

Inspection report for Alfreton Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	383477
Inspection dates	28–29 September 2011
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Centre leader	Miss Angela Devine
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Alfreton Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Grange Private Day Nursery

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.

An inspection of the co-located nursery 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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the manager, staff, health visitors, members of the advisory board, and several representatives of the local authority. They spoke informally to parents and carers.

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

Information about the centre

Alfreton Children's Centre is a relatively small phase one centre, established in June 2006 as a Sure Start Local Programme and managed by the health service. Responsibility for, and governance of, the centre was transferred to the local authority in 2008. The centre manager was appointed at the end of October 2008 and she manages two centres. This year, there has been a significant re-structuring in the local authority and since April 2011 multi-agency teams (MAT) have been established to serve each locality. Direct line management for the manager now comes from the MAT manager and key personnel in the local authority have changed. There is an advisory board made up of representatives from agencies and schools.

The centre is co-located with a maintained nursery school. It serves an area of mixed housing. There are several areas with high levels of deprivation, high proportions of children in workless households and families on benefits. Within the reach, the great majority of families are of White British heritage. There is an increasing number of

families of Polish heritage. In general, children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are well below those expected.

The centre makes the full core offer. Jobcentre plus services are no longer provided at the centre; children's centre workers signpost families to the central service which is a short distance from the centre.

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

Alfreton Children's Centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. The services it provides are adequately matched to the needs of families and so it achieves satisfactory outcomes for families. The centre is welcoming and runs smoothly. Its greatest asset is its staff, who are enthusiastic, caring and committed to supporting families. The manager has built a team of staff who are confident in their roles. They feel empowered through training and well supported in taking significant responsibility for key areas of the centre's work. The centre's engagement with families has increased steadily each year.

Currently, just over two thirds of families in the reach are registered, and although the centre has contact with two thirds of these this amounts to less than half of families in the area served by the centre. Monitoring information shows that the bulk of its work is with the most vulnerable families; target groups, such as fathers and lone parents, are adequately represented. The feedback that the centre obtains from users shows high satisfaction with its work. Typically, families say that they are kept well informed, treated well and they appreciate the support, understanding and advice they receive.

Through case studies, the centre can show clear impact of its work on improving outcomes for families. However, it is not yet able to demonstrate fully the impact of the work it is doing. This is because it does not consistently set precise targets for the work it is planning or carrying out, so that it can measure its success, as well as identify what works well and what does not.

The centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory. There have been improvements to the provision in the last three years and partnerships with other agencies have been established for some time. However, the recent re-structuring has provided an opportunity to review what the centre provides and consider what can be improved, so that many services have been enhanced in some way, and have been running for a short time. As a result, impact is not yet evident. The recent re-structuring in the county supports increasingly effective joint working between the centre staff and other agencies, with joint planning of cases to meet the needs of families.

Representatives of agencies find that communication with the centre is good and the staff receptive to ideas and to change. There have also been changes in the lines of accountability, and procedures associated with this are not yet fully implemented. The local authority has recently drawn up an action plan showing ranked priorities for the locality, but these are not yet reflected in the centre's planning and not all staff are aware of what these are. Nonetheless, the centre has a plan showing appropriate developments, linked to indicators for the area as well as priorities they identified themselves. These include supporting parents in enabling children's language to develop and increasing breastfeeding rates. In general, self-evaluation is accurate, and the manager and staff know what areas of provision the centre needs to develop further. However, few of its targets are measurable and so it is not possible to see whether they are ambitious or not.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of families in the area who access the centre's services so that this is over 50%.
- Implement and embed the recently-developed arrangements to hold the centre to account.
- Ensure that the centre's planning reflects the locality plan and sets out ambitious and measurable targets for development that can be used for evaluating the impact of the centre's work.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Data for the local area show some improvements in outcomes over time. For instance, breastfeeding rates, although low, are better in the reach than they are in the district or county. However, the proportion of mothers who are smokers at the time of their baby's birth is high and above district and county levels. The number of young adults who are not in employment, education or training is relatively low, and work done to support this group is effective in encouraging them to register on courses likely to lead to employment. Although the centre's data shows that older adults have completed a range of courses in literacy, numeracy, vocational and leisure skills at entry level and above, that are likely to improve their chances of employment, there are few examples of adults who have subsequently found employment or who have moved on to do voluntary work. Although the knowledge and skills of children on entry to early years provision remains low, there has been a

small improvement in the last year in the gap between the lowest scoring children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the others.

Case study evidence shows that family support work leads to improved outcomes for children and adults. This is evident for children on the child protection register and families for whom the Common Assessment Framework is used; centre staff work effectively with other agencies to identify the needs of families, and these are kept under review. Improvements include those in parenting skills, enabling parents to enjoy their children more, advice on debt or access to appropriate benefits, a reduction in depression and social isolation and the adoption of healthier lifestyles including reducing obesity. However, the centre does not have sufficient evaluation of the impact of all that it has done in the past. Work done recently with parents and carers to help them to encourage their children's language development has been evaluated as successful elsewhere, but an evaluation for this centre was not available for inspectors to see.

The centre provides a secure environment for families, who feel safe there and will turn to staff when they are experiencing difficulties. Each family that registers is provided with a pack containing information on home safety as well as useful items for use in the home such as electrical socket covers. Parental feedback shows that some have made positive changes in their everyday lives as a result of activities or courses at the centre. This is evident in comments such as 'We eat together at the table more now', 'I am going to put a new battery in the smoke alarm', or 'I will make sure there are healthy snacks at home'. Children and adults behave safely and well at the centre.

Achievements are readily celebrated at the centre. For instance, children who completed a 'Rhyme Time' challenge all received certificates, and displays of users' achievements celebrate successes.

