

Inspection report for Newminster Children's Centre

Local authority	The London Borough of Merton
Inspection number	365820
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Denise Blackwell HMI
Centre governance	The Governing Body of Malmesbury Primary School
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Malmesbury Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cherubs @ Newminster EY399111

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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 health services, members of the local children's centre management board, centre leaders and staff, local authority staff, Jobcentre Plus, Grenfell Housing, Family Information, Advice and Guidance, Supporting Families team, Portage and Early Support, Social Care, local private and voluntary childcare providers and parents and carers who use the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Newminster Children's Centre is a stand alone children's centre situated in the grounds of Malmesbury Primary School. The entrance is accessed via Newminster Road which runs alongside the school playground. The centre was designated in November 2007. It is a phase two children's centre covering one of the 30% most deprived wards in the country with over 27% of all children living in poverty. The centre provides the full core offer and also links with the three other schools in the school cluster with Malmesbury Primary School. This includes Abbotsbury Primary School, St Teresa's Primary School and St Anne's School for children 0 – 19 years of age with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The centre sits in the heart of the St Hellier Estate, which is an area of high deprivation. There are approximately 722 children under five in the reach area which is made up of approximately 50% White British families. The centre has identified that there are also high numbers of Tamil and Polish families in the reach area. There are high levels of unemployment with over 25% of families in receipt of out-of-work benefits.

Governance is provided by the Governing Body of Malmesbury Primary School, with an advisory board known as the Local Children's Centre Management Board which is

made up of partners, community representatives and parents. Health visitor and midwifery clinics are held at the centre. Cherubs @ Newminster is registered to provide early learning and care for a maximum of 16 children from two years of age to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is based in the children's centre, and provides places to children in receipt of two-year-old funding, and wrap-around care for children attending the Nursery in the school. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with levels of skills and abilities well below those expected for their age.

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

Newminster is a bright and attractive centre which offers a warm and welcoming environment for families and visitors. You are greeted with a friendly smile and if new to the centre are calmly and reassuringly shown to the activity or service you are attending. Space and display areas are well used to promote centre activities, to advertise job vacancies and training courses and to provide useful information and guidance to users through posters, leaflets and a wide range of booklets. However it can be difficult to find the centre as it is not signposted from the road or the school and is accessed from a small side road which runs alongside the school playground.

The enthusiasm of the centre coordinator and the staff to do their very best to help families is evident from the success of the centre in helping users, particularly many who face multiple barriers, to achieve positive outcomes. One of the key strengths of the centre is the outstanding support and care given to families, particularly during times of crisis. 'Because of my child's needs this is the only centre I can use. Here I know and trust staff to care for my child. I know my child will be safe and without it I would have nowhere to take my child to' was the comment from one parent who could not speak highly enough about the care and support she and her child have received from staff. The effective assessment of need ensures families, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who are hard to reach, benefit from a range of good quality services which are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

Outcomes for families are good and improving. The centre is particularly effective in keeping users safe and protected. Families say they feel very safe at the centre and are being supported to stay safe when they are outside. The safeguarding agenda is promoted across the local authority, with the Supporting Families team and multi-agency panel ensuring no one who is in need of support slips through the net and that the level of support is appropriate to the needs identified. The multi-agency work and effective information sharing are a key part of the centre's safeguarding practice, and ensure the centre implements robust safeguarding policies.

The centre has an excellent understanding of the diversity within the community. The centre use local intelligence and data well to monitor registration and participation rates by ethnicity, disability, gender and deprivation levels and take decisive action to encourage user participation from any under-represented groups. Targeted and successful work is being done to engage more fathers in centre activities and to help them become more involved in the lives of their children. Centre information is translated into community languages to ensure all parents have an opportunity to find out what is happening in the centre and contribute to activities. For example the inspection poster was translated into Tamil and Polish to ensure that all families knew about the inspection and any family that wished to speak to inspectors could do so.

The success of the centre is further enhanced by outstanding partnership working with staff from organisations such as health services, social care and the voluntary sector. Partners hold the centre in high regard and value its contribution to the community and particularly the commitment of staff to improving outcomes for vulnerable families. Whenever families are referred to the multi-agency panel they always consider whether the support needed can be delivered from a children's centre where they feel at 'home'. This also means that the centre's resources are extremely well used and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are extremely well supported.

