

Inspection report for KEVI Rural Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	383515
Inspection dates	4–5 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt

Centre leader	Wendy Brookfield
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	St Lawrence Primary School Lowfield Lane Gnosall Stafford ST20 0ET
Telephone number	07837 339830
Fax number	01785 822391
Email address	wendy.brookfield@staffordshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	St Lawrence Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 primary 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with local authority strategic leaders, managers responsible for commissioning and purchasing services, service providers from the local authority and from commissioned services, and representative centre users. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

KEVI Rural Children's Centre is a phase two centre based on the same site as St Lawrence Primary School in Gnosall, Staffordshire. It has an office, a large toilet/bathroom area with full changing facilities, and a well-equipped room for activities. The centre is serviced under a contract with the primary school. It was designated as a children's centre in 2007 and is part of the wider provision of one phase one and seven phase two and three centres that serve the district of Stafford administered by Staffordshire County Council. The local authority is responsible for the governance of the centre. KEVI operates on a commissioning basis and employs no staff of its own. Services are commissioned on an individual basis by the district children's commissioning officer. The centre serves an area where the proportion of families on benefits, and levels of worklessness are below the national average. The large majority of families are of White British heritage. Children's knowledge, skills and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are above those expected for their age. The reach area is almost entirely rural and there are issues around rural isolation that help shape pattern of provision made by the children's 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

2

Main findings

The district children's commissioning officer has a clear vision for meeting the identified needs of many families and individuals in their homes. The service is based firmly around outreach so that the rural isolation experienced by some families can be addressed by taking services out into the reach area. This means that comparatively few services are provided at the children's centre base. The centre commissions each service individually, ensuring a fast and flexible response. It also allows the centre to set clear targets to measure the success of each service.

The local authority's data team are working to provide information to increase the centre's ability to measure its effectiveness. Overall, outcomes are satisfactory and improving. As the range of data improves the centre is better able to highlight its increasing effectiveness. Provision is also satisfactory overall, but some good practice is not having maximum effect. Here again data are not yet being used to full effect to measure the percentage of total potential users engaged in activities. However, the data team is committed to extending and maximising the use of the data available.

The district children's commissioning officer for KEVI took up her newly created post in April 2011. She is committed to ensuring that all families who can benefit from children's centre services are able to do so. She uses local intelligence to very good effect, well illustrated by the excellent relationship with health visitors who are often the 'first port of call' following the arrival of a new child. This is proving to be an effective way of gathering initial information across the scattered communities of the reach area. This information is fed into the 'Families First' provision and from there to the commissioning process.

The use of 'Bertie the Bus' – a modern and well equipped vehicle fitted out for training and children's centre activities provides the flexibility to visit the whole reach area. This allows services such as those supporting return to work or to learning to be taken out to the community. As a result, positive outcomes are seen in the increasing engagement of those who first start to use services through this rural outreach facility.

Governance and leadership arrangements are currently in transition as a result of the wider restructuring of children's services by the local authority. Consultation on proposed new arrangements is currently being undertaken. This leaves governance of the KEVI centre in a state of flux in which users are not able to exert a clear influence over decision making.

Centre users who were spoken to were very positive about the services. The flexible approach being developed means that targeted groups are able to make good gains in terms of health and lifestyles. Pre-school provision in play groups or with child-minders is effective and supports children who demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities that are above those expected for their age when they start the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Safeguarding is seen as a high priority and effective procedures are a feature of all contracts. However, inspectors did find that one user led activity had no clear procedures for identifying individuals who would take the lead in ensuring that all group participants are registered as present and in leading the evacuation procedure in case of a fire, or in making first aid available in the case of an accident. This was identified at an early stage in the inspection and the commissioning officer took immediate steps to start to rectify the situation by appointing a group leader.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Develop more effective systems for involving centre users in governance now that the structure of the service has been reformed.
- Improve the use of data to provide clear information on levels of success in involving all potential centre users in the reach area in activities provided, especially those families seen as hard to reach.
- Ensure that user led activities follow health and safety requirements by:
 - registering all participants in order to identify who is present in the building
 - ensuring that a designated leader is fully aware of evacuation procedures in the event of a fire
 - making sure there is access to first aid in the case of an accident.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Health outcomes are good because services and support are closely matched to identified needs. There is good access to services that promote health and positive lifestyles. The percentages of mothers who initiate and sustain breastfeeding are above the national average, with self-help support coming from the 'Bosom Buddies'. The percentage of children who are obese is below average. Providers promote services that support good health and well-being, such as the 'Little Kickers' group. Groups that meet in the children's centre were observed eating healthy snacks during sessions such as 'Stay and Play'.

