

Inspection report for Glascote Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire County Council
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Reporting inspector	Champak Chauhan

Centre leader	Katrina Dipple
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Hawksworth Glascote Heath Tamworth Staffordshire B77 2ER
Telephone number	01827 475222
Fax number	01827 475220
Email address	surestart.tamworth@staffordshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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.



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Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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 other staff of the centre, members of the district management advisory board, staff from services commissioned by the centre, parents and carers, staff from the local authority and representatives from the health service. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Glascote Children's Centre was designated in September 2006. Over a quarter of the population within its reach area is classed as income deprived and levels of deprivation are relatively high. Unemployment is well above average and a high number of young people have never worked. Levels of qualifications are low. About 20% of children under five in Tamworth are resident in households dependent on workless benefits, but more up-to-date figures for the centre's reach area are not readily available. Four per cent of the local population are claiming jobseekers' allowance and about one in five parents is taking up the childcare element of tax credit. The reach area is largely White British, but the relatively small numbers of people from minority ethnic groups is growing and currently stands at 3.4%. Recently, some transient people of Eastern European origin have moved into and out of the area.

The centre has identified its target groups and offers a range of services in conjunction with health professionals and services commissioned from partners in the voluntary and private sectors, for example Home-Start, Barnardo's and the Pre-School Learning Alliance. These services include: health visitor and breastfeeding clinics, pre-natal yoga, antenatal labour workshops, adult learning, 'Active Tots', 'Bumps to Babies, baby massage, a group for parents of premature babies, 'Tots Library', 'Bounce and Rhyme, 'Chatterbox', 'Toddler Talk', 'Little Explorers', 'Buggy Fitness', speech and language development, and 'Family Fun' drop-in sessions. The centre has developed outreach work through attracting National Lottery funding for a

five-year project with pregnant teenagers and teenage parents, and it is also extending its outreach work to help the growing number of victims of domestic violence. Most children transfer to local nurseries and schools. Their skills, knowledge and abilities are generally below those expected for their ages.

The head of centre manages a number of centres in the district and she is accountable for the performance of the centre to officers within the local authority. The local authority is reorganising management and accountability structures within the district and recently created a district management board which oversees the work of the centre.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Glascote Children's Centre is well established and valued within the community that it serves. As one mother said, 'It's my lifeline.' The centre knows the needs of its target groups well because partnership working with health professionals and those from the voluntary and private sectors is strong. Health professionals based at the centre identify children and families who may need additional support at an early stage and the close working relationships with the centre staff and others ensure that needs are met. This includes identifying unborn children who may be at risk. As a result of such procedures, the care, guidance and support offered to identified families are good.

Parents, children and others in the targets groups who participate in the centre's activities enjoy them and overall outcomes are satisfactory. Parents are developing well their awareness of leading healthier lifestyles, both for themselves and their children. This is done through, for example, swimming, yoga sessions, organised buggy walks and healthier cooking. However, obesity levels for four-year-olds in the reach area and the proportion of teenage pregnancies are higher than the national averages. Parents, carers and their children make satisfactory progress in their achievement and personal development. Children are enhancing their language development and are learning constructively through play and social interaction. In

some years, children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is above the national average but in others it is below. However, the gap between the bottom 20% and the rest is not being significantly reduced.

Parents and carers are improving their parenting skills and value the positive contribution that the centre makes to their lives. Children behave well at the centre and show respect for others. Most families using the centre are encouraged to express their views about the services it provides and many do so, largely informally. Some parents and carers are involved in decision-making processes, but this aspect of the centre's work is underdeveloped. Parents and carers also organise activities which the centre helps them fund, for example during the summer holidays and at Christmas. Target groups are increasing their economic stability and independence through adult education courses run by the centre and a local college of further education. These courses lead to formal qualifications and enhance employment prospects for some.

The centre has satisfactory procedures for safeguarding and families know how to keep themselves safe. This is done, for example, through families becoming more aware of potential dangers in the home and of fire hazards. The centre's safeguarding procedures are satisfactory. It keeps a single central record which meets minimum requirements and staff training is undertaken. The centre works well with other agencies to ensure that safeguarding concerns are dealt with and there are positive outcomes for children and families that have undergone Common Assessment Framework procedures.

