

Inspection report for Mountsorrel Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Leicestershire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Christ Church and St Peter's Church of England Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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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/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, outreach workers, health and education professionals, and representatives of the local authority. They observed the centre's work, looked at a range of relevant documentation and spoke with users of the centre

Information about the centre

Mountsorrel Sure Start Children's Centre is one of seven children's centres in the Charnwood district in the north of Leicestershire. All of the centres share a range of services which are managed and delivered by staff who work across all seven centres. It has operated as a phase two children's centre since 2009. The area served by the centre comprises a mix of rural villages and the larger village of Mountsorrel. The vast majority of families are from White British heritages. Very few families are from minority ethnic backgrounds, although the centre does serve a small population of Travellers. Many of the areas served by the centre are relatively advantaged, but there are pockets of deprivation, particularly in the Mountsorrel and Sileby areas. Across the reach area, 10% of children live in workless households. Lack of education, skills and training is the most prominent form of deprivation with about a third of 16–74 year-olds in the area having no qualifications. Children in the area usually enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and abilities which are in line with those expected for their age.

The local authority has devolved governance of the centre to the Charnwood locality partnership board. The centre has commissioned inter-agency partnerships to deliver services and activities on its behalf in the local area. These commissioning

arrangements have been recently reviewed. A locality partnership coordinator provides strategic coordination and support to the locality, while a children's centre coordinator, who also oversees the six other children's centres in Charnwood, oversees the day-to-day running of the centre. Staffing in the centres has been recently reorganised, and family outreach workers are now associated with individual centres. The centre offers a range of health, education and family support services. However, the centre's main focus is on outreach work with families who may be potentially vulnerable due to their individual circumstances. The centre does not provide childcare on site.

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

Mountsorrel Children Centre is a satisfactory centre. Recent improvements to the way that the centre is led and managed are having a positive impact on the quality of provision and have secured satisfactory outcomes for families. Although participation rates are improving and there is a closer focus on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families, the centre has focused the majority of its activities and services on meeting the needs of families who reside in the immediate locality. It has not yet fully considered how it can address the needs of users who live in the more rural areas served by the centre. Additionally, engagement with children and families with disabilities, fathers and the local Traveller community remains low. Nevertheless, those who do use the centre are delighted with the provision. Parents report that sessions are enjoyable and describe how the centre has helped them to improve their well-being and that of their families.

Leaders and managers have made certain that outcomes for users and their families are satisfactory. Action taken following the recent review of the commissioning arrangements has improved the quality of activities and services and brought about an increased focus on improving outcomes for those in the most need of support. The partnership with health visitors is particularly strong and has contributed well to recent improvements in breastfeeding rates which are now above average. Families feel safe in the centre and appreciate that the emotional support provided helps them to feel less isolated. Sessions such as 'Chatterbox', 'Chatterbabies' and

'Speakaboo' are helping to improve children's speaking and listening skills and are having a positive impact on children's achievement in the immediate locality. Partnership agencies such as The Bridge and Citizen's Advice Bureau make sure that parents have access to expert advice on housing, benefits and debt management. Parents appreciate the good-quality individual support that is available at times of crisis.

Changes to staffing structures and new appointments have strengthened the satisfactory leadership and management, and have secured a satisfactory capacity for further improvement. The reorganisation of staffing has refreshed the expertise available in each centre and has improved links in the local community. However, although partnerships are satisfactory, the partnerships that are specific to primary schools and private and voluntary providers of pre-school education are currently underdeveloped. The centre has limited information about the development of children's skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and this means that the centre is not always able to target additional support effectively such as sessions run by the speech and language therapy team and activities that focus on developing early literacy skills. The appointment of a senior family outreach worker together with the creation of another layer of supervision within the local authority is creating greater accountability. However, the local authority has not yet implemented an annual conversation designed to provide a greater level of challenge. Systems to collate data are much improved and are increasing the leaders' and managers' understanding of the needs of the local community. The centre is using this information to inform development plans but there are areas where the targets against which commissioned contractors are held to account are still rather broad. Additionally, because these systems are so new, it is still too early to judge the centre's impact in some areas of its work. Although many professional services are represented on the partnership board, currently there is no parental representation on the board and the involvement of the local community in governance is limited.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families in the reach area who access the services of the centre by:
 - making certain that early contact is made with all new mothers
 - increasing the level of contact with primary schools, and pre-school provision across different parts of the reach area
 - ensuring the needs of disabled children and those who have special educational needs and their parents are better addressed
 - developing services that meet the needs of fathers
 - improving provision for Traveller families in the local community.
- Further enhance lines of accountability and develop the way that data are used to inform development planning by:
 - collating and analysing data more accurately, especially those relating to

