

Inspection report for Mablethorpe Children's Centre

Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	384001
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Marian Pearson HMI

Centre leader	Cath North
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Seashells (EY337834)

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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361

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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.

An inspection of the co-located registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings or telephone conversations with the head of centre, members of the advisory board, representatives of the local authority, and the statutory, community and voluntary organisations working in partnership with the centre. They also talked informally to parents and users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Mablethorpe Children's Centre, which is in the Lincolnshire district of East Lindsey, covers the coastal strip from Mablethorpe southwards to the outskirts of Skegness. This phase one centre, which was previously a Sure Start local programme, was designated in 2006 and now offers a range of on-site services including health provision, childcare, support to find employment and targeted support for families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The centre was purpose built within a complex which includes a large health centre, library and council offices. A satellite centre is based on the primary school site at Sutton on Sea.

The vast majority of the population is of White British origin. Qualification levels for adults are below the national average. The local economy is mainly supported by the seaside tourist trade with long working hours in season and little employment during winter months. Lack of social housing is a problem for young families with a high number of short term lets and caravan sites being increasingly used as a more

permanent solution. A large number of families in the community have experienced domestic violence. The area has a higher than local and national average of teenage conception and higher than average proportion of children with additional needs, mainly related to autism.

Admission arrangements vary for the six schools in the centre's reach area. Two schools have a nursery with children starting at three years of age, while in the other schools children do not start until they are four years old. Children enter school with levels of skills and knowledge which vary considerably from area to area but are generally at or below those expected for their age.

The local authority has governance responsibility, providing strategic direction and annual challenge. A restructuring of staffing and leadership and management of the centre has recently taken place with a new head of centre due to take charge in December 2011. Partner agencies have also been subject to significant changes and recommissioning of service delivery.

Seashells, the centre's designated childcare provider, is managed by the Pre-school Learning Alliance. The nursery was separately inspected immediately prior to the children's centre. The report for this inspection can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Mablethorpe Children's Centre provides good support for children and families. The wide range of services offered at the centre and its satellite centre at Sutton on Sea are highly valued by users. Adults get on well together and support each other to access the centre's services. Their confidence and parenting skills have improved greatly through a progressive pathway of courses. The high quality of care, guidance and support provided by friendly, professional staff, from a range of partner agencies, is a real strength. One parent commented: 'I don't know how I would have managed without the centre. It's been really scary at times being a parent but so reassuring knowing that I have somewhere to turn to for advice and support.'

The centre's procedures for keeping families safe are outstanding. Safeguarding has a very high priority and users say that they feel safe. Because of the highly transient nature of the community, staff work determinedly with partner agencies to secure a detailed knowledge of all families in the reach area. This enables them to provide support swiftly in times of crisis and identify at an early stage those who are potentially vulnerable due to their circumstances. Equality and diversity are celebrated well and the centre offers a welcoming environment for all users. Young parents are particularly well supported and a new service for families with disabled children is currently being commissioned following a recent audit of their needs.

Outcomes for children and adults are good across all areas. An enthusiastic midwife, working from the centre, has been instrumental in encouraging an annual increase in the number of mothers who breastfeed. A wide range of initiatives to promote families to lead healthier lives has resulted in a recent reduction in the number of children who are obese at the age of six. Although many families do now take more exercise and most are aware of how to prepare nutritious meals, healthy-eating habits are not fully embraced by all families.

Users feel safe when accessing the centre's services because staff regularly assess the risks associated with the premises, activities and trips. Children make good progress in their personal and social development as they learn how to form amicable relationships with adults and other children. They play together harmoniously, behave well and participate eagerly in activities. By the time they start school, they are confident, independent learners as a result of the well-structured, exciting activities provided which stimulate their learning.

The centre effectively signposts users to other agencies for support with literacy and numeracy skills, leading some to further their qualifications. Some users have realised their ambition to use skills gained on courses to successfully set up their own businesses. Users have been encouraged to enhance their skills and experience through taking up volunteering opportunities with Homestart and a local community group. The centre has rightly identified that it could extend the role volunteers play within in the centre itself.

