

Inspection report for Charnwood Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Charnwood Primary School and Rocklands Special school
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Gateway Special Needs Pre-School

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.



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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 centre staff, users, representatives from the district management advisory board and the centre's partner services. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This is a phase two children's centre providing the full core offer since January 2010 to a community ranked within the 70% most deprived in the country. During the last two years, the centre has been through a number of changes in its leadership and management. In July 2011 a new District Children's Centre Manager was appointed to oversee the work of Willows, Chadsmead and Charnwood children's centres. This area is referred to as North Lichfield. At the same time, the previous centre manager was appointed as the District Commissioning Officer for Lichfield. They are responsible for the coordination and commissioning of services. The centre does not directly employ any staff as it commissions local organisations to provide all of its services. The centre has recently revised its governance arrangements and a newly formed district management advisory board holds the centre to account through its improvement plan.

The centre provides health and family support services, adult training, and early years advice and guidance. There is a low number of workless families dependant on state benefits, and unemployment in the area that the centre serves is relatively low. There is a small minority of families from minority ethnic backgrounds. A large majority of children at the end of the of the Early Years Foundation Stage have skills, knowledge and abilities are in line with those expected for their age. Charnwood is on the same site as Charnwood Primary School, Lichfield Dyslexia Centre and Rockland's Special School. There is an onsite pre-school which provides services for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. It is governed by

Rockland's Special School. All on-site provision has separate inspection arrangements.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre offers satisfactory support to children and families. Parents and carers describe the centre staff as 'friendly.' They told inspectors that they appreciate the time staff take to get to know them as individuals and how much they feel valued. A particular strength of the centre is its approach to safeguarding and extent to which users feel safe. Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures, they are well trained and ensure that any concerns are promptly shared with relevant agencies.

Children behave well during sessions and make steady progress in developing skills. Evidence from case studies and discussions with users show that aspects of provision are having a satisfactory impact on some children, adults and families. Despite the best efforts of centre staff, links with Jobcentre Plus are less well developed. Currently there is a Job Centre Plus bus that visits monthly. The centre seeks the views of users through annual surveys, questionnaires and ongoing discussions. As a result of feedback from users, the centre is increasingly adapting aspects of its provision. For instance the timing of certain sessions, which has resulted in an increased number of users able to attend. Leaders acknowledge the need to increase the involvement of users and the opportunities they have to contribute to the centre's decision making process, strategic planning and evaluation.

Those centre users who made their comments known are unanimous in their appreciation and praise for the improvements to their lives. The centre has successfully identified some areas of need and shortfalls in provision because of the good-quality information that health visitors and other professionals provide, as well as their own local knowledge of their reach area. This enables the centre to target some of the groups of people to ensure that their needs are met. However, the take-up of services remains low and the centre's engagement with families from the wider community is underdeveloped. This results in their needs not being identified or met.

Consequently, the equality of opportunity for users in the reach area is satisfactory.

The satisfactory provision is underpinned by sound procedures to assess children and other users' needs and successfully match them to appropriate services. Several parents and carers said they were happy and secure with the welcome and care that they receive in the centre. One strong feature of the centre is the work of outreach workers such as the 'Parent Participation Worker' and 'Home Start'. They provide invaluable support for the most vulnerable families. They are particularly effective in signposting parents and carers to additional services to promote their safety and well-being. There are learning activities provided by the local college and at the centre to increase users' knowledge and understanding which is having a positive impact on their lives.

Governance and leadership are satisfactory and improving. The centre's development plan demonstrates an understanding of the target groups within the reach area and what needs to be achieved. Consequently, the centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for improvement. A district management advisory board has recently been established. Its membership includes representatives from partner agencies. There are plans to develop the parent forum and locality partnership group. There are limited occasions for parents' and carers' views to be heard and opportunities for them to inform the shaping of the centre's services.

