

Inspection report for Northfields and West Humberstone Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Leicester
Inspection number	383708
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2011
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Linked school if applicable	Northfields House Primary School Merrydale Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Hamilton Pre-School SPICE Pre-School Bright Bees Nursery 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 year's inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, the centre manager, other staff, representatives from partner services and a local authority representative, as well as talking to parents and carers. They observed the centre's work including activities provided at the centre, activities provided at other settings, and looked at a range of relevant documents and policies, safeguarding arrangements and data.

Information about the centre

This phase one centre was purpose built as an extension of Northfields House Primary School and it also has links with Merrydale Infant School. It serves the Charnwood and Humberstone wards in the city of Leicester. Over half the families in the reach area are from minority ethnic groups. The largest proportion of this group is from Asian backgrounds, a small proportion is of Black African heritage and there is a small but growing proportion of Slovakian Roma families. Just under half the families in the area are White British. The area contains high levels of deprivation and unemployment with almost twice the level of children living in income-deprived families than is usually found. The most deprived areas contain a significant transient community with families moving to the area to take up temporary housing before moving elsewhere.

The centre's primary location is on the Northfields House Primary School site. The building is linked directly to the school, allowing the sharing of facilities and resources, particularly the outdoor area for the Early Years Foundation Stage. Services are also delivered in a room at the Uppingham Road Methodist Church. Early years and childcare provision are also delivered at the Hamilton and SPICE pre-schools and in partnership with Bright Bees, a privately run nursery across the road from the centre. The centre is managed by Leicester City Council and forms part of the recently formed North East Neighbourhood which incorporates three other children's centres: Hamilton, Thurnby Lodge and Netherhall. A neighbourhood advisory board manages all four centres. It is made up of representatives from the

local authority, private and voluntary sectors, other statutory agencies and parents. A parents' forum has been established which helps support the work of the neighbourhood advisory board. The centre is managed by a core team, directly employed by the local authority. The centre manager is also the North East Neighbourhood manager for all four centres but is based at Northfields and West Humberstone Children's Centre. A range of other services is provided by staff employed by partnership agencies who deliver services and activities for users of the children's centre.

When they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage provision, children's levels of knowledge and skills are often 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 families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Northfields and West Humberstone Sure Start Children's Centre is satisfactory. Some aspects of the centre's work are good because of the enthusiasm and commitment of the centre's team for ensuring high levels of enjoyment and achievement for those who attend. Central to the centre's work is the provision of good-quality care and guidance for children and their families. This includes good-quality childcare commissioned through partner settings and well-tailored support for the most vulnerable families to ensure their welfare needs are well addressed. Good arrangements for safeguarding are in place. Staff are well trained and have a good understanding of child protection procedures. Parents told inspectors that they and their children feel safe at the centre and some said that because of the support they receive and the emphasis of all centre and partner staff on staying safe, their confidence and understanding of how to keep themselves and their own families safe was much improved.

Outcomes are satisfactory. Observations by inspectors and feedback from users confirm that they enjoy all the activities on offer. The work of the children's centre teacher has helped to ensure that outcomes for children have improved swiftly and securely. As a result, their progress is good, as evidenced in the Early Years

Foundation Stage profile scores where the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest has closed and, indeed, children are approaching levels expected for their age. Furthermore, targeted work has ensured that these children enjoy a smooth transition into school. There are also some examples of adults being supported to develop their confidence and skills to return to education and training, to learn English and to apply and be successful in gaining employment. However, adults are often signposted to these services with other agencies and the centre does not have systems in place to accurately evaluate progression or outcomes.

For the many families who engage with the appropriate health services and, where they are measured or information is available, health outcomes are similar to those found nationally. Because comprehensive health data have not been available to the centre, this limits its ability to precisely target families and demonstrate impact across the full range of healthy outcomes. A parents' forum, facilitated by the community development worker, is re-establishing itself and can demonstrate its impact, for example, in establishing single-sex swimming sessions. However, because of staffing and organisational uncertainty, parents' and carers' involvement in the decision-making process is not systematic and routine. The centre does not always check well enough that its methods for communicating with, and receiving feedback from, for example, those who do not speak English as their first language, are appropriate and effective.

Provision is satisfactory. Working closely with most of its partners, including the other children's centres in the neighbourhood, the children's centre offers a range of appropriate services to its community. Assessment is used satisfactorily to ensure that generally these services meet families' needs. The most vulnerable and those in crisis using the centre receive well-tailored support and guidance from skilled family support and children in need workers to help them get back on track and enhance their well-being. 'Stay and Play' sessions in the centre are very well attended because of the exciting activities and resources used to engage children and adults. They give opportunities to socialise and to demonstrate how parents and carers can support their children's learning. However, so many attend the groups that opportunities are sometimes missed to identify and plan to meet the specific needs of individuals or families who, if missed, may disengage.