Leaders monitor the centre's work carefully and are increasingly proactive in ensuring that the centre has reliable data to help them measure effectively the impact of its work and accurately inform its priorities. Monitoring of impact is less well established where adult learning is delivered through non-commissioned services. The recent period of significant change for the centre and partner agencies, has provided opportunity to restructure and relaunch the advisory board (known as Children's Services Partnership) and develop more effective ways of representing the views of users. The 'Coffee Morning' session has ensured that users' views are now more widely heard and influence directly the work of the centre. However, the centre has not yet managed to fully engage schools in its work.

Good provision and outcomes, coupled with effective self-evaluation and development planning demonstrates the centre's good capacity for sustained

improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes by:
 - identifying and implementing additional strategies to encourage more users to embed healthy eating habits
 - widening the range of opportunities available to users to enhance their skills and experiences through volunteering roles which support centre services.
- Ensure that adult learning providers regularly share data with the centre to demonstrate more clearly the impact it has in encouraging users to improve employability skills and further their education.
- Strengthen partnership working to include all local schools, ensuring that they are involved in the Children's Services Partnership to inform the strategic direction of the centre and increase their awareness of services available through the centre to support families.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre makes a good contribution to promoting the physical, mental and emotional health of users and their children. Prospective mothers, fathers and grandparents are prepared well for their new roles through excellent take-up of the highly informative 'Bumpstart' sessions. A peer-support network offers practical support resulting in an increase from 12% to 38% of babies being breastfed at 6–8 weeks. Activities linked with the local sports centre, such as 'Activestart', have increased exercise taken by all the family, and fathers in particular. Fresh fruit is provided for snacks as a means of widening children's dietary tastes and the 'Big Cook, Little Cook' sessions have successfully helped most, although not all, adults to provide more nutritional, low-cost meals for their families. These initiatives are helping to reduce obesity levels at the end of Reception Year.

Families with disabled children receive good individualised support which promotes their children's learning and development through agencies such as Portage. The well-resourced sensory room provides a relaxing environment to reduce levels of anxiety during social care meetings, providing better outcomes for all concerned. Parents' skills and self-esteem have grown through a progressive range of parenting courses, including a specialist course for parents and carers whose children have been diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder; these courses enabled them to confidently manage their children's behaviour in a calm and controlled way.

Almost all children and adults are aware of how to keep themselves safe. Staff highlight risks when new activities are introduced and users are developing a strong sense of responsibility for ensuring the safety of all children in the group. Home

safety assessments and family safety days raise users' awareness of how to keep their families safe. Emergency hospital admissions have shown a recent small increase which the centre and health partners are investigating to identify any implications for their work. Families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are assessed very carefully through a single assessment framework and there are excellent links with various agencies to support children who have child protection plans. Valuable support is offered to users who experience domestic violence through the 'Freedom Programme'.

Young children attending 'Little Explorers' delighted in exploring mark making as they crawled through paint. Older children experimented with coloured water and flour whilst developing co-ordination, communication and language skills. Such well-designed activities build on children's interests and their current stage of development. These initiatives coupled with effective transition arrangements ensure children are well prepared to learn quickly when they start school. Consequently, good progress has been made towards narrowing the achievement gap for the lowest achieving 20%. This is decreasing faster than the national rate when children are assessed at five years of age. One school reports 100% of children now reaching their expected level of attainment at the end of Reception Year following targeted intervention by centre staff.

Users have been actively involved in the redesign and naming of the 'Rockpool' area. Their feedback has been instrumental in informing the development of parenting courses, resulting in high retention rates. Family learning courses are also reported to be well attended with high retention and success rates. There is evidence of some users continuing to further and higher education; but the centre does not routinely collect data to demonstrate its impact in signposting users to these learning opportunities. Young parents are extremely well-supported to continue their education.

Users are keen to access employment support, evidenced by the numbers attending the Jobcentre Plus weekly session at the centre and the local job club. Impact of this work is masked by the low numbers of employment opportunities out of season. Business Links has supported users to develop small businesses in cake making and as childminders, using skills gained on other courses at the centre. Good financial advice is provided, enabling users to become more financially astute and access extra benefits to which they are entitled.

