

Inspection report for Middleton Children's Centre

Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	383594
Inspection dates	15 -16 September 2011
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	107953 Middleton Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY 512410 Middleton Children's Centre Under 3's EY313137 Middleton Children's Centre Over 3's

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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.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, representatives from professional partnerships, representatives from the advisory board, and the local authority as well as parents and volunteers.

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

Information about the centre

Middleton Children's Centre is situated in south of Leeds and has three main sites within walking distance of each other. It is a phase one centre, offering all elements of the core offer: integrated childcare, Early Years Foundation Stage, health, family support, outreach and links to Jobcentre Plus and child-minder network. Governance is provided by the local authority and an advisory board, with representation from many agencies.

All of the reach area comes within the Middleton Park Ward. The centre serves a community living in the 12% most deprived areas in the country. Of the 345 families registered with the Middleton Children's Centre, 259 are from the reach area. The majority of families are of White British heritage with a small percentage from minority ethnic backgrounds, largely African or of East European heritage. Of those registered in the previous year, 22% were lone parents, 12% were children in BME group and 2% of the children had disabilities. A total of 710 parents in the reach area were in receipt of incapacity benefit and 14 of those were registered at the centre. Last year six teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers were registered for courses and using day care.

Lifestyles and general health is historically poor within the area. There is history of low uptake and sustainability of breastfeeding. Most children enter early education with a much lower range of skills than expected for their age. Unemployment is high in the area with 40% of children in the reach area living in households dependent on benefits.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

By its offer of multiple services, varied learning opportunities, effective partnerships, high quality support and dedicated staff, the centre is successful in both transforming and making a positive difference to the lives of some of the most disadvantaged groups of people in its reach area. One father described the centre as being 'a brilliant place.' The centre has enabled users to achieve good outcomes, in particular in improving their health within a welcoming environment. Centre staff and health professionals promote healthy lifestyles through centre based sessions, outreach work in the homes and special support groups, including teenage mothers and fathers.

Parents, carers and children enjoy learning at the centre and often learn together. They take part in a range of activities offered on all three sites. These develop their skills and add fun into their lives and a good measure of exercise too, including taking part in summer trips and family-fun days. The centre offers outstanding care, guidance and support to its users. Robust safeguarding procedures keep users safe and raise their awareness of safety in their homes.

Leadership and management are good overall, with good governance, accountability, vision, target setting and performance monitoring. Day-to-day management across all three sites is good. Resources are excellent, including the staff consisting of management team, partners, centre-based and outreach workers, all working extremely well as a team to support the needs of the users. Promotion of equality and celebration of diversity is good. The efficient and effective use of its resources, accommodation and its partnerships contributes to the centre providing good value for money. The provision is continuing to develop and has good capacity for sustained improvement.

However, the service recognises that it needs to provide more volunteer training programmes to widen opportunities for work for users and courses to develop their functional skills. Similarly, it needs to involve more parents and carers in the centre's self-evaluation process and the work of the advisory board.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop the current adult learning programmes provided by the centre and its partners to include more courses and learning opportunities covering functional skills (literacy, numeracy, ESOL and IT) and employability training to respond more fully to the needs of parents and carers.
- Increase the involvement of users in the annual review and planning cycle and to contribute to the governance of the centre and to determining and shaping services.
- Increase volunteering opportunities for adult users to develop their confidence, enhance their skills in the workplace, and improving their chances of finding employment.
- Continue to promote and encourage more mothers to take up and sustain breast feeding.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre is particularly good at promoting healthy lifestyles for both children and adults. Children are served healthy food as part of their snacks during sessions as well as being taught the importance of brushing their teeth. The parents are well signposted to the nearby local health clinic for breastfeeding support, immunisation and maternity services. Cooking sessions help teenage mothers taking the 'Cooking Healthy Dishes' to prepare healthy meals for their babies. Take up and sustaining breast feeding is still low despite the centre's efforts. With obesity and weight management an issue for many families the centre has successfully attempted to reduce obesity by its offer of activities such as 'Wake Up and Shake Up' providing opportunities for physical exercise, including opening out its field spaces for families to use at certain times.

The centre provides a very warm, welcoming, safe and inclusive environment for all users across all the three sites. All centre staff and key agencies have a shared understanding of how to keep children and adults safe. Children are effectively learning how to behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Family outreach workers offer help and support in making homes safe for young children and carry out the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents checks in the users' homes.

Outcomes for the Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare provision are good. Children are making good progress given their low starting points. The centre works successfully to ensure that all children have a good firm start in their learning development. Parents and carers are happy with the outcomes, with one parent saying that her child is not only learning how to brush his teeth properly but also 'learning how to share', and marvelled at the transformation, 'it is just amazing how much he has changed.'