Leaders and managers at all levels and all other staff demonstrate a passion and determination to improve the lives of users. Regular monitoring by the district commissioning officer is carried out. There are appropriate and regular systems in place to evaluate users' satisfaction. However, the centre has limited methods in place to evaluate the improvement the centre has made to their lives, or the success of the centre's services in meeting local priorities.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families using the centre by:
 - reaching out to and engaging with members of the community who are not accessing services
 - taking steps to identify and meet their needs.
- Further develop the governance of the centre by developing the locality partnerships and parents forum to improve the extent to which parents and carers contribute to decision making.
- Improve the evaluation of the effectiveness of the centre by:
 - working with partners to gather information about outcomes for children and users, and the impact of services provided
 - with the local authority further develop systems to record participation rates, attendance levels and reach of services into target groups

- using this information to inform future planning.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for children, adults and families are gradually improving. The centre has yet to develop systems for demonstrating how it is improving outcomes across all areas. Activities offered at the centre make an adequate contribution to community cohesion. One example involved parents and children working together to design and make lanterns which were then used the following week in a Halloween Parade. This resulted in a reduced number of reports of anti-social behaviour over the Halloween period. Users benefit from services such as the premature baby group led by the local health professionals and the 'Whits End' group, which supports families of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder which is lead by parents, both are held on site. One reason for this is because parents appreciate the friendly, informal atmosphere that the centre provides. Through cooking sessions, users are developing an understanding of how to keep themselves and their families healthy. 'Foody Fun' sessions are held at a neighbouring children's centre, run by staff from the local college and are well attended. Membership of the centre is gradually increasing although it is not fully reflective of the wider community. The centre has very close links with 'Gateway Special Needs Pre-School' which supports parents whose children have special educational needs and/or disabilities and is very well attended. The on-site provision is supported by additional Health Services such as portage, physiotherapy and speech and language support. It provides care and educational for children who may progress in to mainstream education but also provides seamless transition for those children who may attend the Rocklands Special School.

The centre is a safe and secure environment where users feel they can share their concerns. Good systems are in place for coordinating support for vulnerable families, including looked after children, are good. Regular meetings and effective communication between centre staff and partner agencies mean that families who may be at risk of harm and children assessed under the Common Assessment Framework are closely monitored. As a result they receive good support which has a positive impact on their outcomes. Parents' and carers' written evaluations show that the lives of these families are improved through the effective implementation of the Common Assessment Framework procedures and support from outreach workers. All required statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding are met. Comprehensive risk assessments ensure the safety and welfare of children and users when they are onsite and when they access activities at other community venues.

Parents and carers enjoy learning with their children at the centre. Children are developing in aspects of their personal, social and emotional development and communication language and literacy and are generally making satisfactory progress.

Children are keen to participate in centre activities. Their communication, language and literacy skills are developed satisfactorily through activities such as 'Rhyme time'. There is evidence in the latest data that any gap in the attainment of the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest of the cohort is narrowing in the reach area. However the impact that the centre is having on this is limited because of the low numbers of children accessing services, they are also unable to evidence this impact through any evaluation. Good partnerships with the local schools and effective transition arrangements support children as they move on to the next stage in their education.

Parental evaluations of such groups such as 'Debutots', which is a drama and musical based activity, show that they make a sound contribution towards developing users' parenting skills. Parents and carers contribute their views through valuable feedback and evaluations of the services provided. However, there are limited opportunities for them to participate in decision making and the management of the centre. There is no parents' forum or locality partnership. Users benefit from an increasingly helpful range of courses. For instance, positive parenting programmes help parents and carers manage their children's behaviour. Case studies show how centre staff have assisted parents and carers to access other services such as Citizens Advice Bureau which gave valuable advice about housing and debt issues.

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	3
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	3
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	3
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?

3

The range of services provided in the centre and at the outreach site meets the needs of some of the wider community adequately. Senior leaders recognise that more needs to be done to increase the proportion of users from target groups. These include fathers, young mothers and lone parents. Some success has been achieved with fathers and grandfathers through the monthly 'Snap Crackle and Pops' group.

