

Inspection report for The Windmill Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	383840
Inspection dates	23–24 May 2012
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Centre leader	Tracy Seymour
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	New Bradwell 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 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, other staff, early years practitioners, health, social services, family support and outreach workers, advisory board members, local authority representatives and parents. They also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This phase two centre was designated in February 2008, opened in 2009 and fulfils the full core purpose of services. The centre shares a site with New Bradwell School and is open Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 4.30pm and Friday 8.00am to 4.00pm for 48 weeks per year.

The centre's reach area comprises six lower super output areas with one reflecting the 20% most disadvantaged in Milton Keynes and the others with 30% to 60% most disadvantaged. Data show significant proportions of all target groups living in the reach area. For example, 25% of children live in workless households, 15% of families receive the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit and 20% of children from birth to four years of age live with a lone parent. The majority of families living within the reach area are of White British or White other heritage, with 39% predominantly from Asian backgrounds. A high proportion of families are learning to speak English as an additional language; most speak Punjabi or Urdu at home. Following the inclusion of the Wolverton locality a year ago, there are now 927 children living in the reach area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when the children enter early years provision are generally well below the level expected for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy.

The day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the centre coordinator and the team employed by Milton Keynes Council. The centre's work is overseen by an advisory board comprising representative partners and parents. The local authority is the accountable body.

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

The centre makes good provision for the majority of children and families living in its area and outcomes are good. The level of care, guidance and support is outstanding which, coupled with highly effective safeguarding procedures, ensures that children and families are exceptionally well safeguarded. The proportion of children in direct contact with the centre is increasing significantly due to the coordinator's expert leadership which motivates all staff to strive for improvement. The well-focused targeting of services and extended outreach work, particularly in the locality which joined the reach area a year ago, are enabling increasingly good access for those most in need of support. One parent's view sums up many. 'I feel so much more confident about my parenting skills since I dropped in the centre and asked for support.'

Partnerships with a range of services, including health, enable prompt intervention that helps families to live healthier lives, keep safe, build positive relationships, prepare well for the next stage of their lives and achieve positive outcomes. Excellent partnerships with education providers are successfully enabling young children who have attended the centre to make good, and sometimes exceptional, progress during the Early Years Foundation Stage. Highly effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) promotes strongly the well-being of the most vulnerable. The high number of children subject to a child protection plan benefit from the centre's rigorous monitoring and well-timed actions. The close attention paid to meeting specific needs improves their personal safety and leads to uninterrupted learning and development.

The centre's work to support families from different cultural backgrounds, such as

English as a second language courses, has positive impact on building life-long learning skills. There is good take up and sustained participation in parenting courses which raise both confidence and self-esteem. Some adults benefit from work experience through the well-established volunteering programme, with a small number going on to accredited courses and finding paid work. The centre works effectively to support those who have fallen into debt, including up-to-date benefits advice. However, insufficient evaluation of the needs of families from workless homes means that this group is not as involved, or as well served by the centre, as are other target groups.

The centre has a strong commitment to promoting equality and diversity, for example in supporting Asian, Eastern European and French communities with translation of literature into their mother tongues. Survey feedback and inspectors' interviews with parents show that they feel that their views are fully taken on board, and highly value the warm welcome they are given and the centre's inclusive ethos.

There is good capacity for sustained improvement because the centre has already secured good outcomes for the majority of families and there is a very clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development. A sensible number of priorities and challenging targets are in place to support next steps improvement. The advisory board actively supports the centre, but has yet to look critically at its performance. There are no parents from Wolverton, representing the newly-integrated community, involved directly in the centre's decision making.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Undertake finer needs analysis of parents from workless homes, extend provision to meet assessed needs and make closer checks on the impact of services that enhance their achievement, help them get back to work and secure their future economic well-being.
- Develop the work of the advisory board in looking critically at the centre's performance and increase the representation of parents from the ethnically diverse community the centre now serves.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre works effectively to assist families in being healthy, for example through running Get Cooking courses and making sure that healthy snacks are available daily for children. As a result, health outcomes are improving with child obesity rates at 8% and lower than elsewhere in the borough. Anti-smoking work is proving successful with 56% ceasing at the end of their course. In good partnership with health visitors, the centre supports new mothers who want to breastfeed their babies and, at 66%, the level of sustained breastfeeding is above the local average.

