

Inspection report for Crescent Children's Centre

Local authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	383909
Inspection dates	8 - 9 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Jean Webb

Centre leader	Tracy Jackson
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Crescent Children's Centre EY331864
	The Crescent Pre-School Nursery Ltd EY387145

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 one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers and staff from the centre and the local authority, parents and carers, volunteers, members of the advisory board, local schools and partners including an adult training organisation and a voluntary organisation.

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

Information about the centre

Crescent Children's Centre is located in the south-east of Stoke-on-Trent on a predominately council owned housing estate. It shares the site with Crescent Primary School. It opened in March 2006 and is a purpose built building to provide universal services. It is managed by the local authority. The building is on one level and fully accessible. There is a community café and community Enterprise Allotment, which is run by volunteers and also a dedicated Forest School area. These facilities are open to all members of the local community. It has a natural boundary of the very busy Stoke to Derby link road.

The area served by Crescent Children's Centre is one of the most deprived areas in Stoke-on-Trent. Nearly two thirds of families live in the 10% most deprived areas nationally and nearly half are in the 5% most deprived areas. There are small pockets of less deprived areas that fall into the 10-30% level of deprivation. Within the centre reach area, 37% of children live in households dependent on workless benefits. Attainment on entry to school is below that expected of this age, particularly in terms of language development. Over 97% of the community are of White British heritage. A small number of families from Eastern European countries have settled in the area.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Crescent Children’s Centre delivers outstanding services to the community and particularly to those groups most in need of support. The quality of provision and outcomes for families are excellent. It has maintained the high standard of services and accurately identified where they can continue to improve further. The overall effectiveness of the centre is outstanding.

Parents and carers are exceptionally active in the running of their centre and contribute to its development and success. They were instrumental in ensuring the continuation of the children’s centre in times of cutbacks and directly affected the level of reduction in budgets. Safeguarding has a very high priority in all the centre does and there is a remarkably friendly and inviting atmosphere which is commented upon frequently by parents and carers. There is an extremely effective business planning and service delivery process in place and excellent ongoing evaluation of services that involve all relevant partners. Staff are particularly well qualified and supported. Managers’ work very well with the local authority to continue the development of best models of practice in meeting both children and parents needs in the local and wider community. Challenging targets are agreed and where services are identified as not being effective, these are quickly recognised and changed. The centre is responsible for rolling out many of their successful approaches and systems to other centres and schools.

The café in the foyer of the centre is an important hub for the community and is used extremely well. There is an excellent outdoor play area leading out from the café for families to use which includes a ‘beach’ and picnic areas. The allotment on the site is run by parents, carers and volunteers and used very well to promote healthy eating and give children opportunities to find out more about growing different types of food. The needs of children with disabilities are assessed very effectively and they are making significant progress in their development. Although breastfeeding has increased, it is still below national averages. There is a high incidence of smoking in the area and more work needs to be undertaken to ensure a smoke free environment in the home.

Families in need are identified particularly well and given exceptional care and support in a way that ensures empowerment and more independence. Parents and carers develop a very good understanding of their children's needs and development and this gives them high levels of confidence in their parenting skills. Staff are highly committed to the delivery of an excellent service. Teams are supported very well by managers, through a well structured system of carefully planned meetings at all levels. The outstanding quality of services, combined with a determined approach to address any issues of concern, strongly reflect that that centre has an excellent capacity to improve even further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further improve the health of families by:
 - considering other ways to change a culture of bottle feeding and continue to promote the positive benefits of breastfeeding
 - strongly promoting smoke free households and associated benefits as well as providing continuing support for smoking cessation.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Outcomes for families are outstanding. A well researched 'Parents involved in Children's Learning' (PICL) approach has resulted in exceptionally contented children, who are able to express their personal preferences in learning and substantially improve their skills and development from a low starting point. Parents and carers are fully involved with the process and they have high levels of understanding regarding the development of their child which they talk about very confidently using terms and concepts that are not in everyday language. Videos are used to record parent and child interaction which has a tremendous impact on their parenting skills. Children are notably more able to socialise. The improvement in learning is clearly evident when they start full time nursery aged three, compared to those who do not attend the children's centre. Children identified with most needs follow a 'let's get started' programme for transition to school and the careful monitoring and assessment of these children show they benefit considerably and cope much better with transition. The percentage gap between the lowest performing 20% has been closing over the last three years.