Groups such as the Junior Opportunities Group hold their summer fun days at the centre because the facilities are suitable and the staff and school are very supportive. 'It makes a difference when we can do something as simple as putting a sand pile on the school field and know it is okay with them' said one professional. As a result, 40 families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities attended the last fun day, with over 100 families in total attending the day. Contact meetings are held in the centre, making the centre a familiar place to go to when children who are looked after and/or are subject to child protection plans return to their family.

The centre has an advisory board known as the Local Children's Centre Management Board (LCCMB). The board has membership from local authority partners, community members and parents. The LCCMB provides a review of services and challenge to the centre. They work together to decide on which services and activities should continue or be developed in line with priorities for the centre and within the budget. Spending decisions are then ratified by the finance committee of the governing body. Services such as health, social services and Jobcentre Plus engage at a strategic level

with some teams, such as the Supporting Families team, delivering services across the borough. Parents contribute their views through evaluations of services and activities and through face-to-face contact with the centre's participation officers. The local authority has also carried out a survey of parents to identify those who would like to be more involved in their children's centre's work. However the centre does not yet have a clear, structured way in which to gather the views of families to feed into the decision making of the LCCMB.

The data collection systems are used very effectively for gathering data about participation rates and make-up of the community, enabling effective targeting of outreach work. Plans are evolving, with the action plan identifying the priorities for the centre, the actions to be taken and date for completion. However planning does not yet show clear success criteria that would enable the local authority to really challenge the centre, or allow the centre to clearly show its contribution to improving outcomes for families. Actions to improve outcomes to date have been concerted and effective. This, along with the detailed analysis of needs, results in the centre having good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop plans so that they clearly show:
 - ambitious targets to drive improvement that enable the local authority to challenge the centre's performance and hold it to account
 - measurable success criteria to enable the centre to clearly show the impact they are having on outcomes.

- Strengthen arrangements to enable users to participate in review and to challenge the centre by:
 - developing and implementing plans for more effective and structured parental input
 - providing clear information to parents about how to be involved in the centre and who the parent representatives are on the Local Children's Centre Management Board.

- Improve information on where the centre is located so that families in the local community can easily find:
 - how to locate the centre within the estate in which it is situated
 - the entrance to the centre by clear signposting from the school and where possible from the roads nearby.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Overall outcomes for users are good. The health of families has improved as a result of engagement with the centre. There is good support from health visitors and midwives who hold regular clinics in the children's centre. All staff know where they can refer parents for health advice and support, as they receive one day's training on smoking cessation, breastfeeding, post-natal depression and dental health from health professionals. Meetings are held between health and centre staff to discuss individual needs. Where appropriate discussions result in a 'request for service' from the centre. This ensures all contact with families is recorded and contributes to analysis of outcomes.

The Live and Kicking Club encourages physical activity for children in Reception Year that are referred by the school nurse. The centre is also working towards the Unicef baby friendly award. Breastfeeding data are collected across the borough but anecdotally the health visitors know that Merton is above average for breastfeeding rates at all stages. When children are about four months old parents are sent a letter by their GP inviting them to a day to find out about weaning. This is only a one-off session but families are encouraged to come back to other centre groups for ongoing advice. Polish and Tamil families access services well, with a Tamil worker starting in the weaning group from September.

Comprehensive risk assessments of all centre areas and activities ensure high levels of safety for families in the centre. Families in need of multi-agency involvement are supported through the Common Assessment Framework process. This process then feeds into and supports referrals to the multi-agency panel ensuring families receive the support they need. Home safety checks are carried out improving families' ability to keep their children safe at home. Parenting programmes such as Incredible Years are helping parents to better manage their children's behaviour and support their development.

There are many opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together and as a result children are making good progress in their learning and development. This is also seen through tracking carried out by the school that shows the impact on those who have attended the centre. Tracking shows that these children settle quickly into the nursery/school and are keen learners. Improvements to children's communication and social skills can also be seen for children who have attended children's centre activities, compared to those who have not. When children move from the centre provision into the school nursery the participation officers help to settle the children in. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader in the school has helped to develop a transfer document for these children so that future learning builds on what they already know and can do. This effective process is now moving across all schools in the cluster.

Parenting courses are well received and having an impact on parents' abilities to support their children's learning. 'I wish I had done the course years ago' said one dad who had recently completed the Incredible Years/Incredible Dads course.