Leadership and management at all levels have been restructured. At a strategic level, the new systems for governance across four children's centres are well understood by the local authority and some agency partners who are committed to streamlining services and making the best use of resources. This change coincided with a period of staffing uncertainty. As a result, the new arrangements are not fully embedded and understood by staff at the centre and parents at the local level. New systems are developing for the collection and analysis of data and for their use in development planning and driving improvement. Leaders acknowledge these systems are not comprehensive and rigorous enough and not everyone is playing their full part. Nevertheless, the commitment of staff has ensured that outcomes have been maintained as at least satisfactory and some have improved, evidencing satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen leadership and management and improve outcomes by:
 - sharpening the collection, collation and analysis of data to be used when strategically planning and evaluating provision for all children and their families in the reach area
 - asking partner agencies to provide more information to the centre, especially health data and the outcomes of all services to which the centre has signposted users, in order to more accurately evaluate outcomes, particularly for adults
 - ensuring all partners work together seamlessly to evaluate and plan future services so that the benefits of partnership working can be maximised for users
 - strengthening the arrangements for middle and senior leaders to play their full part in driving improvements
 - establishing routine systems for communication, contact and feedback that are equally as clear and accessible for all members of the community to ensure equality of access and engagement
 - sharpening the assessment and planning of learning opportunities so they are more closely tailored to meet individual needs during activities in the centre, such as 'Stay and Play'.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Healthy lifestyles are suitably promoted within the centre and through outreach and partnership work. Early contact with target groups is established through midwives and health visitors, and a high proportion of mothers attend antenatal services. The proportion of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding is similar to that found nationally, as is the proportion of children who are obese. A more pressing issue identified is the relatively high proportion of young children who are underweight or who have health issues relating to poor diet. Strategies have yet to be embedded and monitored for impact in this area. The promotion of smoking cessation has met with varied success. Children develop a good understanding of healthy eating and exercise. Along with their parents they have been encouraged to grow and eat vegetables. A high proportion of adults responded positively to an initiative to promote leisure centre membership. However, of those who joined initially, it is not known how many have actually used the leisure centre. Swimming in the onsite pool is very popular with adults and children alike, and parents are expressing their views about how this should be organised. Those who attend 'Baby Massage' and 'Discovering Babies' sessions report that they are better able to identify and deal with children's emotional, behavioural and health needs.

Because of the centre's comprehensive support the most vulnerable families do well in developing their confidence and parenting skills. Children in need or on child

protection plans and those who are looked after also do well. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used effectively to provide multi-agency support for families. Staying safe is promoted well across all activities. There have been no reported road accidents for children in the reach area and children were seen to behave safely and sensibly in all settings. Adults were seen to respect the rules of the centre and show respect for one another. Bespoke programmes, such as 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities', help parents and carers to deal more appropriately with challenging behaviour.

Achievement of children who have accessed the centre has shown significant and consistent improvement. 'Preventative Pathways' encourages early language development successfully. Transition arrangements into childcare or school ensure children settle more easily to school than those who have not accessed the centre's services. Children accessing childcare greatly enjoy their experiences and make good progress in their learning and development. One parent said, 'My children have grown up with Sure Start and they are doing well.' Much positive feedback is received about, for example, how accessing the learning and toy library has given parents confidence to support children's learning at home. The JobCentre Plus worker and community development worker present compelling case studies as examples of how their help with interviews, advice on benefits, curriculum vitae writing, and volunteer training programmes have resulted in an increasing number of volunteers and those returning to education, training and work.

The recent period of change at the centre has proved unsettling for some, and confidence and willingness to participate, for example, in the parents' forum and in the promotion and participation of more community-wide events, have had to be rebuilt. The centre cannot be sure, because of lack of rigour in its data collection and analysis, that they are reaching and ensuring the participation of all groups equally.

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	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	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

Assessment is used satisfactorily to identify the needs of those who use the children's centre and to evaluate their progress. For children in the commissioned childcare, the assessment of their progress is of good quality. The information is then used to plan activities to meet children's individual needs well. Examples of good assessment procedures were also seen in records of case studies of children in need, those subject to the Common Assessment Framework and families in times of crisis. Elsewhere, more informal assessment and user feedback tends to focus on enjoyment, interest and confidence building. There is also little identification of the needs of those not registered with the centre. However, a range of engaging opportunities is planned and resourced conscientiously by the committed staff to secure enjoyment. Staff also provide positive role models for users, for example, preparing and eating only healthy food with them at the centre café and demonstrating consistently how families can keep themselves safe.

A recent and concerted effort to contact every family entitled to claim the nursery education grant has resulted in a significant increase in the take-up of childcare and, consequently, contact with other services. The 12-week course 'Preventative Pathways' guides parents effectively to support their children's early language development. The new childcare and early learning officers work within the centre, for example, to support children and their families in the 'Stay and Play' sessions, or where need is identified, at home. Provision organised by the children's centre teacher in partnership with schools and commissioned childcare centres is very well planned and delivered.

