

Inspection report for Atherstone Early Years Centre

Local authority	Warwickshire County Council
Inspection number	383619
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Atherstone Early Years Centre Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Ashleigh Nursery School

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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and staff from the centre, members of the governing body and the advisory board, the heads of two local children's centres, parents and carers, staff from the local authority, representatives from the health service, and a range of other partners who work with the centre. They also had a telephone discussion with the headteacher of a local primary school where outreach services are based. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Atherstone Early Years Centre is located in the market town of Atherstone in North Warwickshire. It was designated in December 2005 as a phase one children's centre and it includes a maintained nursery school with 100 places. A large majority of families are White British and a small number of Polish families have recently settled in the area. Unemployment is slightly below average but there is a significant proportion of low income families in the reach area. Twenty two per cent of children under the age of five live in workless households and 3.1% of adults claim jobseekers allowance. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age when they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The centre has experienced significant changes to its leadership and management over the last year. An advisory board was established in 2010. Two different acting headteachers led and managed the centre from January 2010 to April 2011. A formal collaboration was created with Stockingford Early Years Centre in April 2011 and its head of centre, a different postholder to the centre manager, manages Atherstone Early Years Centre and its nursery school for part of the week. This arrangement will be reviewed in August 2012. The governing body has been enlarged. In September 2011, Atherstone Early Years Centre was accepted to be part of the central government's pilot programme for early years teaching centres. The centre provides

the full core offer of services and a wide variety of activities which are relevant to the needs of target groups in its reach area.

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

'An invaluable service which helps children to learn, play and make friends. Friendly staff who offer support to parents and children.' 'Very well managed and well organised'.

The two comments above from users of the centre are indicative of the work of the centre and the high regard in which it is held in the local community.

The centre has undergone some significant and positive changes in the recent past which have led to marked improvements in its provision and outcomes. It is well led and managed. The head of centre and the centre manager have worked hard to implement changes, and the rate of improvement has increased since April 2011. Staffing has been reorganised and rationalised so that needs can be better met, especially during the school holidays. Professional supervision arrangements have been tightened, accountabilities are clear, and routine management arrangements are shared and understood by the staff. Most families and partners working with the centre have commented on how much the centre has improved. Staff morale has remained high despite the many changes implemented.

Leaders and managers are strongly focused on improving outcomes for the centre's target groups. Senior leaders monitor and evaluate the work of the centre rigorously. They ask challenging questions and demand high standards. As a result of their approaches and the good outcomes, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good. Senior leaders use a wide range of data to evaluate the effectiveness of services. However, they do not always have access to the most up-to-date information from the local authority.

The expansion of the governing body, the appointment of a new chair and the

creation of two committees have led to the involvement of more governors in the scrutiny of the centre's performance. Governors discuss relevant issues and are kept up to date through relevant presentations from the senior leaders. Some governors visit the centre on a regular basis to gain first-hand knowledge about the centre's work. However, the governing body has not yet established formal systems for assuring the quality of the centre's work.

The centre offers good provision which results in generally good outcomes for its target groups. The wide variety of activities offered by the centre, supported by excellent resources and the good layout of the indoor and outdoor areas, ensure that all children are engaged in a good range of stimulating activities which enable them to make good progress. Children behave well and good relationships exist within the centre.

Most families are encouraged to express their views through formal and informal means, and many do so. A parents' forum is well established and parents are represented well on the governing body and the advisory board. Some families are engaged in training and adult learning, and recreational courses are run at the centre by the local authority's department for adult and community learning. Take-up rates are increasing. The centre realises that it is not providing enough accredited vocational and academic courses which lead to formal qualifications and it is currently addressing this as one of its priorities for improvement.

A large majority of families engage well with appropriate health services. Families have good access to integrated wider services and take-up rates are good. Health outcomes are good and improving. Encouraging healthier lifestyles is complemented well by ensuring that families keep themselves safe. Families have a good understanding of safeguarding matters and the centre's safeguarding procedures are thorough.

The family support workers who are engaged in outreach work make an outstanding contribution to some of the most vulnerable families. They support them intensively and they regularly undertake home visits. They monitor the well-being of families closely and are in regular contact with other professionals, for example nurses and health visitors. As one young mother said of them, 'If it wasn't for you lot down there, I don't know where I'd be.'