- the Early Years Foundation Stage
- establishing an annual conversation that provides challenge and holds leaders and managers to account
- setting clear and measurable targets for outcomes in all areas
- enabling parents and the local community to make a more meaningful contribution to the development and direction of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre is focused on improving the health and well-being of families. Although outcomes are satisfactory, they are improving. These improvements are most evident in health, where good working partnerships with health visitors are having a positive impact on the health of new mothers and their babies. The improvement in breastfeeding rates is because of good support from staff and peer supporters. This support is highly valued and many mothers say that the advice and guidance together with the emotional support provided have been pivotal in enabling them to sustain breastfeeding. Peer supporters are extending their valuable work by providing additional assistance to mothers who wish to return to work, enabling them to combine the continuation of breastfeeding with employment. Postnatal groups have also been successful, with users reporting that groups like 'Mums in Mind' have helped to reduce feelings of isolation and have improved the well-being of new mothers. On-site baby clinics are well attended and ensure that parents have access to information about weaning, feeding and the development of their babies. Useful emotional and practical support is provided to teenage parents through 'Parents with Prospects'. Families are developing a satisfactory understanding of the importance of healthy eating through attendance at cookery sessions such as 'Big Cook Little Cook' and the importance of exercise in popular sessions such as 'Mini Movers'. However, obesity rates in the Reception Year remain at about average.

Parents and carers say that they feel safe and secure in the centre because there is an atmosphere of mutual respect. Their awareness of how to keep their children safe has improved through the 'Safe Start' scheme. 'Home-Start', which operates through staff and volunteers, has helped parents to improve their parenting skills, including their ability to establish routines, and has increased parents' awareness of local services. A typical parental comment was, 'I do not know how I would have survived without Home-Start'. 'Play and Stay' sessions have become 'Play and Learn' sessions where there is a greater emphasis on helping parents to support their children's learning. Parents say that their levels of confidence have improved through their involvement with the centre. They make a positive contribution to the centre through volunteering in a variety of roles. The centre has begun to implement early intervention as a result of concerns about children's language and communication skills that have been raised by health visitors. For example, 'Chatterbox' and 'Chatterbabies' sessions have been introduced which help parents to understand the importance of interacting with babies and young children. 'Speak-a-boo' sessions have helped parents recognise the detrimental effect of excessive television viewing on children's early speaking and listening skills. Children who attend the neighbouring primary school are now better prepared for school as a result of attending activities provided by the centre. The gap between the lowest-achieving

20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest is being reduced, but the children's skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage across the whole reach area remain broadly average.

Parents are developing satisfactory economic stability and independence. The courses that are offered mainly focus on developing parents' confidence and enabling parents to feel better prepared for developing their literacy and numeracy skills and entering the world of work. A small number of parents have achieved further qualifications and moved into employment. Effective working partnerships with organisation such as Citizens' Advice Bureau and The Bridge ensure that users are able to access expert guidance relating to debt management and housing issues.

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 has improved the way it focuses its services on the needs of the most vulnerable families, but it has concentrated the majority of its work in the immediate locality. The needs of those who live in a more rural setting have not been fully considered. The centre is very dependent on health visitors to disseminate information about the services offered by the centre and to identify potentially vulnerable families. Not all families with new babies receive a 'Cherub' visit, where staff from the centre visit new mothers. This is a missed opportunity to inform new parents about the services offered by the centre and to recognise parents who might appreciate additional support. The centre provides an adequate range of activities and some, such as 'Chatterbabies' and 'Chatterbox' sessions, baby clinics and 'Mini Movers' are well attended. There is an improved focus on supporting the most vulnerable groups. The initial assessment of needs by family outreach workers and the tracking of progress of those families who are accessing one-to-one support are good, and these processes have been strengthened through recent staff changes. Historically, the Common Assessment Framework has been underused, but this is improving.

Some partners, such as those that deliver 'Chatterbox' and 'Chatterbabies', are using excellent methods to record children's progress. These methods help parents to understand and promote their children's progress. However, there are wide variations in the practice of different providers when recording children's progress, and the way they use these assessments to inform the planning of future learning opportunities is not always sufficiently thorough. The centre has struggled to engage with parents whose children have disabilities or special educational needs. A recent survey of these parents revealed that they had limited awareness of the services that could be offered by children's centres. The centre has now set money aside and is in the process of considering how this money could be used to provide much-needed support to this group of potential users of the centre. Also, there is little provision that has been specifically designed to meet the needs of fathers, although there are cases of fathers who have received useful individual support. The warm welcoming environment provided by the centre ensures that families feel comfortable when using the centre. The centre is particularly successful at helping families in times of crisis. Case studies show how the centre has successfully supported parents and carers through challenging times. The close working relationship with the family outreach worker based at the neighbouring primary school promotes continuity of care for families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leaders and managers and those who are responsible for governance are increasingly ambitious for the centre and are determined to implement improvements swiftly and to develop more effective support for users and their families. They are supported by a committed team which is delivering a satisfactory but quickly improving service to local families. Those who are responsible for leading and managing the centre have a clear picture of its strengths and weaknesses. There is an increasing awareness of target groups and the factors influencing outcomes. Links are made between the centre's evaluation of its services and priorities on the centre's development plan, but the targets for improvement are not always specific enough. The recent comprehensive review of commissioning arrangements has resulted in improvements in the quality of provision. There is increased focus on making sure that provision has a significant positive impact on outcomes for users and, as a result, the centre provides satisfactory value for money. Key partners have been thoroughly involved in this review and many are represented on the Charnwood

locality partnership board. A closer eye is now kept on the quality of services delivered by the commissioned partners but targets for these commissioned partners are sometimes quite broad. Accountability is being strengthened through some key appointments, including that of the senior family outreach worker. The local authority is now considering how to develop regular discussions that provide challenge to those who are responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre but has not yet implemented an annual conversation.