The multi-agency approaches being developed through the 'Families First' model

enable targeted support for families and individuals. This leads to positive outcomes through provision such as parenting programmes or family support, including support for children identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, and their parents and carers. Homestart volunteers support and sustain families within their homes leading to positive outcomes. Work with families and individuals leads to improvements in areas such as smoking cessation, or dealing with drug and alcohol abuse. It also promotes positive outcomes for those who might be victims of domestic violence in seeking to address their situations. Sometimes services, such as antenatal and paediatric clinics, are run in the new and very well equipped village medical centre in Gnosall. Elsewhere community based venues around the reach area enable good coverage and maximise opportunities for users to benefit from provision.

Centre based groups such as 'Chuckles' promote personal, social and family development. Users say they feel safe and their children enjoy the activities. They also say they receive excellent pointers to how they can encourage positive play in a home setting. This helps develop positive behaviour patterns and relationships between children and their parents and carers.

The need to support women who wish to return to the workplace has been identified as the main focus for improving adults' economic well-being and independence. A dedicated worker has successfully addressed this through Open College Network qualification in Professional Career Development. The number of participants enrolling this year has increased. On-line learning opportunities are also promoted, not only through training, but also support for personal and social development such as helping mothers newly arrived from countries, for example, Poland through the 'Net Moms' on-line support. This opens up new and effective ways of receiving support and help. There are links with Jobcentre Plus, but the service they are able to offer to the scattered village communities that comprise the reach area is limited and has been reduced in recent times.

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	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	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	2

How good is the provision?

3

Services meet the needs of users satisfactorily but available data do not give a sufficiently clear picture of the overall impact. Little provision is made in the children's centre itself, but with the excellent support of the mobile facilities and judicious use of local community buildings good coverage of the geographical area is made possible. The reach area population is comparatively small and there are only three pre-school playgroups and four registered childminders, all of whom are judged as good by Ofsted. This provision supports purposeful learning, promotes the social and educational skills of the children and achieves much in terms of school readiness. Children enter school in the Reception Year with skill levels above those normally expected and over three quarters go on to make the gains expected in their first year at school. The need to address the performance of those children who are not reaching expectations for their age is not as acute as in some children's centres. However targeted family support is in place and this is effective in helping these children to make progress, particularly in the more social aspects of development.

Local authority data staff have a clear appreciation of the need to support centres to maximise their provision. They collect a good range of demographic data, but what is not so clear is the extent to which the people identified are fully engaged in utilising services that are provided. Often the information gathered by professionals such as health visitors and midwives is used to build up a picture of local needs, such as the recent identification of the specific needs of a group of children with speech and language difficulties. The needs of specific groups, for example the families who live on the local military base, or those at the local Traveller site have also been addressed effectively through very good use of 'Bertie the Bus'. These initiatives reflect a good response to identified need, but until the available data are used more effectively to determine the effectiveness of provision, it remains satisfactory overall.

The needs of target groups are often not as severe as those at a national level. For example, the reach area contains no teenage mothers or pregnant teenagers. The proportion of children in workless households and children in minority ethnic groups are below national averages. The number of lone parents is decreasing. Where programmes are in place they usually, but not always, have clear goals and objectives. The quality of support, befriending and counselling for individuals and families reflects good care good, guidance and support although, as elsewhere, the incomplete nature of the data means that the centre is not fully aware that it is meeting the needs of all 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	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

Leadership and management across the local authority are currently the subject of consultation and change. As a result for the centre's previous system for giving users a strong voice in governance has not yet been fully replaced. Consequently the voice of users in centre management is limited at the moment. In part this is being addressed through ensuring maximum day-to-day contact with users by the district children's commissioning officer until the period of consultation is ended and a new framework of governance instituted.

The quality of monitoring is variable and satisfactory overall. For example, in 'Stay and Play' the children's progress and achievement are not recorded in a systematic way. However, this is not universal, so that, for example, the skilled leader of the 'Chuckles' group is developing a close understanding of the needs of the children (and parents) who participate and their outcomes.

