

Inspection report for Warsop Children's Centre (Meden, Birklands)

Local authority	Nottinghamshire
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Shaping Futures (EY280082) Pre-school Learning Alliance Meden Vale Childcare (EY333939) Warsop and Meden Vale Children's Centre (EY309902)

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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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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinators, 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, carers and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Warsop (Birkland, Meden) Children's Centre is a purpose-built, phase one centre, which was designated in January 2006. The centre is situated in the market town of Warsop, in the Mansfield district of Nottinghamshire. It has a satellite centre on the primary school site in the nearby village of Meden Vale. Although the centre mainly serves a traditional mining community, the reach area also includes rural settlements, some of which are quite isolated.

The centre was originally a Sure Start local programme. It provides the full core offer, including a range of on-site services such as health provision, childcare, play and learning sessions and targeted support for families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Activities are provided also at the satellite centre, at local schools and in community venues, such as the local library. The centre is governed by the local authority supported by a local advisory board and parents' forum. During 2011 there have been several staff changes including job-sharing the coordinator's role.

The community is predominately of White British origin. There has been a slight increase in families from minority ethnic groups, mainly of Eastern European origin, moving into the area recently. Half of the reach area is within the highest 20% of deprived areas nationally. The number of people seeking employment is comparable with the national average but those in employment are mainly low paid and unskilled. The number of people accessing long-term benefits for disability is almost

double the national average. Qualifications levels for those leaving school and the adult population are lower than in other areas nationally.

When they start school, usually at three years of age, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age. The centre has two linked daycare providers. Shaping Futures Day Nursery is co-located at the main site. Daycare is also provided by the Pre-school Learning Alliance at the satellite centre in Meden Vale. The centre itself provides crèche facilities which are registered with Ofsted. These settings were not inspected as part of the children's centre inspection and reports for their inspections 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

This centre provides good support for children and families in Warsop and Meden Vale. Outcomes are good overall. Users feel safe as staff and volunteers regularly assess and address risks associated with the premises, activities and trips. Children are confident, independent learners and their involvement in interesting and stimulating activities ensures their behaviour is good. Excellent working relationships with the local schools have resulted in well-designed programmes which support extremely smooth transition for children (and their parents and carers) when they start school.

Although health partners have little involvement in the advisory group, the centre actively engages health visitors and midwives in its work. The limited health data available at reach level is supplemented by information from local sources. As a result, the centre is successful in encouraging healthy lifestyles, covering all aspects of emotional, mental and physical health. Obesity levels of children at six years of age have reduced impressively to below the national average. Families enjoy physical exercise more through outdoor activities and now provide more nutritional, healthy meals at home following the 'Cook and Eat' sessions and gardening project. Volunteers, including young parents, make a positive contribution to the centre. They deliver 'Stay and Play' sessions and act as ambassadors for the centre. Their enthusiasm encourages centre users to engage in community events such as the

local carnival.

The impact of the centre's work on users' economic well-being is less evident. Although they benefit from a variety of courses, there is limited opportunity for users to progress to accredited courses. The centre is unable to demonstrate the impact of its work with Jobcentre Plus and other local agencies, in supporting users to develop employability skills as it does not track the outcomes of this work.

Provision is good. Very effective integrated working with local health and social care colleagues ensures that families whose circumstances make them vulnerable, swiftly receive the help they need when they need it, particularly in times of crisis. Well-designed activities, which are enjoyed by children and adults, ensure purposeful learning for all involved. Care, guidance and support are good as users readily access well-informed, sensitive staff and a wide range of visual displays and informative leaflets in the centre.

Leaders and managers evaluate the work of the centre effectively. By incorporating feedback from users, they ensure services meet the needs of families well especially those most in need. Together with the advisory group, they are clear about their own roles and have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas requiring further development. However, the centre is not able to demonstrate fully its impact over a period of time. This is because the centre is over-ambitious in setting itself too many targets and changing its local priorities on an ongoing basis to meet evolving needs.

Staff are very well motivated and have continued to deliver high-quality services, despite imminent changes following the recent local authority review. The centre provides an inclusive welcome for all users, whatever their background or circumstances, as it promotes equalities and celebrates diversity effectively. Safeguarding is given a high priority and all appropriate recruitment procedures are in place for staff and volunteers including Criminal Records Bureau checks.