Through drop-ins the centre has worked effectively to improve the oral hygiene of a high number of centre users, with many achieving the Smile Award. Well-forged links with mental health services support the good outcomes for families with specific needs, such as children with disabilities. As a result, a large majority of families feel they have much healthier lifestyles due to accessing the centre.

Families using the centre who are experiencing difficulties in their lives are unanimous in their views that centre staff provide the support they need to help them get through. Many develop a high-level awareness about dangers and how to keep safe. For example, all centre users are offered free home smoke alarms and safety checks and take up is high. This support, together with other advice such as road safety awareness and first aid training, assists families in being alert to potential dangers. Road traffic accidents have fallen to zero in the area and emergency hospital admissions are below the rest of the borough.

Highly effective use of the CAF process promotes strongly the very good well-being of the most vulnerable. The well-being of young children, including those subject to a child protection plan, shows highly effective impact from well-targeted, multi-agency interventions. Families whose circumstances make them very vulnerable are helped to build positive behaviours and nurturing family relationships through programmes where they learn a range of parenting skills. Feedback from activities informs the centre's plans, for example in requesting crèche facilities. Parents' involvement in helping to shape services is growing through their membership of the advisory board; however, no parents from the recently-extended reach area are represented and as such their voice in decision making is not as strong as those from the original locality.

Children who attend the centre enjoy activities and achieve very successfully because of the very well planned sessions and this assists their next step into education. The centre's tracking of their progress over time shows good, and sometimes exceptional, progress from their low starting points. At 56%, the proportion of children in the reach area attaining 78+ points at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including six points in communication, language and literacy and personal social development, is above local and national averages. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is below average and reducing more quickly than seen nationally.

The centre has helped a large number of adults most in need of intervention to develop their confidence and self-esteem, for example through basic skills updates and English as a second language courses. Signposting to training for adults is clear and steps have been taken to increase employability, for example through the emerging work with the Neighbourhood Employment Project (NEP) and through the well-established volunteer programme which has enabled some to secure paid work. Family Learning sessions have contributed well to ensuring successful outcomes for families across all target groups, although those from workless homes are not participating as well as others.

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	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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Assessment is used well to inform the planning of good-quality services that meet the needs of families well and support good and improving outcomes. Regular meetings between service partners enable the sharing of information to inform the integration of service delivery and make sure that knowledge about the community is up to date. Unemployment in the area is increasing; centre staff have undertaken training to build expertise about benefits and have secured the services of NEP to support job readiness.

Parents identify how valuable the services are in helping them through times of acute crisis. For example, a mother with very young children identified how well the centre had supported her through Time for You sessions which remove feelings of isolation and help her learn new skills, such as sewing. Health professionals' support for baby resuscitation, techniques to deal with choking, and safe evacuation procedures are identified as being very valuable by new parents. The 'team around the child' work to keep children, included looked after children, safe is highly effective in keeping them very securely protected.

Skilfully-planned activities make a positive difference to the learning and development of families, including those in most need, who are experiencing complex problems. The collaborative work involving parents making 'story sacks' has significant impact on communication and language development as children and adults enjoy telling and listening to stories together as well as fostering stronger family bonds. Increasing outreach work, and bespoke services, such as the under fives group held in the Wolverton area, are enabling good access and increasing participation of all target groups, in particular families from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Personal development and achievement are celebrated well; for example, everyone gave a 'high five' when a mum shared her good news that her child had uninterrupted sleep for four nights in a row. A 'celebration tree' is a focal point in the centre and shows how families are building on their achievements.