Guidance has been produced for parents on getting children ready for school/nursery. Parents have also attended writing and phonics workshops to help improve their knowledge and enable them to better support their children. Evaluations show that nearly all who attended felt more confident in their knowledge and abilities following the workshops. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses are provided, as are literacy and numeracy courses. However the centre does not have robust information or evidence of numbers who have completed or gone on to gain qualifications or into employment.

Some families are fully engaged with the centre and a number of parents sit on the LCCMB and are involved in decision making. Families who use the children's centre treat each other with respect and as a result community cohesion is developing well. For example the centre initially set up a stay and play group for Tamil families which has now grown to incorporate all families in the area. Staff and families say that you no longer see the different cultures standing together as a group outside the Nursery class waiting to collect their children; all families mix and talk to each other. As a result the centre is playing an improving role in the life of the community.

Children are inquisitive learners. They actively engage in stay and play, or creative play sessions, where they and their parents enjoy joining in with singing and rhymes. The number of teenage parents in the area is very low. The centre links with the borough-wide Teenage Parents Group and Connexions. This shows where teenage parents are in the reach area, allows outreach to be targeted and results in them attending centre services and activities. Until recently Jobcentre Plus had an adviser based in the centre. Due to changes in structures there is no longer a worker on site but a link worker is still identified to ensure that centre families can access support and advice when needed. Parents and carers benefit from advice on benefits and on how to deal with debt from the Citizens Advice Bureau and the local housing association which supports the families' future economic well-being. Where training is provided in the centre, a crèche is also provided to ensure parents are able to access sessions without the worry of having to find childcare.

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	1
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 and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The quality of provision is good. The centre knows its users well and is extremely effective in assessing users' needs and promoting purposeful learning. User's needs are assessed sensitively and appropriately to ensure services are tailored to suit individual circumstances. For families facing complex difficulties, the assessment of need is effective, and is supported through excellent inter-agency working and communication. The initial assessment of need is further supported by targeted assessment depending on the need and allocation by the multi-agency panel. 'Although we may become involved because families are in danger of losing their home through non-payment of rent, this is because of other things happening in their lives and we need to get to the root cause of the problem in order to support someone appropriately', said one professional from the housing agency. This kind of rigorous, well-informed and targeted assessment ensures that services are tailored to individual needs, and that families receive a cohesive package of integrated support.

The effective assessment can also be seen in increasing participation rates of target groups of users. These have increased year on year though the centre is aware that there is still more that needs to be done to further improve the participation rates of those in the 30% super output areas. Centre registration forms completed by health visitors on their first visit to a family are sent to Merton Borough Council, who then allocate families to a children's centre depending on the post code. It is then for the centre to follow this up with an introduction pack about the services provided. The analysis of data is used as a starting point for identifying needs but the centre knows it is also important to have local knowledge. For example the centre and professionals are aware that domestic violence is an issue in the area, though this does not show in data. 'We need to give people the confidence to come forward if they are a victim of domestic violence', said one professional. 'The figures may say it is not a problem but we know the figures aren't everything. We need to better understand the culture of keeping quiet about domestic abuse in the community to be sure we get it right for families who need help.'

Because activities are of good quality they engage both children and parents, and encourage them to progress further. Certificates are given out to adults who attend courses at the centre, and those who completed the Incredible Years course were photographed and celebrated in the local paper. Because fathers gained so much from attending their course they requested further opportunities at the centre to meet and look at issues for them. This has resulted in an early evening session of Men Behaving Dadly that will run once a month. The centre also runs activities on a Saturday, responding to users' needs, especially focusing on working parents.

The outstanding care, guidance and support provided by the centre is personalised and supports families in times of crisis. All centre staff know where to get information and advice about universal services as well as targeted services. As a result parents will turn to centre workers as they feel confident they will be listened to and supported.

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	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

Leadership and management are consistently good at all levels and are exceptional in some areas. Senior leaders have a clear vision, set the tone, communicate high expectations and have the drive and commitment to ensure that the centre is effective in improving the life chances of all families. All staff demonstrate admirable commitment to the centre and the community it serves. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and well understood and financial oversight is excellent. Effective arrangements for performance management and accountability are in place and are supporting staff to develop their skills and knowledge. Staff are encouraged to use their initiative and as a result they are motivated and enthusiastic.