There is an active 'parents' forum' and a clear mechanism through which the views of parents and carers are passed on to the advisory board. Parents are listened to and they have an influence on developing the provision made at the centre. A few are involved in developments, such as the re-designing of a leaflet to make it appeal more to young parents. However, there is currently no involvement of users in community based activities or projects. Children's views are sought regularly, including about the activities to be provided in the summer holidays.

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	3
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

Families' needs are accurately assessed and the centre provides a satisfactory range of services to meet these needs. These include a young parents' support group. The centre successfully signposts families to those services not provided at the centre. Although levels of smoking and worklessness in the area are high, and these aspects are addressed as appropriate through outreach services, the centre does not routinely provide courses such as smoking cessation and 'back to work'. The centre recognises that it does not do enough to reduce teenage pregnancy, such as contraceptive services, and there are plans to provide this.

Children's centre workers and partner agencies reach out to those in the area and provide a range of services well targeted to the most vulnerable; this work is tailored to the individual needs of families and is increasing steadily. The centre's staff co-ordinate services and cases are reviewed regularly and frequently, both formally, as part of supervisions, and informally. In this way, emerging or changing needs are identified and provision made for these. The centre makes appropriate use of its linked early years provision to provide care for vulnerable two-year-olds. Occasionally, this enables adults who were previously socially isolated to access adult learning. Similarly, it supports mothers from minority ethnic groups who have little spoken English, enabling them to build their confidence and encouraging them to attend English courses and centre activities.

The centre is responsive to the wishes of users as well as their needs. For instance, both paediatric and basic first aid training has been provided. There is a suitable range of information for families in the centre on health matters and safety, including a computer for users to use to find job-related information.

Activities that involve children are well prepared and the centre uses its accommodation well. For instance, the room used for crèches and other child-related activities has a secure outdoor area which is partially covered, and staff use this to provide a range of activities from which children can choose. Activities reflect the areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Records of children's learning and development are meaningful to all because they are photographic, but these do not identify the next steps in a way that is accessible to parents. The centre recognises this and has recently provided training for staff.

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 local authority provides satisfactory strategic direction and holds the centre to account through an 'annual conversation'. Because strategic plans are recent, the links between these and the centre's planning are not yet clear or well understood by all parties. The advisory board, charged with acting as a 'critical friend' has recently agreed that meetings will be chaired by an independent party, rather than the centre manager as has been the case in the past. There is good multi-agency representation on the board. Members of this group have asked questions, for example, about how the centre can support increased Polish representation in the community and high rates of child obesity.

The centre meets its duties in relation to safeguarding and equality and diversity. Staff are vetted as required and all have had a range of child protection training. There are sufficient staff who have the enhanced training in multi-agency procedures. Further training for staff is planned this year, on topics such as 'Safeguarding the disabled' and 'Shaken babies'. A suitable range of policies guides this aspect of the centre's work, although the arrangements for reviewing the safeguarding policy are not included in the document itself.

Staff are inclusive in several ways. They have been trained to support families from the travelling community, and welcome children from a local special school to some sessions at the centre. Appropriate use is made of interpreters and contact has been made with all known Polish families in the area. However, while the centre offers crèche facilities for parents and carers who attend courses, there are few activities outside working hours. Awareness of cultural diversity is satisfactorily promoted.

The training of staff is well targeted to priority needs in the area. Morale is good. Those who have worked in the centre for a while recognise that their roles have become more complex and involve a wider range of partners. Staff share responsibility by working as 'champions', such as for breastfeeding, and feel valued and well prepared for their roles. However, there is a lack of clarity about how the impact of their work is to be evaluated. At present, the work done achieves satisfactory outcomes and so the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional	3
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supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	
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	3
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

The Grange Private Day Nursery was inspected last in November 2009, when its provision was judged to be good. Reference was made to this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Alfreton Children's Centre on 28–29 September 2011. We judged the centre to be satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us about your experiences at the centre and how you have benefitted from the support you have had at home. We also read your comments given to the centre staff once you had completed courses and found these helpful in making our judgements. Many of you say that you are treated well, the services meet your needs and you are kept well informed. Some of your comments were helpful in showing how your contact with the centre has made a positive difference to your lives.

We were pleased to find that there is an active 'parents' forum', which meets regularly and is able to influence what happens at the centre. This group's views and requests are regularly fed into the advisory group, which supports and advises the centre manager.

The centre is successful in encouraging you to lead healthy lives, keep safe and make a positive contribution. Staff and others also help you and your children to develop personally and socially and to learn. Those of you who have come to the centre on parenting courses found these helpful so that you are more skilled and confident and able to enjoy being parents more. Almost all enjoy the activities that are put on at the centre. Many also have support at home, and this involves a number of different agencies. The staff at the centre are working more and more successfully with a number of different professionals in order to give the support that families need.

The centre staff know what families in the area need and its services are designed to meet the needs. The centre is able to show that some things are getting better. For instance, more are choosing to breastfeed their children. However, there are some aspects that are not improving quickly enough, such as children's development by the time they go into early years provision.

The centre is run well. The manager has made the staff into a skilled team who are confident to take on responsibilities for taking developments forward. The staff know most of the areas that they need to work on in order to improve. For instance, they are currently making clear to parents what the next steps are in children's learning, so that parents and carers can work on these too.

The inspection identified some areas for improvement. There have been quite a few changes in the local authority and it has only recently made a plan showing which areas it wants the centre to be working on in the future so the centre has not yet included these in its own plan. The arrangements for checking on the work of the centre are at an early stage and are not well established.

The centre's plan shows what its own targets are but does not show how it will measure its success. The centre will be setting targets that it can measure in the future. It is going to increase the number of users who have contact with the centre because less than half of the families living in the area are using its services.

We wish you all well in the future.

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