Excellent quality care, guidance and support help families from different backgrounds that use the centre to develop positive self-esteem, increase personal skills and improve family relationships. Observations show children behaving exceptionally well and replicating the excellent role models set by the staff in their consideration for others. Very high quality support for young parents, for example, through baby massage, helps them build stronger attachment and grow in confidence as parents. Clear signposting and very good quality information about sexual health, drugs misuse and mental health problems assist families in knowing how and where to access services and they feel much better equipped to deal with problems as a result.

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

Leadership, management and governance at all levels are good. The day-to-day management of the centre is excellent and there is a very strong team ethos amongst all those involved with the centre, strongly focused on improving outcomes and widening access to services, especially for the most vulnerable.

The centre coordinator sets very high expectations and has prioritised the right number of challenging targets which are on display in the centre for all to aspire to and help meet. This focus on targeting interventions more precisely is proving successful in widening access to those most in need and making a clear and measurable difference to the lives of families across target groups. Accurate self-evaluation, coupled with rigorous tracking, is assisting the centre in building for even better effectiveness, although there is recognition that a deeper drilling down into performance data by the advisory body would aid accountability.

The centre's high-quality environment reflects the high aspirations of staff. Displays celebrate users' achievements and provide helpful and informative details about the range of services on offer and how to access them. Resources are well managed and the impact on outcomes for families is good. For example, children who are reluctant

to talk are helped to build confident speech by using the microphone and tape recorder. Well-directed expenditure has created a good quality resource in a very old building at Wolverton, where the imaginative use of space is enabling increasing access to services and securing good value for money.

Equality and inclusion are central to the centre's work and there is zero tolerance of any form of discrimination. Creative ways to break down barriers have met with success, such as the winter celebration party which is organised annually with everyone invited to bring a traditional dish from their country. Through its active promotion of multicultural diversity, such as the link with a school in Ghana, families feel included and their cultural uniqueness valued.

High-quality safeguarding arrangements, including rigorous child protection arrangements and multi-agency cooperation, ensure that families, including those with children with special needs or disabilities, are exceptionally well protected. The protocols for making referrals, together with joined up working, provide a very secure safety net of support. Health and safety matters are closely supervised and supported by robust risk assessments. The systems for staff vetting and recruitment fully meet requirements.

The centre's strong partnerships are central to the positive engagement of families and result in the good and improving outcomes. The coordinator's proactive approach in extending tailor-made solutions to specific needs is resulting in rising numbers of the most vulnerable using the centre. However, leaders recognise that more formal links between families from the extended reach area with the advisory board would enable their greater involvement in shaping and evaluating services.

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	1
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 integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2

<p>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</p>	<p>2</p>
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Findings from the concurrent New Bradwell School inspection in relation to attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage and partnerships were taken into consideration.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Windmill Sure Start Children’s Centre on 23 and 24 May 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. Some aspects of the centre are outstanding.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre’s work and looked at a range of documents.

Thank you for your contribution to the inspection. We found that the centre makes good provision for all the families who use it and this makes a positive difference to your lives. You told us that when you join in the activities at the centre, the coordinator and her staff make everyone feel valued and that ‘the centre is a warm, welcoming and friendly place to be’. We agree that these features help the centre meet the diverse needs of families, including those with special needs and particularly in times of crisis. The centre’s work helps you achieve good outcomes across the board; its work in helping you keep safe is outstanding and results in you being exceptionally well looked after.

The centre and its partners are doing really well in helping young learners enjoy achieving and be well prepared for starting school. The adult courses on offer also make a tangible difference to your lives, such as the parenting courses which raise your confidence as parents and English as a second language courses which assist adults in building their communication skills. It was great to chat about how your experience as volunteers in the centre has raised your sense of achievement and set out a clear training pathway that you are really enjoying. We have asked the centre to look more closely at how best to help those of you who are aiming to get back into work to do so.

You told us that you put forward your views through chats with staff, using the questions box or by completing activity feedback forms, and some of you are part of the advisory board. However, there are no parents from Wolverton on the advisory board and we have asked the centre to see if anyone would like to be and to make this happen.

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