

Inspection report for Polesworth Children's Centre

Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	367856
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Walsh

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Alison Tweedale
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	Birchwood Avenue
	Dordon
	B78 1QU
Telephone number	01827 894649
Fax number	01827 894649
Email address	alison.tweedale@actionforchildren.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	Birchwood Primary School
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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, early years workers, family support workers, outreach workers, health and education professionals, representatives of the local authority and the Action for Children charity. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation and spoke with users of the centre

Information about the centre

Polesworth Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2008. The centre provides the full core offer of integrated services that include health, family support, early years advice and guidance and adult learning.

It is governed and managed under the strategic direction of the Action for Children's Charity and the centre also has an advisory board. While its main base is at Birchwood Primary School, services are delivered in several local villages. The centre often works in partnership with Kingsbury Children's Centre with which it shares its head of centre. Many of the staff work part time although there is a full-time family support worker and administrator. The centre has had some staff shortages and turnover in recent years.

The area served by the centre is predominantly rural and contains small pockets of social and economic disadvantage as well as more affluent neighbourhoods. Most families in the area have members who work and the proportion of users who access benefits is broadly average. Children start the Reception class in the co-located primary school with skills that are sometimes below those that are expected for their age. The population served by the centre is largely White British with very few families from other ethnic heritages.

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

Polesworth Children’s Centre provides a good service for the young children, parents, carers and families who live within its reach area. It is particularly good at taking its services out into the local villages and ensuring that parents and carers who may become socially isolated are able to access its services.

Strengths include work to improve children’s skills in speaking and listening, the improvement of parenting skills and the provision of emotional support to users of the centre. The way that the centre works in partnership with a wide range of other agencies is good and is effective at ensuring that families receive good care and guidance. The Common Assessment Framework is used well to ensure that families can access the type of support that is most appropriate to their needs.

The range of services that is offered is good and results in good outcomes as families deepen their understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe. Although parents and carers develop skills that enable them to manage their money more effectively, currently, the children’s centre does not provide sufficient opportunities for users to improve their qualifications. Parents and carers appreciate the local provision of a baby clinic and the support of health visitors at sessions at the children’s centre and in the local villages. The centre rightly recognises that staff do not have enough contact with prospective mothers to enable them to have an influence on the low rates of commencing and sustaining breastfeeding that are prevalent in the area served by the children’s centre.

The centre is effective in raising levels of attainment for young children, particularly in enhancing their social skills and improving children’s communication skills. Children greatly enjoy their time at the centre or at sessions in outlying villages. They particularly enjoy interacting with other children and taking part in activities such as ‘Stay and Play’. A strong partnership with the speech and language service is helping to ensure that children’s speech develops well. Consequently, there has been an improvement in children’s skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Partnerships with local health workers are particularly effective and this together with the good quality advice and individual support provided for families has had a good impact on the extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy. Parents, carers and families appreciate the good-quality support and advice they receive. They especially value groups such as 'Parenting Puzzle', 'Mini Movers' and baby massage. User satisfaction rates are high and many parents say, 'Nothing is too much trouble for the staff'.

The centre has been through a difficult period when staffing shortages slowed the rate of its development. These staffing issues have now been resolved and the rate of improvement has accelerated. All staff share the leader's enthusiasm, commitment and ambition for the future. Staff morale is high and the improvements in staffing are already having a positive impact on the work of the centre. The centre meets safeguarding requirements and promotes equality and diversity well. The analysis of the needs of those who use the centre is good. Currently, parents and carers and other members of the local community are under-represented on the advisory board. This has limited their opportunities to contribute to shaping the development of the centre. The centre has clearly identified where improvements are necessary and the strategies for improvement are being rigorously implemented. Therefore the centre's capacity for further improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Encourage the initiation and sustaining of breastfeeding by developing more timely support and intervention for new and prospective mothers.
- Provide more opportunities for parents and carers to improve their qualifications.
- Improve parent's and carer's contribution to decision-making and governance of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Good partnerships with health professionals implemented through baby clinic ensure that parents and carers of young children and babies are offered a good level of support. Parents and carers speak warmly of these sessions and are especially appreciative of the baby massage sessions that help them to bond with their babies. They speak enthusiastically of the massages that are offered to themselves and describe how these breaks from the daily routine help them to manage the pressures that looking after babies and young children bring. The centre is aware that local rates of initiating and sustaining breastfeeding are well below the national average. Although staff are very supportive of breastfeeding, and some have a good level of expertise, their impact has been limited because they do not meet some mothers until sometime after they have given birth. Therefore, they have been unable to give support and advice at the point when some new mothers are most vulnerable. The

