre to have an accurate understanding of the population within its reach. However, the good links with partners enable needs to be identified on the ground, and services are developed to meet those needs. Health partners, especially health visitors, refer families to the centre, and local pre-school groups and schools contact the children's centre for advice and help with individual families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

'The children's centre has made a significant impact on children's and families lives and consequently outcomes for children are good and improving', said one key partner. The centre manager provides good leadership and management for the centre, and another partner praised her for her 'professionalism and support to partnership working'. Leaders are focused on the needs of the immediate community. Their expertise and the skills of a united staff team combine to ensure that a good quality of service is provided across the centre's operations. Regular and effective supervision supports the personal and professional development of staff well. All staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

Safeguarding is a high priority and at the heart of what the centre does. The safety of children and their families is embedded into the ethos of the centre. Staff are very effective in ensuring children and families are safe. There is rigorous attention to child protection, vetting and recruitment procedures.

The children's centre is an integrated part of the community it serves. Its location within the library means that the community is well aware of its presence and, therefore, has easy access to the services provided. Take up of services is good and increasing. The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision, equality is promoted and diversity celebrated. The effective integrated working with other professionals, such as Securestart, health visitors, special

educational needs coordinators and social care, enhances opportunities for all children and families and has a positive impact on improving outcomes. The centre makes a positive contribution to community cohesion and the breaking down of barriers between families of different backgrounds.

Teamwork among staff is very good and morale is high. Staff are well qualified and experienced. The staff operate exceptionally well from the office located within the library. They deploy resources well given the restrictions placed on them. They make effective use of the local community room to deliver some of their sessions. The manager has been instrumental and highly successful in improving the quality of provision. The centre provides effective value-for-money services through working in partnership with other agencies. The centre meets its community's needs well.

The governance of the children's centre has recently changed and now is the responsibility of the locality team's operational services. They are continuing to develop good links with other services and are building on the good systems already in place. The centre has a parents' forum and a recently established partnership board made up of an excellent cross section of members representing a range of interests, such as education providers, the local authority, the health service, and parents and carers. Members are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role in the community.

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	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	2

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

N/A

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 Bishops Cleeve Library Children's Centre on 30 June and 1 July 2011. We judged the centre as good. 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 a good 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 very supportive and staff are very kind and caring, and give you 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 a good 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 growing fruit and vegetables and 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 such as first aid, and to entering voluntary or paid work because of the skills you learnt. The transition arrangements for children between home, early years childcare provision and school are excellent. This means they settle very well and make good 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 'Bumps to Babes' and 'Stay and Play'. You told us how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access through 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 local authority and staff team to increase the number of families who engage with the services so that more families can benefit from what the centre provides. We have asked leaders and managers, including the partnership board, to develop rigorous strategies to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the centre in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families in the reach area. We have also asked them to make effective use of monitoring and evaluation information to plan for improvement and to enable the partnership board to hold the centre to account effectively.

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.