

Inspection report for Croyland Children's Centre

Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	362461
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Sheelagh Barnes AI

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Croyland Nursery School
Centre leader	Christine Whelan
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Croyland Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Croyland 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.

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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of the centre, representatives of the local authority, members of the governing body, parents, doctors, nurses and other health workers, family support workers and a representative from Jobcentre Plus.

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

Information about the centre

This is a phase one children's centre that offers full core provision. It shares a site with Croyland Primary School and premises with Croyland Nursery School. The head of the centre is also the head of the nursery and the provision for young children is fully integrated. Levels of entry of children who attend the children's centre are below those expected for their age. The great majority of the families who use the centre are from White British backgrounds. A small, but growing proportion of the children speak English as an additional language. The main home language of these children is Polish. Levels of deprivation in the area range from the lowest 30% to the lowest 70%. Around half of children who use the centre come from homes where no one is in work and the proportion of families in receipt of benefits is high. A higher than average proportion of the children who attend have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are designated nursery places in the centre for children with speech and language difficulties. The centre is funded by the local authority and children's centre monies. The centre generates approximately a third of its funding from earned income. The accommodation is spacious and most services are run on site. The range of activities and services includes baby clinics, child development checks, Jobcentre Plus, links with health visitor, speech therapist, paediatrician and breastfeeding support. The local authority has allocated overall responsibility for running the children's centre to the governing body of the nursery. The centre also has an advisory board, comprising of professionals and some parents.

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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good. Relationships are good. The centre provides a warm and welcoming reception to all. This is appreciated both by parents and also by professionals who use the centre and it is cited as one of the reasons everything works so well. The range of services provided is good and these are well supported through high-quality resources which reflect the diversity of the area. The spacious accommodation is used effectively and the centre runs smoothly. As a result, children and adults who use the centre, such as at 'stay and play', enjoy attending. They take part enthusiastically in the many activities provided by the centre. Users make good progress in developing skills and competencies as a result of the quality of the provision. Parents say they find the enjoyment of their children reassuring. They appreciate the support given by the staff at the centre. Typical of the many appreciative comments are: 'I have had more support and advice from here than anywhere else and the centre's emphasis on the positive really helps,' and 'The children were not sleeping, but now I have back up. You know you are not on your own!'

Provision for children who attend childcare sessions in the nursery is excellent. The children's centre is run in an integrated manner with the nursery school, with which it shares rooms, staff, leaders and managers. Children attending the centre for childcare sessions share facilities and work alongside those who attend the nursery. The quality of the provision for children who attend the day-care sessions is excellent, as is the quality of provision in the nursery, reflecting the judgement of the recent inspection of that facility.

Support for parents who attend the centre is good. Service partners work efficiently as a team to make a real difference to parents and families, particularly those from vulnerable groups. The system to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults at the centre is excellent. Child protection, health and safety and risk assessment are given a high profile. As a result, users feel safe and are comfortable to express their views honestly. The work the centre undertakes towards health outcomes is good. Mothers appreciate the centre's promotion of breastfeeding and say that this is not

their experience when trying to feed their babies elsewhere in the locality. The efforts to ensure that users from all groups achieve well and enjoy their learning are also effective. The centre runs some courses for parents, for example, 'cook along' sessions and these are greatly enjoyed. Not all of these courses lead to accredited qualifications. Parents are advised which other providers they can go to in order to gain access to further qualifications. Tracking the outcomes of this signposting is at an early stage. However, the centre has strong links with Jobcentre Plus and there are regular opportunities to have interviews on site. There is also support, through 'Job Maets' to help parents seeking work, filling in application forms, writing application letters and preparing for interviews

The centre works well to ensure equal access to all. There is good support for users with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders are continuing their efforts to make all families in the reach area aware of the range of work it does, through activities such as the distribution of leaflets at the local carnival. Centre leaders are starting to reach out to vulnerable groups in the area, but the measurement of the centre's success in this is inhibited by the quality of data provided by the local authority and lack of training for leaders to interpret them and to make best use of the information they provide. The data provided are plentiful, but it is not easy to extract those parts relevant to the centre, such as the exact context of the area or the impact of the centre's work on the families in the reach area. Governors wisely show initiative in trying to remedy this by using their own local knowledge of the area when planning the centre's work, but this does not give them an accurate yardstick by which to rigorously measure the impact of actions undertaken.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- For the local authority to improve the provision of, and leaders and managers' understanding of the use of, data about families in the reach area of the centre.
- For centre leaders and managers to sharpen the use of analysis in setting strategic plans for the centre and to measure the impact of actions taken on users in the reach area with greater rigour.
- To involve users more actively in shaping the direction of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre places a strong focus on the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Within the health promotion agenda, an extensive range of activities is implemented, such as free-flow access to outside play, healthy meals, 'cook along' sessions and open access to the family kitchen. Healthy eating policies are in place for all groups, and healthy snacks are provided for children and have a positive impact upon their

health. Hygiene is promoted effectively throughout the daily routine within the nursery. The centre has developed strong working relationships with health professionals.