The centre has a system for assessing the needs of all children, including those with

special educational needs and/or disabilities. Children’s achievements are celebrated through informal discussions with parents and carers and through the targeted ‘Play and Stay’ sessions. Parents, carers and adults make satisfactory gains in their learning and development. Parents and carers who met with inspectors explained how their involvement in the centre had built their confidence. ‘I have gained the confidence to help out at the school. I am helping children with their reading’ said one parent. Staff consult with adults prior to planning programmes, which successfully build on their prior learning.

Case studies clearly show that the centre is making a noticeable difference to some families. Users particularly appreciate the support they receive at times of need. The quality of information and the guidance they receive is presented in a way that is accessible for all members of the community.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. A newly developed reception area and appointed administrator enable all users and commissioned services to have their needs met. This ensures that services are delivered as per the centre timetable. Staff of all commissioned services are keen and committed to improving the work of the centre. The ability of leaders and managers to monitor and evaluate the centre’s work and demonstrate impact is developing satisfactorily. Evaluation is sometimes used to shape future services, such as evening activities to provide support to parents and carers of children with Aspergers Syndrome. However evaluation of the centre lacks consistent and secure evidence, including information from commissioned services, of the impact on outcomes for children and families. The centre has now got all of its users registered on their system but not all commissioned services are inputting their data to give the centre the information that will allow them to plan for the future and evaluate fully.

Members of the newly formed district management advisory board have met once and clarified roles, responsibilities and terms of reference. While it is too early to evaluate the impact of this group’s work, members who met with inspectors articulated their high expectations for the centre. They have a crystal clear understanding of the part they can play in improving outcomes, strengthening partnerships and holding the centre to account. The contribution that users make to the strategic work of the centre is limited because there is currently no system in

place to allow this to happen.

Safeguarding is a strength. Procedures to ensure the protection of users as they move around the site are effectively implemented. Staff have a clear understanding about their roles in identifying and reporting concerns. The centre has good systems in place for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment of staff including those from commissioned services. Families that attend the centre are particularly well supported at times of need. Partnerships with services such as health and the family support team contribute satisfactorily to the outcomes of users.

Centre staff and partnership agencies are committed to promoting the inclusion of all children and their families including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff have yet to identify how services in the centre and at the outreach site can be developed to ensure take-up rates increase particularly for the target groups. As a consequence, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	3
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	3

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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Sure Start Charnwood Children's Centre on 28 - 29 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for making us welcome. We would like to thank you for contributing to the inspection by sharing your experience of the children's centre. Many of you told us that the staff at the centre are friendly and you feel safe there. We could see that children and their parents and carers enjoy many of the activities on offer. The centre is particularly effective at ensuring staff have a good understanding of procedures for protecting children. Services also work together well to help families who come to the centre during particularly difficult times.

The centre works with a range of satisfactory partners such as health and social care to support children's development and help the adults who use the centre to learn new skills and gain confidence. Children make satisfactory progress in all areas of learning. Some make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and communication language and literacy. Some of you we spoke to told us that you really appreciate the services of the Citizens Advice Bureau because the support they give in relation to benefits and housing is good. One parent said, 'It made a big difference.

Staff have produced a written plan which identifies targets for improving the centre's work. Centre staff know that there is still more to do if they are to fully meet the needs of the community by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access its services. We have asked them to develop ways in which they can ensure everyone who needs the centre's help receives it. We have also asked the local authority to help the centre understand how well it is doing in improving the lives of children and parents.

There have been some changes to both the organisation of the centre and its leadership. There is a new district management advisory board which is looking at the work of all of the Sure Start Children's Centres in the Lichfield area. Currently there is no parent forum or locality partnership to feed into the district group. We have asked the centre to give parents and carers and other adults more opportunities to be involved in making decisions about the types of activities offered by the centre.

I would like to thank everyone who came to talk to us. I would like to wish you, your children and the families who live in the Charnwood area the very best for the future.

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