Similarly parents and carers speak glowingly of the gains in their lives, their increased self-esteem and personal development after taking part in activities that were both enjoyable and where they learnt new skills. For example, one parent through very good personalised support not only gained in self-esteem and confidence in parenting skills, but also now actively contributes to the centre as a member of the advisory board and as a volunteer setting up activities in the nursery. She summed it all up as 'a massive change' in her life, saying how much she owed to the centre 'I would be desperate without this centre – it has given me the opportunity to learn so many new things.'

A number of parents and carers successfully make positive contributions to the running of the centre. Some have become members of the advisory board, where their views are welcomed and used to inform centre decision making. Other users recruited and trained as volunteers to help with the centre activities and they speak highly of this experience. However, the centre management recognises that it needs to provide more volunteering opportunities and to engage more users and encourage them to join the advisory board.

Opportunities for users to develop skills and improve their economic stability are satisfactory. A job vacancy notice board is maintained in the centre and the Jobcentre Plus advisor offers monthly appointments, providing advice about finances, employment and training. The centre is successful in its aim to 'Reduce debt' and increase financial management skills for its users. Figures for adults entering into employment remain very low for this reach area. The centre has plans to support parents and carers into employment by working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, Leeds City Council and with a new supermarket opening in the area, which is committed to offering to recruit 50% of its staff from local people.

With some users having very low literacy skills, and having difficulties in reading the publicity handed to them, or to be able to write comments about their child's progress, the development of employability and functional skills have become a key priority for the service. At the time of inspection, the centre was planning with a local college to provide a programme of courses in literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and language classes for speakers of other languages.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	3

How good is the provision?

2

The quality of provision is good. The centre is highly responsive and provides learning sessions tailored to meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged families within its reach area. All centre staff, partner agencies and the local authority have an in depth understanding of the issues facing the families. Users' needs are thoroughly and sensitively assessed and relevant support provided, enabling them to access appropriate learning opportunities. Well-structured parenting programmes have a marked impact on outcomes for users experiencing difficulties with their children's behaviour. There are many opportunities for parents and carers and children to play, learn together and develop new skills in the popular 'Stay and Play' and 'Messy Time' sessions. Children of all ages can access a wide range of age appropriate resources and activities that meet the areas of learning and children's individual needs and interests. A range of high quality information and advice is given on all aspects of children development.

Similarly, the centre offers many family learning programmes for adults, which have improved their relationships, the behaviour of their children and the quality of family life. One parent told the inspectors that she had 'learnt a lot of stuff on how to deal with behaviour.' Courses for men including 'Mellow Dads', 'Space for Men', and 'Saturday Man' and training on 'Anger Management', have all helped to encourage men to take up provision at the centre. Many women users have been helped by the self-empowerment courses, including developing confidence in dealing with domestic violence. The annual trips and fun day activities for the entire families have been extremely popular and enjoyed by up to 250 local families.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The level and quality of support provided by the centre staff is excellent, both transforming and making a positive difference to the lives of many families. The intensive family support programme and highly sensitive outreach work results in many of those parents and carers engaging in activities out of the home after a period of home visiting. Users express their deep felt appreciation of the support they receive from the centre with a comment made by one user 'the people here have given me hope for the future' being typical of the feelings of many.

There is very good advice on budgeting and benefits that the users speak highly of, for example, how they were 'helped with debt and pointed in the right direction.' Support for young teenage mothers is similarly excellent. The centre has helped these isolated mothers to take part in varied activities, by offering them support with both transport and crèche facility. Users in particular benefit from the individualised support they receive from the outreach and family team. For instance, one user strongly praised the staff in how they 'went out of their way' to help her 'looking for a washer and dryer as well as providing a safety gate for their home'

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The leadership and management of Middleton Children's Centre are good. The centre manager, the senior leadership and centre partners are a good team and demonstrate a clear vision and very strong commitment to support and make a real difference to their local community. Relationships and communication with all staff including partners, are extremely good. There is good day-to-day management by the centre head and the senior management team. The centre's governance and accountability arrangements with the local authority are good.

The advisory board and the local authority are proactive and provide appropriate support and good level of skills, knowledge and guidance in relation to the development of the service and improvement plans. The planning of provision and self-evaluation process is robust, with regular updating of targets, clearly linked to Every Child Matters outcomes, staff performance appraisals and key service priorities.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All the displayed information has a strong focus upon the promotion of equality. The Leeds city-wide successful project on the Stephen Lawrence Award has resulted in the majority of staff taking up training on equality and diversity topics and the centre has been recognised for the good quality of its multicultural resources. The varied range of resources, books, pictures, and posters with positive images of people from Asia and Africa, including mothers breastfeeding, celebrating different cultures and languages both enhance users' learning and demonstrate the centre's strong commitment to celebrate diversity. Similarly, the curriculum in the early years programmes embeds the celebrations of other cultures and major festivals such as Divali and the Chinese New Year.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and meet with statutory requirements. Safeguarding is actively promoted through the informative posters on display. Risk assessments are good. Staff and partners are knowledgeable about key procedures and they all have appropriate levels of training. Moreover, staff are supervised in their work to protect children through safeguarding supervision meetings held every six weeks. This ensures that the staff are well supported and children remain well protected.