Procedures to ensure the safety of children are excellent and they are protected extremely well on a daily basis. Users are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their families safe. Site security is rigorous and ensures children and vulnerable adults feel safe at all times. Home visits are routinely undertaken, and practitioners liaise with agencies, such as the local fire service, to provide support and guidance to parents and children. Parenting programmes, such as 'Burps', support parents with managing children through difficult stages of development. Parents find this extremely helpful and make comments such as, 'I honestly don't know what I would do if this place closed!'

The centre provides good opportunities for adults and children to play, have fun and learn together. This is evident through the different sessions such as 'family fun' and 'stay and play'. Facilitators are knowledgeable, aware of users' starting points and consider these and the learning intentions for each session carefully. Some training is provided on site for parents. For example, there is a range of volunteering opportunities for parents, along with training, to enable them to develop new skills. As a result of these opportunities, some parents go on to undertake childcare courses. In the main, however, the centre signposts parents to other venues for training to improve their skills and confidence. It does not always monitor the success rates of these courses. Strong links exist with Jobcentre Plus, to encourage users to access training and employment. The extent to which parents are developing economic stability and independence, including access to training and employment, is an area which the centre leaders have prioritised for further development this coming year.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from well-integrated services. The gap between the achievement of the lowest-attaining children and others is being eroded steadily. The centre has strong procedures to support children subject to Common Assessment Framework processes, as well as any with a child protection plan. Robust systems are in place to enable successful transitions into nursery and school.

Users are instrumental in making choices and decisions. There are opportunities for parents and carers to express their views, and a few are engaged in the governance of the centre. Users are offered the opportunity to become part of the 'centre users' action group' and the 'centre users' forum'. However, the number of parents involved is not high. The centre's role in the life of the community is becoming effectively established. Case studies illustrate how the centre makes a positive difference to users' lives.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups,	2
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are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The quality and range of services are good. Facilitators demonstrate a good understanding of individual users' needs, and effective working partnerships exist. The centre promotes excellent, individualised, purposeful learning for children. Within the early years provision, practitioners are very knowledgeable about the children in their care and highly intuitive of each child's needs. Children's needs are assessed rigorously. Information is then used effectively to match activities precisely to these needs. High-quality activities are consistently available. Assessments such as those carried out under the Common Assessment Framework are very clear and effective. This promotes strong partnership working and provides a solid framework for action plans. Ongoing evaluations are completed to ensure that sessions and resources continue to promote purposeful learning for all children.

Currently there are good assessments of the needs of those parents who use the centre. Effective partnership working exists. The centre has strong links with Jobcentre Plus and opportunities for volunteers are promoted. Preparation for work, such as help with curriculum vitae, is provided by 'Job Maets'. Courses on cooking healthy meals are much enjoyed and build parents' and carers' confidence in using the full range of activities the centre offers. Family support, outreach and health services work together to provide a 'one stop shop' that caters for a wide range of personal, social, health and emotional needs. The conversation group, for example, benefits parents whose English is developing. Parents say, 'Before, I had no-one to talk to.' A number mentioned the feeling of isolation and anxiety of being a mother at home on their own with children. They appreciate the welcome the centre provides and say, 'It's nice to come in and know no-one will judge you if your baby cries!'

The assessment of the needs of potential users who have not yet come to the centre is less well developed and is something the centre leaders have identified as an area for improvement. This is linked to difficulties in the interpretation of data the centre

is provided with to identify the proportions of potential users in vulnerable groups. However, centre leaders and managers are pro-active in going into the community and using their own local knowledge to engage with potential users. For example, a 'buddy' system for parents has been used to encourage those who have not yet visited to come into the centre with a friend.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leaders and managers hold their duties to ensure safeguarding as of the highest importance. As a result, policies, procedures and recording are of excellent quality. Checks, such as for Criminal Records Bureau and recruitment checks, are undertaken meticulously. Training to ensure all staff are fully aware of protection of children and vulnerable adults procedures is regularly upgraded, and there are careful induction procedures for new staff. Systems, such as those to support victims of domestic violence are good. The various agencies that use the centre cooperate extremely well to provide a seamless multi-agency approach in ensuring the emotional health and well-being of all users.