Plans are still developing but have progressed a long way from the initial planning in the centre. Action plans are well targeted at the areas of most need. As a result of the input from the local authority data team, the data they provide are used well as a basis for further investigation. Staff receive training and support in understanding the data which in turn has led to effective questioning and more accurate diagnosis of what more needs to be done. Sessions and activities are evaluated, with training courses assessing the progress of participants over the length of the course. The bi-annual satisfaction survey is analysed for participation and satisfaction with services and activities offered. Comments are also analysed to enable figures to be explained and to support better targeting of services. However, the system for the long-term evaluation of the impact on improving the outcomes for families is not yet embedded throughout the centre.

There is an excellent use of resources; services are very well used and reach the most vulnerable groups in the area. Provision is mainly offered in the centre but they also hold sessions in the local library. The children's centre building is attractively decorated and well used. Attendance rates at activities are monitored and reviewed regularly so that retention rates and positive outcomes for users are identified and maintained. Staff expertise and knowledge are appropriately deployed with some staff from the school also supporting the centre's work.

The management team is effective in ensuring the centre focuses on activities that are sustainable, building upon existing provision and involving users in giving

consideration to reducing costs without reducing the quality of provision. For example the All in it Together play session is run and facilitated by parents. Training for staff to co-facilitate or run sessions enables the centre to be more sustainable over time. Contact meetings are held in the centre with the intention of introducing parents to other centre services and activities that they continue to use once statutory involvement is no longer required. Health clinics are very well attended and ably supported by centre staff. Midwifery clinics are very popular and increasingly requested in the centre.

The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the work of the centre. Staff ensure that all children and adults, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have access to the full range of experiences on offer. The centre is Disability Discrimination Act compliant and praised by special needs services and providers for its inclusive and welcoming ethos. All safeguarding requirements are met and often exceeded. There is a clear single central record of checks and a comprehensive induction for staff and volunteers that covers child protection and health and safety. There are clear protocols across the authority for making referrals through the 'request for service' form and process that all public sector and voluntary agencies are signed up to. There is a clear child protection procedure that identifies the lead and deputy lead for safeguarding, and includes numbers and names of link workers and out of hours support.

The centre has excellent partnership arrangements which ensure almost all users' needs are met. Staff and partner agencies report that relationships are excellent, morale is very high and that everyone pulls together to improve outcomes for users. Partner agencies have identified the effectiveness of joint working on outcomes for children and families, and those families whose circumstances make them most vulnerable are supported well by a wide range of agencies through a coordinated approach.

Users express high levels of satisfaction and confidence in the centre and this is also reflected in good attendance at sessions. There are good opportunities for users to be involved in the work of the centre through volunteering and representation on the LCCMB. Users are regularly asked for their views, through comments cards, evaluations and face-to-face, in an informal way and these are used to inform decisions. However not all users are aware of how to contribute to the centre as there is not yet an agreed structured opportunity to enable them to be engaged in the review and planning process. The centre, through its participation officers, is increasingly effective in reaching out to engage members of the community who are not accessing services in order to identify and meet their needs.

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	2

community	
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	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	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	2

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

The findings from the Section 5 inspection of Malmesbury Primary School were taken into consideration in this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Newminster Children's Centre on 6 and 7 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for making us so welcome when we recently inspected your children's centre. During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you as well as the professionals that work with you. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how important the centre is to you, what a difference going there has made to you and how much you enjoy the activities provided. You told us that the staff are friendly, good listeners and give you excellent support. The staff have a high level of expertise and offer excellent practical and emotional support to families who need it.

The centre does some things especially well. The outstanding care, guidance and support provided by the centre have helped many of you improve your confidence. All the professionals from the different agencies work exceptionally well together to make sure you receive the very best advice and support, and the centre provides excellent value for money. However the centre can be difficult to find as it is not signposted anywhere on the estate or roads nearby and there is no signage at the school to show families the way to the entrance.

We were particularly impressed with the enthusiasm of those of you involved as volunteers and in the Local Children's Centre Management Board, showing your commitment to making things at the centre even better. It was very clear that you see the centre as a safe place for all the family and we were very impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and your children. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly well supported and fully included in centre activities.

The headteacher of the school, the centre coordinator and all staff have high ambitions for everyone in the community. They all work hard with great enthusiasm. They are constantly striving to improve the quality of the services they provide and have a good capacity to bring about further improvements. To help them improve further we have suggested that they: develop plans to give you a more structured opportunity to have input in the centre; improve written plans so that they clearly show the targets for the centre and how success will be measured; and improve signposting to where the centre is located so that families in the local community can easily find and access it.

Thank you very much for your welcome and willingness to speak to inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and sampling the centre's work. We wish you every success in the future.

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