Users, including male carers, are very actively engaged in the centre. Together with a wide range of partner agencies, they are well represented on the local advisory group. A parents' forum enthusiastically ensures users' views are valued and listened to. The high level of professional expertise, together with strong teamwork and effective partnership working, means that there is good capacity to extend the current good practice.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes for economic well-being by:
 - gaining a better understanding of the centre's impact on signposting users to partner agencies who support them to access training and employment and use the information to plan services
 - implementing pathways to learning so more users can gain accredited

qualifications to support their future employment prospects.

- Increase the rigour of self-evaluation and monitoring by setting a limited number of well-focused, ambitious priorities and targets to enable leaders and managers to assess the centre's impact more effectively over a longer period of time.
- Strengthen engagement with the health authority to ensure they contribute effectively to the strategic development of this centre and provide it with up-to-date accurate data at reach level.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Dedicated counselling sessions, a well-equipped sensory room and baby massage techniques were all highlighted by users as contributing to their improved state of health. 'Bumps and Babes' has resulted in more babies being breastfed at six to eight weeks. Although still below the national average, recent success indicates that some long-standing cultural barriers to breastfeeding are breaking down. 'Home Talk', combined with a nursery place, has been a particularly successful strategy in improving young children's language and communication skills. One parent reported: 'My child's speech problems have disappeared. He has gone from not talking to being able to answer the phone in three months.' Take up of universal health services is good with high attendance at the baby clinic, and low dental decay in children aged five. Although no immunisation data is available, health professionals report take-up is high.

Users say they feel safe in the centre both in terms of physical safety and in raising any concerns they have about their own family or others' parenting skills. They recognise that staff plan activities carefully to include messages to help keep their children safe such as road safety awareness and protection while in the sun. Courses such as Paediatric First Aid and Home Safety are popular as they help users protect their children. The number of children referred to social care has reduced by over a third, as a result of effective joint-working and early intervention through a 'team around the child' approach. Children on child protection plans and their families have been so well supported that none currently needs this level of support for a second time.

Despite low starting points, an impressive number of children achieve the expected level of attainment when assessed at six years of age. This is well above the national average and the achievement gap, particularly for children eligible for free school meals, is very low. Comparative weaknesses highlighted in writing and reading skills are being addressed through the effective deployment of the children's centre teacher in training all staff working with the centre. Having fun and learning alongside their children has increased users' understanding of how to support their children's development at home. Sessions such as 'Getting Ready for Nursery' have the added bonus of widening users' social networks, providing peer support and reducing isolation. Crèches are provided for all training courses facilitating users' attendance. Although some learners progress to accredited literacy and numeracy

courses, numbers are comparatively low.

Children's behaviour is good and parents' and carers' expectations of their children are well managed by centre staff. Young children are encouraged to express their feelings by communicating through use of signs and symbols, reducing frustration for those with limited language skills. Users who volunteer are provided with a very effective pathway to enhance their skills and experience. As one parent said: 'The centre's done wonders for me. I can't thank them enough. Now I want to give them something back.' The 'funding group', established by some former members of the parents' forum, has secured resources to extend centre activities, including organising trips and larger scale community events, with no cost to the centre. Users valued greatly the help they receive with financial management that they say encourages them to set realistic budgets and access benefits they were unaware of.

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 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	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	3

How good is the provision?

2

Targeted promotions, such as 'Zone Attack' successfully increase the centre's knowledge of families and raise awareness of the centre's services across the reach area, particularly in the rural areas. This local information supplements other data available and enables the centre to identify families who need their services most. Consequently participation rates for the most vulnerable groups, including workless households and families from minority ethnic groups, are high at 84%. The centre has successfully worked with Connexions and the community midwife to identify pregnant teenagers and teenage parents. Specific support packages enhance their parenting skills and, where required, enable them to continue their education. Other users are equally well supported and empowered. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework procedures very effectively to create thoughtfully-designed packages of support for vulnerable families to increase their resilience in dealing with difficulties. Consequently, their confidence as parents has increased, outcomes for their children are improving and some independently promote the benefits of the

centre to others. One parent's comment was reflective of others: 'The centre has made my life so much better. I am able to look at problems and solve them without getting all upset now.'

Innovative activity sessions, such as the 'Forest School', greatly enhance parents' and carers' understanding of how children learn. While having fun exploring the outdoors, they realise that children need to learn how to keep themselves safe and develop their independence. Fathers' post-its on the comment board indicate their appreciation of 'Men Behaving Dadly' sessions as these provide specific time to engage in purposeful activities with their children.