Healthy eating is promoted well and families eat a range of healthy food, much of which is grown at the centre and cooked in sessions with adults and children together. There is a specially designed kitchen so children can work alongside parents. Obesity levels are well below the national average. Sustained breast feeding has increased at the 6 week stage but is still below national averages. Smoking levels are still high in expectant mothers in spite of some reduction in levels of smoking. Excellent improvements have been made in speech and language development in response to this being a particular area of low achievement for

children. Significant progress is made by children with learning difficulties and in one instance resulted in full statement before they start school.

Children are kept safe and protected extremely well at the centre and in the home. Numbers of children on child protection plans have decreased due to early intervention. Parents and carers are well informed about safety hazards in the home. Safety visits are made when children are six months old to raise awareness of different age-related risks. Emergency hospital admissions have decreased. Parents and carers feel safe and are confident to take any concerns they may have to centre staff. They very much appreciate how well staff know them and their circumstances and comments such as, 'They know who you are when you phone without even saying your name and they can tell by the tone of your voice if anything is wrong,' and 'We've become the Crescent family' illustrate this very well.

Children confidently make their own choices for play activities. They are always busy and fully engaged in their play. There is an active parent's forum and parents are represented very well on the advisory board. Parents are extremely vocal in a constructive and positive way and have an enormous input into the development of resources and services. They organise events and raise funds for the community and services. Parent and carer volunteers contribute significantly to the centre including the running of the allotment and supporting the dads group. There is mutual respect between families and there has been good integration of families who have moved to the community from other countries. Parents and carers gain qualification in skills for life and vocationally related topics and also progress onto further and higher education and employment.

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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1
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.	1

How good is the provision?

1

The children's centre knows its reach area extremely well and the engagement with those who are in most need is excellent. The highest levels of poverty are near to the centre but

there is also a more distant pocket of vulnerable families. A separate outreach centre has been established specifically for this group and it is running very successfully to meet the needs of these users. There is an increase in the reach of all target groups and particularly high levels of success with children with learning disabilities and also fathers. Home visits are made to get to know new children and as one parent said, 'The key person did the visit for couple of hours to find out about likes and dislikes. She made us feel comfortable and wanted to really get to know our child'. Attendance at services is high throughout the year including the summer period. There is a free crèche for children of adults volunteering and training and those identified for need of respite.

There is a wide range of programme of activities to engage families in learning at the centre. They include music and rhyme, baby massage, cook and eat, and fun sessions to encourage learning through play. The forest school resource is used well for activities, such as a 'bug hunt'. 'Play and learn' home visits are arranged in the home and families benefit enormously from these interventions. They are encouraged to make good use of everyday objects in the home for play. There are excellent resources for play, particularly in the outdoor areas. Learning and achievement is highly celebrated and two adult learners won 'learner of the year' as part of Stoke-on-Trent's adult learning week awards.

The quality of childcare available at the centre is outstanding. Support is family led and the level of care is exceptionally well coordinated between partner agencies. Records are well kept to ensure a holistic approach and to ensure all actions are followed up. The information and advice given to families is continuously updated and checked for its accuracy. There is a touch screen web-based resource in reception, a social networking site page and texting service that is well used by families. A partner is based at the centre full time giving individual advice and guidance regarding training and development and make referrals to other support agencies if required.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leadership and management are outstanding. There have been many changes in the local authority in the last year in the structure and delivery of children's centres as well as severe reductions in budgets. Throughout this time there has been a clear focus on maintaining high quality provision at the centre and continually increasing the impact on targeted groups. The local authority has worked well with managers to review and improve models of delivery. Managers use local and national data to set challenging targets for improvement, which are approved and supported by the local authority. The centre's processes for business planning and service delivery are exemplary and have been taken up across the city. The centre won a national award in 2010 for the best children's centre team. They were also runners up for a national award for training and development of staff.

Communication is excellent within the centre and between partners. Focus groups for different services are attended by partners and users and these feed into the evaluation process very effectively. Parents and carers challenge the advisory board highly effectively, and as part of their role, they attend group activities to ensure they are hearing what parents have to say. Parents and carers feel they are listened to, respected and not judged by staff. They say 'We know our opinions are as good as those of the staff'. The centre and resources are used well and targets and performance indicators ensure there is excellent value for money when delivering services. The centre is one of the most effective in the south of the city in terms of cost per head.