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	2

and social development	
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

For those families who face challenging circumstances, the centre uses a single assessment framework very effectively to sensitively, but accurately assess their needs. This approach facilitates information sharing and ensures continuity of approach across all partner agencies. The dedicated staff team very creatively adapt outreach services to offer a bespoke package of complementary activities designed to meet the individual family's needs. Adults and children are empowered to contribute their views to the well-targeted plans which results in many families quickly moving from individual support in the home to accessing services delivered from the centre. Here they identify that other families may have similar problems and provide peer support for each other. As one parent said: 'The best thing is to know you are not the only one.'

Well-qualified staff facilitate a wide range of quality play and learning opportunities which enthuse adults to extend their children's learning in the home. One parent's comment was typical of others: 'I wouldn't have thought of some of the things we do here. My daughter loved helping me to make playdough from the recipe we got at the centre and then we also put glitter in it.' Many parents are capturing their children's learning journeys, enabling them to understand better their child's development, celebrate achievements and increase opportunities to talk together about their shared experiences. Purposeful activities are designed to extend children's knowledge and understanding of the world. For example, they explore the outdoor environment through nature walks and scavenger hunts on the beach, providing what one mother described as lots of 'wow' moments for her child.

Parenting courses, commissioned by the centre, are carefully structured to build on previous experiences. This helps parents to gain a sense of pride in their successes, for example, in managing their children's behaviour. Young parents value the opportunity to meet together. They engage in learning opportunities, such as sewing and growing food, which have a material impact on their lives. Tips provided by visiting health professionals have given them confidence in their parenting skills, such as deciding when to introduce solid foods and how to promote their children's dental health.

The centre's outstanding care, support and guidance provided for children and adults have a positive benefit on their well-being. Staff from partner agencies provide parents with good-quality benefits and tax credit advice and very effectively signpost them to support for smoking cessation and sexual health concerns. Agencies, such

as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, also participate actively in the 'Team around the Child' meetings to ensure families receive all help available to them. Very caring family support workers build trust with children, parents and carers, and they are especially sensitive to families who are most in need of emotional support. Quality childcare places are provided for parents while training and as respite care for parents who need it. A crèche facility is currently being commissioned to provide a specialist service for parents of disabled children with complex needs. Users say that activities such as 'Stay and Play' and the 'Coffee Morning' provide them with motivation to get them out of the house, resulting in their feeling less isolated and developing new friendships. Good links with Jobcentre Plus increase users' employment opportunities, particularly those for lone parents, and signposting to a job club and family learning courses helps build their skills and confidence in preparation for when they are ready to start work.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leaders and managers at all levels have high expectations. They communicate these very effectively to staff, partner agencies and users. This results in a shared common sense of purpose to improving outcomes for children and families, through a well-integrated service. The local authority, as the governing body, provides good strategic direction for the centre. It holds leaders to account through regular monitoring of delivery and reassessment of priorities to maximise impact. The advisory group, which is representative of the community, and helps provide the centre's strong understanding of the reach area and its users which underpins its accurate self-evaluation and effective development planning. However, the centre has not yet managed to successfully engage with all schools in the reach area and recognises this is an area for development.

Leaders, managers and staff, including those in partner agencies, have remained very focused during a sustained period of significant change. Clear, supportive systems are in place to ensure a smooth transition to the new head of centre. Well-defined professional supervision arrangements for family support staff in their new more complex roles are continuing to ensure consistently good outcomes for the families they work with. The centre manager's deployment of her staff team, management of resources and robust monitoring of contracts delivered by specialist commissioned agencies ensures that families' needs are well met and outcomes for children and adults are good. Thus, demonstrating the centre provides good value

for money.

Safeguarding is outstanding because it is given paramount importance. The local authority safer-recruitment procedures require that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are conducted to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children and records are updated regularly. Checks are also made to ensure agencies delivering services on behalf of the centre have equally rigorous safeguarding procedures in place. Clear referral procedures and very well-developed information sharing protocols are equally understood by all staff and partner agencies. Users understand the limits of staff confidentiality and are confident about how to raise any concerns about their own or another family's well-being. All centre staff and those in partner agencies have regularly accessed safeguarding, child protection and other training, as appropriate to their role, to aid identification of families' complex needs and help keep children safe.