Staff provide good role models by regularly making positive comments, praising success and celebrating achievement. For example, certificates were awarded to all those completing the 'Rhyme Time Challenge' to learn ten songs. Adults are keen to provide feedback on courses they attend. Most are enthusiastic about continuing their learning; their comments are scrutinised to determine the impact on their learning and to inform future delivery.

Care, guidance and support for all families are good and for some, such as families with a disabled member are exceptional. Where respite care is needed for a family or children need additional support with their learning, the centre has been instrumental in enabling them to get nursery places.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements are secure with clear lines of management and accountability in place. The local authority thoroughly evaluates the centre's work on a regular basis. Within the advisory group, focus groups linked to the Every Child Matters outcomes support and challenge the centre managers well. Members effectively provide an accurate view of local need, help shape service delivery and monitor progress. Leaders and managers set high expectations and offer development opportunities which motivate staff, partner agencies and volunteers. As a result, the team enthusiastically embraces new initiatives, is keen to extend the centre's work and increasingly able to demonstrate the impact of the centre's services. The centre gives good value for money. Job-share arrangements for the two centre coordinators are managed very effectively, making good use of their complementary skills and experience. Sustainability themes are incorporated well

throughout the centre's work and volunteers regularly support delivery of sessions.

The inclusion of all children and families is embedded throughout the centre's work. Outreach venues are carefully chosen to include users living in rural areas. All information displayed, and resources available, are thoughtfully selected to raise awareness of equality and reflect diversity. The centre is fully accessible for families with a disabled member and staff regularly evaluate the suitability of the environment for all. A recent review of the entrance area resulted in a reduction of written material so users with low levels of literacy would not feel overwhelmed.

The centre's safeguarding policy and guidelines are robust and all staff have been fully trained at the appropriate level in child protection procedures. Protocols and practices for referrals and information sharing are well known and effectively used by everyone involved in the centre. Health and safety are given high priority, with rigorous risk assessments and evacuation practices conducted on a regular basis.

Childminders are valued as users of the centre and providers of services. This has enhanced their role in the community and encouraged others to take up the profession. Users responded well to the user survey, expressing their high satisfaction with services. Children's views are actively sought and they are encouraged to 'make their mark' when their parents and carers register their attendance at the centre.

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	2
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	2

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

The Ofsted reports on local providers and schools were scrutinised to provide contextual information about the area in which the centre is situated.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Warsop Children's Centre (Meden, Birklands) on 23 and 24 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We were pleased to spend time at the centre looking at its work and talking to staff and other professionals who work with them. We felt privileged that so many of you were keen to share how the centre had helped you to face and overcome difficult challenges in your lives. This gave us a clear picture that the centre is effective in helping families with support packages designed to meet your family's individual needs. We found that staff work effectively with health visitors, midwives and other colleagues to assess with you what will make the most difference for you to help you cope if things get difficult.

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. Your children are making good progress and the centre has some effective programmes to help your children develop their language such as 'Home Talk' and the introduction of signs and symbols. This reduces children's frustration as they can communicate more easily and as a result their behaviour improves. You have also found the centre's sessions such as 'Getting Ready for Nursery' very effective in helping to prepare you and your children for starting school. It was good to see photographs of the celebrations which took place after the 'Rhyme Time Challenge' which you worked on with your children.

The centre is successful in providing a welcome place for all parents and carers. There is lots of useful information available in the centre and staff are well-trained to provide you with advice about how to manage your budgets or claim benefits. We saw from the post-it notes that fathers had left how much they valued time with their children at the Saturday sessions. Young parents are well supported from when they are first known to the centre and it was good to see that some of you have been enthused to volunteer to support the centre. The work of volunteers is making a positive impact on the centre's work through helping to run sessions and raising money for additional activities such as trips and community events.

There are a few aspects of their work we have asked the centre leaders to improve. Although there is a range of courses for you to attend to help develop your parenting skills and keep your families safe, there are fewer opportunities for you to gain qualifications. We have asked the centre to explore how more of these courses can be offered and to follow up how successful it is in helping you into employment when you are ready to seek work. The centre knows families in the area very well and has assessed your needs effectively, but it sets itself too many targets to work to. We have asked managers to look at setting fewer targets so they can show the success of the centre's work more clearly. Much of the information the centre needs about how successful it is in improving your health is not easily available to the centre. We have asked staff to work more effectively with the health authority to ensure they get the information they need to inform better how they support you to develop healthy lifestyles.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and sharing your stories. We wish you every success in the future.

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