The leadership of the head of the centre has resulted in a whole-team commitment to aim for ambitious targets and a belief that these can be attained. Multi-agency cooperation is a strength. Leaders at all levels work with determination and vigour to provide an integrated service to meet the needs of all users. The centre is maintained in a bright, welcoming and attractive way that communicates the striving for quality in all aspects of its work. Resources are deployed efficiently and the value for money provided by the centre is good.

Responsibility for governance is shared by the local authority, leaders of the centre and the governing body. The local authority, which has the ultimate responsibility for the centre, has delegated the responsibility for day-to-day management to the governing body of the nursery. However, it has not yet provided training for governors, or for the head of the centre, to explicitly give them information about the difference between responsibilities for the centre, and the nursery. Some data is provided for leaders by the local authority, but the format has meant the data are

not easy to interpret. Despite governors asking for training on these data, so that they can support the headteacher more actively in evaluations on the effectiveness of the centre towards meeting its targets, this has not yet been provided. Governors' determination to do their job well is shown by the extent to which they gather information using their own local knowledge to help to evaluate the centre's success. As yet, few parents are regularly involved in determining the direction of the centre through the advisory board. There have been a number of initiatives to involve parents in governance, which have been successful in the recent past. The centre leaders are determined to continue to draw parents more actively into the leadership of the centre.

There is effective promotion of equality and diversity throughout all of the centre's activities. Inclusive practice is promoted well. Children with disabilities are successfully integrated into all of the activities. The centre has designated places for children with speech and language needs, and these children make good progress as a direct result of the good management of the provision.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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

Croyland Nursery School inspection report and the findings of Croyland Primary School inspection

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Croyland Children's Centre and Nursery School on 7–8 December 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

I would like to thank all those of you who spoke to us during the recent inspection of the children's centre. Your views were very positive and helpful to us. You are aware that the nursery, which was inspected recently, and the childcare provided by the children's centre are fully integrated. We looked at the childcare provided on site and the provision made for all children and families with young children who live in the area around the centre. Our judgement is that the provision for the young children who attend is excellent. There is good provision for adults, including those in vulnerable groups who attend the centre.

The way that the centre keeps children safe is excellent. Staff are all trained well and regularly update their training in child protection, first aid and risk assessment. Security and safety are held in the highest regard. Records that have to be kept to ensure that all who work at the centre are properly qualified and checked are accurate and detailed.

We think that the wide range of things that the centre plans for you and your children is really good. You told us how all staff and visiting professionals at the centre help you in many ways, such as giving you confidence and support. We know that a few of you, including some of you who spoke with us, already contribute to decision making at the centre through the 'centre users' forum' the 'centre users' action group' and, of course, as parental representatives on the governing body. We know you have said what courses you think would be helpful. We agree with the leaders of the centre that it would be a good idea to widen this group and for more of you to be actively involved in determining the direction of the centre's development. We agree with centre leaders, that your input into what the centre does is extremely important to make sure that what is planned really matches what you want.

There are many good things to admire at the centre. These include the bright and welcoming rooms and the plentiful information. Many of you and many of the professionals who visit the centre told us of the benefit of the communal kitchen. We know how much that benefits all those who use it and how it is part of the centre's welcome. All of the people who work at the centre are committed to doing a good job. This is especially the case with regard to the centre leaders and the governors to whom the local authority has designated responsibility for the day-to-day running of the centre. The work that leaders do to plan to make things even better is good, because they have high aspirations and determination. The local authority which has ultimate responsibility for the centre provides data to let the centre leaders assess how well things are doing. However, while the data provided is plentiful, it is not always easy to interpret. In addition, the authority has not yet provided training to clarify the differences in responsibility between the centre and the nursery.

These are the things we have said will improve the centre still further:

- for the local authority to improve the provision of, and leaders and managers' understanding of the use of, data about families in the reach area of the centre
- for centre leaders and managers to sharpen the use of analysis in setting strategic plans for the centre and measuring the impact of actions taken on families in the reach area with greater rigour
- to involve users more actively in shaping the direction of the centre.

It was a pleasure to meet you during the inspection and to hear your views. We hope that you, your children and many more families who live in and around the Croyland area will continue to enjoy and benefit from the many services the centre offers. Thank you for contributing to our evidence base by sharing your comments and thoughts so openly.

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