Safeguarding is a key feature in all contracts for services. Contractors must show clear proof that they have carried out appropriate checks. These include identity and the right to work, as well as enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks prior to working with children. Training in child protection is closely monitored to ensure compliance with regulations. Families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are monitored carefully through the well-administered Common Assessment Framework and through increasingly effective multi-agency working. Good links with agencies support children with child protection plans to achieve good outcomes.

The outreach model ensures geographical coverage of the large reach area. Scarce resources are managed strategically and effectively in meeting the needs that are known. However, the data does not yet provide a complete picture of centre coverage and overall effectiveness. Work with a range of agencies is increasingly effective. Much useful information comes from health visitors calling on families and passing on the needs they find. Inter-agency work is therefore good and supporting effective provision, including meeting the needs of those in target groups. The commissioning model provides flexibility in issuing individual contracts to meet specific needs. Commissioning documentation and contracts specify targets and expected outcomes so contractors are held to account for the quality and impact of their work. Equality of opportunity is also a feature of all contracts and an element of monitoring to ensure that statutory duties are met. Providers return quarterly contract monitoring documentation to the district children's commissioning officer

that includes evidence of impact and levels of consumer satisfaction as well as case studies that demonstrate effective impact. Evaluation of contracts for service providers is undertaken on a quarterly basis and includes assessment of the effectiveness of safeguarding, provision to support equality and diversity, and measuring outcomes. The value for money provided by the centre is therefore satisfactory.

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	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	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	3

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

The inspection of St Lawrence Primary School, which provides the Early Years Foundation Stage, took place at the same time as the children's centre inspection. The Early Years inspector liaised with the school's Early Years Foundation Stage inspector to gather data on the performance of children in the Reception year. Ofsted have inspected the quality of child-minders in the reach area, finding the quality of the four who are registered to be good.

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 KEVI Rural on 4–5 October 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who we met and spoke to during our recent visit. Everyone was positive about the centre and the provision that it seeks to make across its wide and rural reach area. The KEVI Rural is different to the usual model in that much of the provision is operated on an outreach service, sometimes using the centre vehicle, 'Bertie the Bus', to good effect. We understand that rural isolation and lack of transport can be a real issue and it is therefore good that the children's centre tries to come to you. The work done to support individuals and families has many strengths. It is also unusual that the centre does not directly employ its own staff, but provides services through commissioning services that meet needs. The usual concerns around safeguarding and equality of opportunity are addressed effectively in the contracts for providing these services. This structure provides flexibility for the commissioning officer and clear strategic planning is reflected in the effective provision across the whole area served.

The local authority has moved to a system that has brought together professionals from a range of different backgrounds to support children's centre services and evidence suggests that this is proving effective in identifying and meeting needs. However, because changes in the process have not yet been completed it means that until consultations have been completed there is no clear process of governance that gives centre users a voice in management. These big changes are still in progress, as is the gathering of effective data to show the effectiveness of the centre in meeting the needs of every family that is entitled to use the centre. Those responsible are well aware that until the process is concluded there will remain room for improvement and there is a willingness to ensure this is done as quickly as possible.

Parents and carers we spoke to were very positive about the role of the children's centre. Those of you who bring your children along for activities such as 'Chuckles' and 'Stay and Play' said that the provision was of high quality and that the centre was a very well equipped venue. Professionals who use the centre to meet, such as the childminders, said it was good to have a base where they could all meet and have opportunities to discuss common issues such as service provision. However, the nature of services, often personalised and delivered in home or very small group settings (including the centre bus), makes this a children's centre very different from the usual model with comparatively few centre-based activities.

Inspectors found three main areas for improvement. The first relates to adult initiated and led activities in the centre itself. We were concerned that there was no one who would be directly responsible for health and safety issues during these meetings, such as registering exactly who is in the centre and leading any emergency evacuation that might be necessary. There might also be a need to have immediate access to first aid facilities in the case of an accident. We also felt that the

local authority needs to finish its consultations with users so that a form of governance can be set up that gives users a bigger say in the running of their centre. Finally, we want the local authority to continue its work in trying to get better use of the data it has to ensure that the centre is reaching all of the families who are entitled to use its services.

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