centre has plans to offer more effective support to pregnant women and those who have become mothers very recently but these plans have not yet been fully implemented. The number of children who join the Reception year and who are obese is below average, reflecting the centre's strong focus on developing healthy life styles.

Good-quality personal support for families makes a good contribution to the mental health of parents, carers and children. Many users say that the staff in the centre and the friends they have made during the sessions have provided emotional support at times when they were potentially vulnerable. Parents and carers often continue to meet and build upon the friendships that have been formed during sessions at the children's centre. There is a good emphasis on helping children and parents to be aware of how to keep themselves and their families safe. Parents and carers say that they feel very safe and secure in the centre. Good-quality support is provided for the small number of children who are subject to child protection plans and staff support families who are facing challenging circumstances well. Relationships between staff and users of the centre are warm and supportive. Many parents and carers say that they appreciate the sensitive support that they are given by staff. Although users make a good contribution to the centre by volunteering to run sessions such as 'Stay and Play' in neighbouring villages and sessions for childminders, they have had limited opportunities to contribute to the work of the advisory board.

Children make good progress in their learning when they attend the centre's provision and demonstrate good behaviour and good relationships. Enjoyment levels are very high and parents and carers say that their children 'love it' at the centre. Children grow quickly in confidence and make good progress in improving their speaking and listening skills. Consequently the proportion of children reaching national expectations at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in local schools has improved. The centre possesses a number of case studies which show how well individual families have made progress in their personal and social development and improved their economic stability. The centre has been successful in ensuring that families are able to access the benefits to which they are entitled. It has also helped parents and careers to develop their confidence and their ability to manage money. In the past there have been a number of very successful courses that helped parents to support their children's progress in literacy and mathematics. However, there have been no courses available for parents and carers to attend in the last six months and insufficient attention is paid to raising the level of users' educational qualifications.

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
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	2

positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	
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

Good communication with a wide range of agencies ensures that a high priority is placed on children's health and well-being. The centre actively seeks out parents and carers who would gain the most from using the centre. They do this by making contact with health visitors and other agencies such as Integrated Disability Services and social services. Joint home visits are often made with staff from the referring agency ensuring that outreach provision is carefully focused on parents and carers needs. The staff are well aware of the characteristics of the rural area the centre serves and place a high priority on taking services out to those who may find it difficult to access transport. The centre is now obtaining more precise information about new births in the area and, as a result, there is now the potential to reach even more families.

The activities provided are of good quality and promote purposeful learning, enjoyment and development; ultimately, they successfully improve parenting and outcomes for children and their families. Many activities focus on improving children's social skills and their ability to communicate with others. These include activities such as 'Rhyme Time' and 'Chatter Matters' which encourage communication between parents and children and also improve children's understanding of the world around them. This is because staff provide high-quality resources as well acting as excellent role models. They ask children relevant open questions that develop children's understanding and thinking as well as their speech. The centre always evaluates sessions and takes careful note of children's responses. It is successful in signposting users to advice and in providing support for ways back into employment but recently has been less successful in helping users to improve their educational attainment.

Potentially vulnerable families are quickly identified and receive good-quality individual support that sometimes involves eliciting the support of other agencies in developing a whole package of care. Additionally, parents and carers are offered good quality support in times of crisis. The centre ensures that good-quality information about many aspects of parenting including advice about how to keep children healthy and safe is freely available to parents and carers. The family drop-in sessions are appreciated by parents and carers because they allow families easy access to specialist advice. The 'Branching Out Bus' has enabled families in rural locations to access advice and information including that relating to financial matters.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The leadership at all levels is focused clearly on providing a good range of services that are closely matched to the precise needs of the users in the reach area. High expectations are shared by all staff and have been sustained during a period of change. Leaders are enthusiastic but are also reflective and keen to improve practice further. They channel their efforts to good effect and manage themselves and others well. Teamwork amongst staff is good and contributes well to the positive ethos and welcoming environment in the centre.