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that the centre provides a range of appropriate and accredited vocational and academic courses to enable users to secure better employment and to become more economically independent.
- For the local authority and the centre to work together to ensure that the centre has more accurate and relevant data to help it better evaluate its performance.
- For the governing body to establish more formal systems for checking the effectiveness of the centre's work.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents and carers enjoy the opportunities which the centre provides for them to learn how to play with their children. Good support from the staff, for example in 'Stay and Play' sessions, ensures that parents and carers know how to engage in meaningful learning activities with their children at home. Children are active and creative as they explore a resource-rich environment which stimulates their curiosity. They achieve well and results in the Early Years Foundation Stage have significantly improved in recent years. The centre wants children to achieve more in early language and literacy, and it is focusing on this as a current priority. Children are prepared well for transition to school. Good attendance habits, for instance, are fostered from an early age. Parents enjoy craft workshops, undertaking first-aid courses, participating in organised walks with their children in local parks, and enjoying trips further afield, for example to Warwick Park and Hartshill Hayes Country Park.

Children play well together and enjoy being part of a group, for example, as they experience different sensations in the sensory role play outdoor hut. They understand the need to share and they respond well to this, for instance at snack time. Some families are improving their economic stability and independence. The centre signposts them to relevant organisations where appropriate, for example Citizens Advice. Links with the local JobCentre Plus are being strengthened through the adoption of a formal agreement with it. However, the centre does not yet provide enough courses for users to gain formal qualifications to enable them to secure better employment.

Obesity levels for children aged four are slightly below national averages but the centre is working hard to reduce these even further. Parents are taught about the importance of a balanced diet for their children and are encouraged to participate in cookery classes. Packed lunches are regularly monitored by the staff. Children are encouraged to grow their own fruit and vegetables in the centre's grounds and many do so. Parents and carers participate in activities which keep them and their children physically fit. Breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks have improved markedly over the last year and the centre has exceeded its target. The emotional health of children and their parents and carers is promoted well through the nurture programme, baby massage, and music, movement and rhyme sessions. As one parent said, 'Knowing the door is always open helped me not have post-natal depression with my second child.'

Children know how to keep themselves safe, are aware of potential hazards when playing and are mindful of others. Parents and carers attend first-aid courses and learn about the prevention of accidents in the home. Both fathers and mothers enhance their parenting skills through sessions such as 'Baby Club' which encourage them to learn and play with their children. In addition, intensive support from family support workers and health professionals has ensured that vulnerable mothers have become more confident. Many spoke very positively about how the centre has helped

them. Children subject to child protection plans are monitored regularly and staff work in close cooperation with health professionals for this. Outcomes for such children are good. The centre staff also work well with other agencies to ensure that the needs of the very small numbers of looked after children that it deals with are properly met. Nine staff are trained in the Common Assessment Framework; they initiate this process if required and outcomes are good.

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
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 centre offers a good range of services to meet the needs of all groups. It has responded well, for example, in meeting the needs of recently arrived families of Polish origin. Assessment systems are robust because of good partnership working which enables needs to be identified at an early stage. Detailed central records are kept by all staff who come into contact with individuals and these are shared as appropriate to enable a consistency of approach. The centre has developed an electronic system for monitoring the progress of all individuals with whom it comes into contact. Trends in involvement are identified and senior leaders ask appropriate questions about the progress and outcomes for families.

Services are relevant to needs. Attendance at some sessions, for example 'Stay and Play', is high. Participants enjoy the learning that is offered and they achieve well. Activities are of good quality and they promote personal development and learning well. In sessions observed, for example 'Baby Club' and 'Willow Nursery', children and adults were engrossed in the learning and they greatly benefited from them. Staff interaction with participants is high, and progress is regularly monitored and recorded. Achievements are celebrated well and evidence of these is displayed throughout the centre. Relevant activities are planned in line with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Recently, the centre started a 'Young Parents Group' for parents under the age of 19. This allows them to benefit and develop in well-focused activities, for example cooking more nutritious foods for themselves and

their children.

Parents and carers appreciate the good levels of care, guidance and support provided for them. As one parent stated, 'My daughter has progressed so much generally and I do believe it's because of the staff's commitment to our cause.' Centre staff offer good individual support, especially when families are experiencing crises, for example in housing, debt management, the managing of children's behaviour, or when experiencing domestic violence. Staff offer high levels of care and guidance because the centre has invested heavily in relevant training, for instance in alcohol and drugs awareness, benefits information, peer group support and working with challenging families. The intensive support given to families through outreach work, especially by family support workers and other partners, has led to some excellent outcomes for such families.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre's development planning involves all key partners and is based on sound evidence and evaluation by the senior leaders. The views of families and other users are taken into account. The parents' forum, parent representatives on the governing body and the advisory board regularly give feedback on how to improve services. The advisory board and partners work well together in trying to improve provision and outcomes for the target groups.