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. Leadership and management arrangements have recently been undergoing a period of transition and realignment, both within the centre and the wider district. Their impact on outcomes has, consequently, been limited and, as a result, the capacity to improve is satisfactory. Appropriate priorities for the centre's work are identified in its annual business plan. This plan is generally detailed but it does not identify precise data to enable progress towards the achievement of targets to be accurately measured.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

For the local authority and the centre to:

- Ensure that the gap in achievement between the bottom 20% of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest is narrowed.
- Ensure that a wider range of parents and carers are more formally involved in decision-making processes within the centre.
- Gather and evaluate a wider range of relevant data so that the performance of the children's centre can be better measured.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Most families using the centre are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to keep themselves healthy. The close working relationship with health professionals means that expectant mothers are targeted and many attend subsequent breastfeeding sessions. Healthier eating is encouraged and mothers learn how to massage their babies. Some children are improving their speech and language development through intensive work by the therapist and the centre ensures that families in the reach area have adequate access to wider services. However, some babies are underweight at birth and the proportion of four-year-olds who are obese is higher than the national average.

Children using the centre's services show positive behaviour and have constructive and respectful relationships with others. They behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Parents, carers and children enjoy participating in the activities. Children make satisfactory progress from their starting points but their achievement by age four is variable. Links with early years settings in the reach area are not as strong as they could be to monitor and enhance children's achievement.

Most parents and carers using the centre make satisfactory progress in their personal development. Some say that their confidence levels and parenting skills have been enhanced. Most families using the centre willingly express their views and contribute to some form of decision-making, although this is limited. For instance, the parents' group ('Parents on Board') organises activities for all parents and carers at various times of the year, especially the summer holidays and the run-up to Christmas. The centre is well established in the community and families state that the centre is developing respect for others in the wider community. Some families using the centre are improving their economic stability and their outcomes are improving. They are signposted to appropriate employment opportunities. Some are improving their independence through participation in the adult learning courses organised by the centre in conjunction with a local college of further education. The centre works hard to ensure that take-up rates for these courses are at least satisfactory. In two notable examples, two participants eventually went on to gain university degrees. However, in other cases parents and carers have not always been successful in gaining suitable employment after attending such courses.

Families using the centre say they find the staff friendly and welcoming, and that they feel safe at the centre. Parents and carers are made aware of how to keep themselves and their children safe. Home-Start, for example, trains them at home to recognise potential dangers and provides safety equipment at a much reduced price. Members of the fire service also visit homes to point out potential fire hazards. Outcomes for families are showing some improvement. There are improved outcomes for children on child protection plans and staff from the centre initiate Common Assessment Framework processes if appropriate. At the time of the inspection, the centre was not dealing with any looked after children.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre offers a satisfactory range of services for the target groups that it works with, and the quality of care, guidance and support is a strength. Strong partnership working with health professionals has ensured that needs are quickly identified. Pregnant women are seen as a priority and sessions organised for them, both before and after birth, are well attended. The centre has an adequate understanding of the needs of target groups in its reach area and its work with pregnant teenagers and teenage parents, largely through its outreach work, is gradually improving outcomes for them. This work is geared towards short family courses which include creative and outdoor activities and story-telling to ensure better parenting skills and less isolation for such teenagers. Outreach work is also being extended to meet the pressing needs of those families experiencing domestic violence but this work is at a relatively early stage.

The centre's activities are located in a wide range of venues. Some of the families in the target groups are engaged well and they state that they enjoy the activities offered. However, attendance at some of the activities is not always high, while others are oversubscribed. There is some representation from the growing number of people from black and minority ethnic groups, but the centre is not always systematically engaging them. Purposeful learning is generally promoted well. The activities observed enhanced children's speech and language development, physical development and their personal and social development. One parent attending the 'Bounce and Rhyme' session, for example, said of her child, 'He seems more confident and it is really helping with his speech.' The centre staff keep appropriate records of the personal development of adults and their children. However, targets for improvement are not sufficiently detailed to ensure all individuals and families who use the centre can achieve as highly as possible.

The staff know the families they deal with well and the support families receive is tailored well for their needs. Some parents and carers who have experienced times of personal crisis are highly appreciative of the care provided by the centre. They stated that the centre staff had helped them well, including supporting them during bereavement and other emotional traumas. Families have also been signposted to other agencies that could help them, including Citizens Advice and social services. The care, guidance and support offered to families in need are well targeted and coordinated between the different agencies. Centre staff regularly monitor the welfare of individuals and 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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Line management and performance management arrangements are clearly understood and staff know to whom they should report. The recently created district management board has met only once and its impact on the centre's outcomes is not yet fully apparent.

The work of the centre is underpinned by the setting of appropriate priorities in its business plan. Services are linked to these priorities and the centre has recently started evaluating the work of the commissioned services on a quarterly basis, with priorities realigned if necessary. Additional funding, for example, was allocated to addressing the needs of victims of domestic violence. As a result of such approaches, senior leaders and managers know the strengths and areas for development of the centre. They take into account the views of partner organisations. However, the evaluation of services is not as sharp as it could be because the centre does not routinely evaluate the full range of data that is available. The views of parents and others in the target groups are sought through annual surveys and by informal means. However, formal systems for regularly gathering the views of parents and others in the target groups are underdeveloped.