Professional management systems are used effectively to monitor the work of the centre and there are clear lines of accountability. Governance is good. The centre's work is well supervised by Action for Children and the local authority is rigorous in the way it monitors and challenges the centre. The advisory board is fairly new and consists mainly of professionals who already have well-developed working partnerships with the centre. The centre is in the process of developing a family forum but this is in the early stages of development. Currently, parents, carers and other members of the local community have limited opportunities to contribute to the work of the advisory board and shape the strategic direction of the centre. Nevertheless, the centre does seek feedback from parents and carers about the quality of its services and makes use of this information in order to refine what it offers. For example, it is considering the parents' and carers' sensible suggestion that the provision of a website would help even more users to be aware of the good range of services offered by the centre.

Partnerships are pivotal to the centre's good work. In addition to the much improved partnerships with the neighbouring primary school, there are also good links with childminders. These links have helped local childminders to build upon and further improve their practice. New staff have been appointed to work with the pre-schools as the centre wants to develop its relationships with other providers. Staff have a conscientious approach to safeguarding. All staff have their backgrounds and identities carefully checked. Staff training is very thorough and staff are sensitive to child protection issues. Early intervention is helping to protect children's emotional health. The centre successfully promotes equality and diversity. The inclusion of all children and families is central to its work and all parents and carers are made welcome irrespective of their background. Leaders know where the strengths and weaknesses of their services lie and have rational plans for improvement. They are well aware of where to target services, and case studies provide good examples of improving outcomes for children and their families. The centre offers good value for

money and is particularly creative in the way it uses recycled and sustainable resources.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
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

Birchwood Primary school was inspected at the same time as the children's centre. The provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage in the school was found to be good.

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 Polesworth Children's Centre on 5–6 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all the people who spoke to us when we visited the centre. Many of you told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very helpful.

The children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping children and their families in Polesworth and the surrounding villages. It is clear that there is lots of fun and enjoyment in the centre. Some super resources and activities are provided and these have a big impact on your children's development and well-being. The centre is especially good at helping children to develop their language skills and their awareness of the world around them. Throughout the inspection, those of you we met were keen to tell us how you and your children have benefited from activities like 'Chatter Matters', 'Stay and Play' and 'Mini Movers'. You said that they had helped your children's confidence and language development as well as providing you with opportunities to make new friends. It was good to hear that you found the baby massage so useful in developing your relationships with your babies and were able to benefit yourselves from the massages on offer.

We noticed that the centre is good at helping you to keep fit and healthy. However, the rates for breastfeeding are still low in your area. As a result, we have asked the centre to ensure that new mothers get timely support and encouragement both to start and to continue breastfeeding. The centre works well with its partners. You told us that the good links with the health service are making it much easier to attend baby clinics and to gain useful information about how to keep your children healthy and safe. You also said that the centre provides you with good-quality emotional support and is good at helping you in times of crisis. We judged the care, guidance and support that are provided by the centre to be good. Although the centre is helping some of you to manage your money and to find jobs we found that it was not as good at helping you to improve your qualifications. So we have asked the centre to make improvements in this area of its work.

The centre is well managed by an experienced leader who is supported by an enthusiastic staff. Together, they work well as a team to make sure that activities are of a high quality and effectively improve outcomes for children and their families. They listen to the feedback given by those who attend activities and use that information to enhance the quality of provision when necessary. Parents and carers are under represented on the advisory board and therefore have insufficient opportunities to contribute to the governance of the centre. We have asked the centre to improve this.

The leaders and managers at the centre do a good job. They have kept up high standards even when there were staffing difficulties. Now these difficulties have been resolved, the centre is starting to improve at a faster rate.

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