Several activities are undertaken by partner agencies, particularly around training, return to education and English courses for speakers of other languages. In return, they refer users to the JobCentre Plus worker based at Northfields whose services are well established and integral to the centre's work. The children's centre quite rightly celebrates the confidence they give users to access services beyond their own reach but are not rigorously checking take-up and the ongoing impact of this work.

Health visitors and midwives see all families in the centre's area and offer a range of services. Their work is supplemented within the centre, for example, by workers trained to support with breastfeeding and baby massage. Working arrangements for these partnerships are still being established. A new system to bring more rigour to the referral system is being piloted and this has yet to be monitored to ensure that it is maximising the benefits of partnership working for users.

A lack of secure data in some areas to identify the harder-to-reach groups and precise details of those not currently accessing the centre, hinder the centre's ability to have complete confidence that no vulnerable groups are missed. This is improving with local authority support, but gaps remain, particularly, though not exclusively, in health data. Of the relatively high proportion of lone parents in the area, it is thought about half of these access the centre and form the largest proportion seen by JobCentre Plus.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Users are well supported in times of crisis and say that staff really care. Case studies show how users have significantly gained in confidence, vastly improved family relationships and acquired a better quality of life.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

A cycle of monitoring and evaluation in partnership with the local authority has recently been introduced, and a more detailed set of data regarding the characteristics of the reach and strategic level target setting has become available. This is not comprehensive and the lack of sufficient data, regarding health in particular, hampers the centre's ability to evaluate its impact across a range of services. Targets sometimes do not identify clearly enough outcomes for users which can be easily checked by centre leaders and the neighbourhood advisory board. The governance and accountability arrangements and their impact are satisfactory. The recently introduced 'Every Child Matters' outcome groups are helping everyone to gain a greater insight into the needs and outcomes for target groups and the expertise and services that each can provide. Leaders and staff at the centre now have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities on a day-to-day basis. However, they are not playing their full part, along with other partner agencies, in rigorously evaluating the impact of their work and, therefore, driving improvements as quickly as possible. The planning of provision across the cluster of centres does avoid duplication and aids the sustainability of resources. The use of resources has a satisfactory impact on outcomes for users and, as a result, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Good policies and procedures to ensure the safeguarding and protection of users on the main and other sites are implemented effectively and updated regularly. The centre collaborates with other key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. It also has effective procedures to tackle the high incidence of domestic violence in the area. The centre has clear systems for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment of staff. The buildings are secure and reception staff are vigilant in checking visitors to the centre.

The centre meets its statutory duties for equality and diversity satisfactorily. For example, it engages with all families in the area with children with disabilities. Staff are committed to the inclusion and removal of barriers for all families and groups

living in the area and celebrate diversity well. The 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' group provides bespoke support for those dealing with the challenges of conflicting cultural values on family life. However, leaders accept that they do not provide enough information in other languages spoken within the community and do not evaluate rigorously enough the centre's impact on improving community cohesion.

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Northfields and West Humberstone Sure Start Children's Centre on 12 and 13 October 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for talking with us and contributing to the inspection of your children's centre. Those of you we spoke to told us you enjoy coming to the centre. The centre offers a good range of activities and sessions to those of you who use it. You said that centre staff and other centre users give you good support and advice, which helps you look after your children. We found that staff understand child protection procedures and that they are well trained. You said that you feel your children are safe at the centre. Some of you told us how the activities you have attended at the centre have helped you improve your parenting skills. You told us that you enjoy sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities'. We found that children benefit from accessing the services that the centre provides and make good progress from their starting points. The centre works closely with schools and childcare settings which helps your children to progress well.

Your children behave well and you learn more about how to stay healthy. The centre knows that childhood obesity can be an issue but is also concerned about reducing the proportion of children with low weight and health issues due to poor nutrition. Some families attend swimming sessions which are helping them to keep fit, and stay healthy and have fun with their children. However, the health authority does not provide enough local information to the centre on how it is improving health outcomes. The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities it offers. Staff change how and when they do some things because of what you say and some of you are involved in making decisions about your centre through being on the parents' forum or the neighbourhood advisory board. We have asked the neighbourhood advisory board, local authority and centre staff to monitor outcomes more closely and really challenge the centre to improve further. The centre is fully accessible to families and children with disabilities. However, there has not been enough data available to help the centre target its work, identify the families most in need of support and measure the impact of its work. The centre does not always make sure it communicates in ways which make it easy for families from different backgrounds and who speak different languages to access services equally. We have asked the staff to improve this. The recent reorganisation of the leadership structure and delivery of services in the neighbourhood along with local staffing uncertainties has caused some confusion and the loss of confidence of some of you. We have asked all the centre leaders, the local authority and other partner agencies to make sure they all work together seamlessly to evaluate and plan services to improve outcomes and encourage all of you to take part.

A special thank you to those of you who took the time to talk to us and made us welcome in some of your sessions. We wish you all the best for the future.

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