The centre effectively celebrates diversity and values all children and their families equally. Users say they are happy to use the centre because they do not feel judged and a disabled user highlighted how pleasing it was not to be treated differently as the centre is sensitive to individual needs and easily accommodates them. The views of users are sought regularly to help the centre develop its provision and meet the needs of the whole community, including those families with a disabled member, fathers and young parents. As a result, almost all users indicated that they were satisfied or highly satisfied with centre services in a recent survey.

Good professional relationships with external agencies, including those in the private and voluntary sector, ensure that expertise is readily available for families who require help and support. The centre works well with the co-located nursery, a local pre-school and childminders to ensure parents can access quality childcare best suited to theirs and their children's needs.

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	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the	2

integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	
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

Information from the inspection of the centre's designated day-care provision, Seashells, which was inspected immediately prior to this inspection, was used to inform judgements. The Ofsted reports on local schools were scrutinised to provide contextual information.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Mablethorpe Children's Centre on 9–10 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that everyone in the centre gets on well together. This is because the staff have created an atmosphere where no one feels judged and everyone is respected as an individual, whatever their circumstances. Different groups such as fathers, young parents and parents with disabled children all benefit well from the centre's work.

You shared with us how you are involved in helping to improve the centre, such as the changes to the café area which you have now named 'the Rockpool.' Many of you told us that you are encouraging others to benefit from using the centre's service. This is because it has given you a sense of purpose in coming out to meet people and provides new learning experiences for you and your children. The quality of the care, guidance and support the centre provides for you is very high. You particularly appreciate the work of the Family Support Workers and we agreed that their work is a strength of the centre.

The centre is good at helping families to keep safe. Everyone says they feel safe as the centre has all the appropriate health and safety checks in place. We also noted how you take responsibility for ensuring that all the children in the group, not just your own, are kept safe. Staff work very effectively with their partners in health and social care and assess well with you what will make the most difference to help you cope if things get difficult. Young parents we spoke to found the sessions effectively help them learn more about how to look after their children, such as tips on how to help clean their teeth. They also appreciated opportunities provided to learn

themselves, particularly the driving course which had encouraged some to learn to drive.

Many more mothers are now breastfeeding and you have been keen to develop healthier lifestyles through attending the 'Activestart' sessions and going to the sports centre more. The 'Big Cook, Little Cook' sessions have encouraged most of you to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals for your families; but a few of you are still not managing to eat healthily on a regular basis and we have asked the centre to do some more work on this with you.

The centre has been very supportive in developing a range of courses to help you see that learning is fun for adults and encourage you to develop your parenting skills, especially how to manage your children's behaviour which you say makes you calmer. It was good to learn that some of you had used the skills you have gained to start your own businesses. However, because the centre works with different agencies to deliver training to support you with skills for when you are ready to start work, the centre is not as clear as it could be about the overall impact it is having in helping you to gain employment. We have asked the centre to ensure that this information is gathered together so it can identify if more work is needed to support you in developing these skills.

In all the sessions we visited, children were well behaved and were learning how to become independent learners. This means that children are ready to learn when they start school and quickly make good progress so that when they are assessed at the age of five their skills and knowledge are now much closer to those of children in other parts of the country. Some schools benefit greatly from the work the centre does with them, but not all. We have asked the centre to extend its work with schools so that they can help decide what is important for the centre and are aware of the work the centre can support families with. The learning journeys you are keeping to record your children's progress, help you to celebrate their achievements and understand better how they are developing. You told us how you like to look at these with your children and how the activities in the sessions help you to think of new ideas for your children to play and learn at home.

Some of you told us how your experiences at the centre had encouraged you to go on to become volunteers with other organisations. This is further developing your skills and experience and so we have asked the centre to look for ways to extend volunteering opportunities for you within the centre itself.

The centre is very well-managed. Although there have been many changes over the last few months, the staff have continued to provide you with good services. They work hard to understand your needs and this helps them to provide the most appropriate activities, courses and individual support for your families. It also changes its services as your needs change. This means that through its work it is making a significant difference for you and your children.

Thank you very much for your welcome. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and hearing your views. We wish you every success in the future.

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