The centre has good partnerships with a number of multi-agencies and works exceedingly well with them, including with its local primary schools. The centre is particularly good in how it oversees, supports and manages the 'smooth' transition process from the under three's to over three's provision and into the school. Carefully planned, and involving parents and carers, senior management team and the school as equal partners, this process is appreciated by all and helps children to settle well in school.

Resources are excellent for all ages. On all three sites, children and parents and carers benefit from the outstanding indoor and outdoor facilities. All provide excellent learning environments. The centre provides good value for money in its effective and efficient use of resources. For instance in its effective deployment of outreach staff to support the needs of the families, including providing quality one-to-one advice and counselling sessions.

There is good consultation of users via questionnaires. However, there is insufficient engagement of users in the wider self-evaluation process and the centre recognises that it needs to be more pro-active in encouraging more users to take an active part in centre decision making by joining the advisory board.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Middleton Children's Centre on 15 -16 September 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We are very thankful to those of you who met us during the inspection and enthusiastically shared your views about the centre. We have learnt a lot from you all, in particular how you appreciate the centre's work and how it has transformed both yours and your families' lives. We agree with you that the centre is a safe and welcoming environment where you are treated with respect.

Through our discussions, observations of learning sessions and meetings we know how the centre has made a positive difference to your lives. For example, it was very pleasing for us to see how one of you took an active part in contributing to the advisory board meeting and later we watched you happily helping with tasks in the nursery as a volunteer.

You told us about the progress that you and your children have made in learning new skills as well as gaining knowledge especially about health matters and healthy eating. One of you enthusiastically told us how your children had developed, in 'leaps and bounds'. The centre offers you a good range of courses that help you all, men and women, parents and carers and teenage mums to develop your confidence, self-esteem, learn about parenting, budgeting, self-empowerment and how to deal with domestic abuse.

Parenting courses in particular have helped you to learn about improving family relationships and how to support your child's learning and to deal with difficult behaviour. In particular, you and your children really like the 'Play and Stay' sessions. Similarly, you have all mentioned how much you and your families loved the summer fun day and the trips to other places. One dad told us how he 'loves coming here' and that the 'centre is brilliant and I am encouraging other dads to take part'.

We agree with you that the centre offers you outstanding care, guidance and support for parents and families, particularly those coping with immense personal difficulties, such as domestic violence or behaviour problems with their children. You particularly value the individualised support provided for you and your children. We were impressed in particular

by the excellent support given to young teenage mums unable to come to the centre. Some of you also told us how the centre goes out of its way to support you with childcare, with information and guidance, as well as helping you to manage your money well. For instance, you spoke highly of how you saved money in buying cheap clothes through the centre's baby boutique and borrowing toys from the centre. You also said how you benefited from the safety checks made on your homes by the outreach staff.

Leadership and management of the service are good. Managers and other staff, including from other agencies know what they are doing, focusing on meeting your needs. They all work really well together to provide relevant learning opportunities and services for you. The centre is very successful in making the process of transition to the local schools a smooth and a happy one for you and your child. This means that your child is much happier and better able to settle well into the school environment. The centre offers outstanding resources, which you and your children benefit from. We found the well-equipped teaching rooms, materials, wonderful displays celebrating other cultures on walls and the indoor and outdoor areas with a lot of greenery to be really pleasing. Similarly, the baby room used for breastfeeding and the training room are also good environment for you to use.

You spoke highly of the staff, saying how very friendly and approachable they were at all times. The 'fantastic' team as one of you described it work hard to support you in achieving your goals and to ensure your young children get off to a good start in their learning. The local authority, centre manager, all the staff and yourself are keen to further improve the centre. We have requested, and are happy to learn, that the centre is planning new learning programmes in literacy, number work and ESOL for you to become more successful in finding work.

Many of you have indicated that both the courses and volunteer work will particularly help you in developing your skills for employment and parenting, such as filling in job application forms, reading to your children, as well as writing comments on your child's progress in their record book. To help you in that, the management is planning a 'drop in' space area or room, fully equipped with computers that you can use at any time, at the main centre where you can have a one-to-one chat with a member of staff or work on your literacy, number work and computing skills.

As you requested, we have also asked the management to offer more of you training in volunteering and to provide opportunities for you to become volunteers. Similarly, we have suggested to the centre management to involve you more in the centre's decision making, consultation activities, and to hear your views regularly through formal focus groups. Also the centre staff tell us how keen they are to encourage you to join the advisory board and to contribute to its work where you can make valuable contributions about the way the centre is run and the type of activities offered.

We wish you the best of luck for the future. Thank you for your valuable contribution to the inspection.

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