The centre tries to include all in its work. It organises a crèche facility every day which is valued by parents and carers so that they can attend sessions at the centre. It tries to meet the needs of some minority groups. For example, it recently became aware of growing numbers of people of Polish origin, organised sessions for Polish

mothers and secured the services of an interpreter. As one Polish mother said, 'I enjoy coming to the sessions and my daughter enjoys it too. Her English is improving and she is singing English songs now.' However, the centre is aware that its work with other minority groups is underdeveloped. The centre ensures that the needs of disabled children and the children of disabled parents are met. It has supported three such families recently. Fathers are encouraged to attend sessions with their children and a few do. In addition, specific sessions for fathers are organised on some Saturdays and a few regularly attend these, although numbers are not as large as they could be.

The centre has adequate procedures for safeguarding. Staff undergo recruitment checks in line with local authority policy. All staff and volunteers at the centre undergo checks with the Criminal Records Bureau and the centre keeps a single central record which meets minimum requirements. Staff are regularly trained in safeguarding matters. The centre is particularly effective in early intervention work because of close cooperation with the health professionals based there. The emotional health and well-being of young mothers, for example, are promoted well. Individual mothers commented on the invaluable help they received during post-natal depression. The centre uses its resources efficiently and effectively, and it provides satisfactory 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	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

Inspectors took into account the Ofsted inspection findings of July 2011 of the crèche facilities at the centre. These findings stated that the centre was complying with childcare requirements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Glascote Children's Centre on 28 and 29 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to all of you who found the time to speak to us. You value highly the work of Glascote Children's Centre and all that it does for you and your families. As one of you stated to us, 'I am a Sure Start junkie!' The centre offers you an adequate range of services that leads to satisfactory outcomes for those of you that the centre works with. The services are delivered by a range of agencies, including the health service, and by organisations such as Home-Start, Pre-School Learning Alliance and Barnardo's. Many of you attend the sessions with your children and you thoroughly enjoy them. As one of you said about your child when attending 'Bounce and Rhyme', 'He seems more confident and it is really helping with his speech.'

Good partnership working between the different agencies ensures that your needs are properly identified and appropriate sessions organised for you. The sessions have enabled you and your children to develop healthier lifestyles. You are aware of how to cook more nutritious food and to have a more balanced diet. You and your children are encouraged to undertake more physical activity and the centre does this through, for example, organising swimming sessions, and encouraging your children to undertake physical activities in the sessions. However, the proportion of children aged four who are obese and the numbers of teenage pregnancies are both higher than the national average.

You and your children make satisfactory progress in all activities. Your children learn how to play, their language is improved and they learn to socialise with others. Your children's behaviour is good and they are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education. Your children make satisfactory progress and by age four their achievement in recent years has been above the national average and, in some years, below. Overall, however, their rate of achievement at age four is not as high as it could be.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre and you and your children are made aware of how to keep yourselves safe. You particularly value the services of Home-Start where potential dangers in the home are highlighted, and you appreciate the purchase of safety equipment for the home, for example stair gates and carbon

monoxide detectors. Some of you undertake vocational and recreational training leading to formal qualifications and better employment prospects, for example in childcare. You are encouraged to express your views, both informally and through the annual satisfaction survey, and many of you do so. However, the centre has not yet adequately strengthened its formal mechanisms for gathering your views and influencing its decisions more.

You said that staff are very approachable and the centre is welcoming. You feel able to talk to centre staff about most difficulties you face and some of you confide about these regularly. The staff respond to your concerns and give you good care, support and guidance. Some of you have suffered various traumas and you said that the staff helped you incredibly well to get over these. Some particularly effective work has been undertaken with helping your emotional well-being.

Leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. As you know, there have been some changes to leadership and management, and the district management advisory board has recently been created by the local authority to help the work of the centre. The impact of these changes has not yet led to much better outcomes for all of you. The centre's work is underpinned by priorities identified in its business plan. These priorities are not always supported by data that would enable the centre to evaluate better the progress it is making towards achieving them. The centre has adequate safeguarding procedures and it keeps a single central record which indicates the checks that have been carried out on all staff and volunteers who work there. The procedures meet the minimum government requirements.

As a result of our visit, we have asked the local authority and the centre to: accelerate the achievement of all four-year-olds in the centre's reach area; involve more of you more formally in the centre's decision-making processes; and, gather and evaluate a wider range of relevant data so that the performance of the centre can be better measured.

We sincerely wish you all the best for the future.

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