Safeguarding is given high priority across the centre and embedded exceptionally well in all systems. The level of need for protection is clearly identified and tracked and the measure of well-being used with all children is particularly effective in ensuring protection of children. There is good information sharing with other agencies so that vulnerable families living with domestic violence can be supported. There are rigorous checks to make sure any possible safeguarding issues raised as part of family support reviews are followed through. Criminal Records Bureau checks are completed to the recommended requirements. All centre staff are trained in safeguarding and paediatric first aid. There are robust risk assessments undertaken and the environment is safe, secure and well maintained.

The child's individuality and respect for differences is encouraged extremely well and planned activities ensure this is further promoted. Outreach services have improved accessibility of the hard to reach groups and there has been an increase in the registration of families with different nationalities. Children with disabilities are particularly well supported and there is a well used sensory room in the main reception area. Strong partnerships have been established for many years and the main ones are based at the centre ensuring a seamless and well coordinated approach to support of families. Partners have helped to secure extra funding for resources that have helped to bring the community together in many positive ways.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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 integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
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.	1

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

Information from the Ofsted inspection of the Crescent Pre School Nursery Ltd in August 2009 has been taken into account when writing about early years' provision and outcomes for children in the report.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaints procedure: raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted* 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 Crescent Children's Centre on 8 - 9 November 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

During our visit we evaluated your centre's work and the quality of its resources, as well as its plans and documents. We talked to a number of you and the professionals that work with you. You are rightly very proud of your centre as it is outstanding in almost everything it does. The way the centre works with its partners is particularly impressive. It has meant they reach and support all of you in a way that has given you the skills and confidence to support your children in their learning as well as contribute to improvements in the centre. You made a big difference to the decisions taken by the local authority about keeping the services you want. You continue to contribute very impressively as part of the parents' forum, focus groups and volunteering. Both you and your children also experience high levels of achievement and enjoyment. You told us how safe you feel in the centre and how much you feel part of a bigger family.

We observed how much fun your children have and how exceptionally well they are progressing in their speech and language and in their personal and social skills. You have had the opportunity to have your interaction with your children recorded and then observe this together with staff. This has had an enormous impact on how you view your parenting skills and explore different ways to make them even better. You have many opportunities to pursue further learning and some of you progress to higher level courses and volunteering. Your centre does a great deal to support mothers who want to breastfeed although breastfeeding levels are still low. There are also high levels of smoking by expectant mothers. Your centre offers opportunities for cooking healthy food grown in the allotment and taking part in physical activities in the forest school and the excellent outdoor resources you have. Almost all families in your centre's area are registered with the centre and most have had a least one visit to the centre or in the home. The centre has done well in reaching the large majority of vulnerable families and making sure they benefit from the centre's services. They have done exceptionally well in supporting children with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Your centre offers tailored individual support to families in their home and coordinates this exceptionally well with other partners. You told us how this has made all the difference to your life and well-being. There are plenty of ways to make sure your voice is heard and you use these options, such as the parents' forum really well. You feel the centre communicates with you very well and you have a number of different ways of keeping in touch such as a social networking site and texting service. The centre staff get to know your children really well and how they prefer to play. They capture your child's learning in their learning journey books and show the tremendous progress they are making. Some of you are part of a family forum and help to organise events and raise money.

The people in charge of running your centre are doing an excellent job. They are continually increasing their reach to target groups such as fathers. Families from different countries and

different backgrounds are not made to feel any different and are very much part of the community. Your centre highlights and encourages children's individuality and to respect their differences. Staff are exceptionally well trained and supported to carry out their role. As one of you said 'Staff are highly professional and friendly'. Your centre gives safeguarding a high priority and you feel very comfortable to approach any member of staff. Staff know you personally by name.

Your centre is excellent at reviewing where they are and highlighting how they can improve even further. We have every confidence that they will continue to carry on improving the quality of services. They work really well with the local authority to plan ahead for the year and your centre managers make sure staff are clear about the targets your centre needs to achieve. These targets make sure there is excellent value for money in terms of the benefits gained from different actions.

We have asked the manager and the local authority to look at how they can make things even better. The most important thing to do is to ensure is that the health of families is improved by encouraging less bottle feeding and more breastfeeding and also to decrease smoking rates further and in particular work towards smoke free homes.

Thank you very much for your welcome and for your frankness with inspectors. We are very grateful and wish you every success in the future.

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