The centre is welcoming, and all staff ensure that there is a caring ethos which permeates its work. The centre adopts recommended good safeguarding practice across all its areas of work. The single central record meets more than the minimum requirements and all adults who work at the centre, either as staff or volunteers, and governors have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau. All other recruitment checks have been undertaken. Care and concern for all is at the heart of everything that the centre undertakes and staff are vigilant about safeguarding matters. All staff are regularly trained in child protection and the centre has five designated personnel for child protection, considerably more than the minimum number required. The centre follows through cases of domestic violence and offers good support to victims. Information about reporting cases of domestic violence is displayed throughout the centre. At all levels, there is a strong emphasis on promoting emotional health and well-being.

Very close working arrangements and the effective sharing of information with health professionals, for example midwives, health visitors and the community paediatrician ensure that any safeguarding concerns are quickly identified and appropriate action taken. Good working arrangements exist with staff from the local authority, for instance social care staff, and the Common Assessment Framework Officer who is based at the centre.

The centre has an overarching philosophy of including everybody, is highly ambitious for its families and pursues ambitious strategies for them. Good inter-agency working ensures that needs are properly identified and met. Strong support is offered to both adults and children who have special educational needs. Fathers are integrated well within the centre's provision, as are the very small numbers of adults and children from minority ethnic backgrounds. The centre is working well with families which have disabled children, and the parents and carers are particularly appreciative of this. It is also working well to meet the needs of parents and carers who are disabled. Improvements in results in the Early Years Foundation Stage in recent years have led to gaps closing between the achievements of different groups of children. Resources are used efficiently and effectively to ensure that outcomes for target groups are generally good. As a result, the centre offers good 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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting 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	2
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

Inspectors took into account the findings of the last inspection for the nursery school based at Atherstone Early Years Centre and Ashleigh Nursery School. The overall effectiveness of both these schools was judged to be outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Atherstone Early Years Centre on 19 and 20 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. Thank you to all of you who found the time to speak to us.

Atherstone Early Years Centre is highly valued by you because it provides a good range of services to meet your diverse needs and it has many strengths. The centre is being led and managed well. As you know, the centre has been through some significant changes in the recent past and there have been some notable improvements. Many of you stated to us that the ethos within the centre was much more positive and that you had noticed a wider range of learning resources being used. This range is excellent. These are just two examples of the many positive changes that have been implemented. In addition, staffing has been restructured so that it can better meet your needs, particularly during school holidays, and staff are managed better. Staff morale has remained high during the many changes that have been implemented, particularly since April 2011 when the head of centre came into post. There has been a marked rise in the rate of improvement since then.

You are offered appropriate services after a careful analysis by senior leaders of how best to meet your needs and they take into account your views. Gaps in provision are addressed. Leaders and managers are strongly focused on improving outcomes for you and they regularly and rigorously check the work of the centre. They use a good range of performance data for this but they do not always have relevant and up-to-date information from the local authority to help them do this even better. The wide variety of interesting activities offered to you ensures that you and your children make good progress in your learning and personal development. Your children behave well, they get on well with others, and their achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased significantly in recent years.

You are offered a good range of health services and the centre enhances your health and well-being. You and your children learn about healthier cooking, having a more balanced diet and the need to exercise more regularly. You know how to keep yourselves and your children safe through, for example, attending first-aid courses, learning about how to prevent accidents in the home and visiting the local fire station to know more about fire risks. This work is undertaken in conjunction with

the centre's high priority on safeguarding matters. Its procedures meet more than the minimum requirements.

You are encouraged to express your views about making the centre more effective and many of you do. Some of you regularly attend the parents' forum, while others are members of the governing body and the advisory board. You feel that your views are taken into account when important decisions are made. Some of you attend the adult learning courses that the centre provides, for example craft workshops, which are organised by the local authority's department for adult and community learning. The centre is aware that it needs to offer more courses that lead to formal qualifications to help those of you seeking employment and it is addressing this. Links with JobCentre Plus are also being strengthened.

Those of you who spoke to us stated that the centre is a welcoming environment, that staff are caring and you have no hesitation in confiding with them about any difficulties you may be facing. The high levels of care and concern by the staff permeate the work of the centre at all levels. This is particularly evident in outreach work where the staff, especially the family support workers, make an outstanding contribution to ensuring that your needs are swiftly met. You are highly appreciative of their work.

The governing body has appointed a new chair and its work is being strengthened by the creation of two committees, performance and standards, and resources. The governors are becoming more knowledgeable about the work of the centre through presentations from senior leaders. Some governors regularly visit the centre to gain a better understanding of the centre's work. However, the governing body has not yet established more formal mechanisms for checking the work of the centre.

To help the centre become even better, we have asked that the following are addressed. First, that the centre offers you a wider range of vocational and academic courses where you can gain qualifications and seek better employment as a result. Second, for the local authority and the centre to work together to ensure that the centre has more relevant and more up-to-date information about its performance so that it can strengthen its evaluation processes. Third, that the governing body implements more formal systems for checking the effectiveness of the centre.

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.