Although the reliability of data and the thoroughness of record keeping have improved, the centre still does not know exactly where all its potential users are based. Nevertheless, inclusion is central to the work of the centre. Although relatively few families in the area are from minority ethnic heritages, many of them access the centre regularly. However, the centre is aware that it does not do enough to engage families from Traveller heritages.

Effective procedures within the centre and with partner agencies ensure that all staff and volunteers are checked for their suitability to work with young children, in line with government requirements. Careful record keeping ensures that these checks are kept up to date. There is regular staff training and staff know what to do if there is a safeguarding issue.

Some important partnerships, such as those with the health visitors and the speech therapy service, are making a significant difference to children's well-being, but other partnerships are less well developed. Although the partnership with the neighbouring primary school is strong and is making a good contribution to outcomes for families in the immediate locality, the children's centre's links with the other primary schools and pre-schools in the reach area are tenuous. Not only is there a missed opportunity to recruit users from a wider area, but the children's centre is also making a limited contribution to raising levels of achievement in these schools. In addition, the lack of awareness of the detail of Early Years Foundation Stage data makes it difficult for the centre to target its resources as effectively as it might. Families who use the centre are pleased with what it provides. The centre does listen to the views of parents, and they contribute to the evaluation of activities. Although there is a parents' forum, consisting of parents from Mountsorrel children's centre and parents and lay members of the local community are not represented on the Charnwood locality partnership board or the other sub groups which contribute towards that board.

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	3

groups	
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	3
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

Christ Church and St Peter's School was inspected at the same time as the children's centre. The provision in Early Years Foundation Stage in the school was found to be satisfactory.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Mountsorrel Sure Start Children's Centre on 1–2 May 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for talking to us about your children's centre. Your views were very helpful. It is clear that you are pleased with what the centre has to offer. This is because the children's centre is providing a satisfactory range of services that are helping local families to improve the quality of their lives. The centre has improved because leadership and management have become more effective.

A recent review of services has helped to ensure that there is a stronger focus on children's learning and improving outcomes for families in the most need of support. Outcomes for health, safety, achievement and economic well-being are satisfactory. The partnership with health visitors has been particularly successful and has helped many mothers to breastfeed their babies successfully. New mothers said that they find the help from peer supporters to be particularly valuable because they know that the volunteers have been through similar experiences to themselves. You also told us that volunteers who support you via Home-Start have been very helpful, and that this initiative has developed your confidence in your parenting skills. 'Speak-a-

boo' sessions focus clearly on the negative impact of television viewing on children's ability to listen and to speak. Other services that you appreciate and that are having a good impact on outcomes for your children's development are 'Chatterboxes' and 'Chatterbabies'. We were particularly impressed with the lovely scrapbooks that you have created with the help of staff. These delightful books are helping you to understand how your babies learn.

The centre is also providing you with important support at times of crisis and its partners are helping you to manage your money, cope with debt and resolve housing issues. There are some opportunities for you to improve your qualifications, but most courses focus on improving your confidence. The centre is aware that there are Travellers within the reach area but has not yet fully considered how best it can support these families. The centre has focused the majority of its services in Mountsorrel and has not yet given enough consideration to the needs of those of you who live in outlying villages or more rural areas. Although it has started to gather the views of parents of disabled children and those with special educational needs, the centre is not yet doing enough to meet their specific needs. Workers in the centre have helped fathers who have individual problems, but the centre is still not doing enough to help fathers to provide emotional and educational support for their children

The local authority has recently changed the staffing structure in the centre and provided a senior family outreach worker. The closer links between family outreach workers and a particular children's centre are helping to promote better continuity of care. Although the centre has a very good working relationship with the primary school next door, it has little contact with other primary schools in the area, and links with private and voluntary providers of pre-school education are underdeveloped. The centre does not have enough information about the achievement of young children in different villages and, therefore, is not always able to target its services as effectively as it might.

Although management has been strengthened, the local authority has not yet implemented the government's system of annual checks that are designed to support and challenge local managers. Systems to collect data are much improved and the commissioning of services is now linked more closely to the needs of the neighbourhood. However, some of the targets for these services are still quite broad. Additionally, much of the data is very new and it is still difficult to judge the full impact that the centre has within the community.

The centre responds to the views which you express during informal discussions and through more formal feedback about the quality of activities. However, your involvement and that of other members of the local community in shaping the services offered by the centre is limited because you are not represented on the Charnwood partnership board or on the full range of committees that report to this board.

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

