

Inspection report for Chesterton Children's Centre

Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	383891
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2012
Reporting inspector	Michael Miller

Centre leader	Joanne Maxwell
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Shirley Community Nursery and Primary School (110663)
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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre manager, other centre staff and the headteacher of the linked primary school. They spoke with a number of individual parents and representatives of the parents' forum. Discussions were held with representatives from the local authority, the centre's advisory board, a wide range of partner organisations, and health and educational bodies who provide services for the centre's families. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Chesterton Children's Centre was designated as a phase two centre in December 2007. Prior to this, it was part of the local authority's Sure Start Local Programme. The plan to fulfil its full core purpose started in December 2009. The centre moved to its current, purpose-built accommodation in August 2011. It shares its site with Shirley Community Nursery and Primary School, which moved to the new site in September 2011. The centre provides office accommodation, a meeting room and one activity room. It is used as an information point for families and professionals, as a meeting space and a facility to run play and drop-in sessions. The centre's manager is answerable to the local authority. She took over the running of the centre in October 2011, and also manages its two partner centres: the North Cambridge Children's Centre, a phase one centre which was inspected in February 2012, and the Arbury Children's Centre, a phase three centre. An advisory board provides advice and guidance and oversees the work of the centre. There is a parents' forum which provides support for the running of the centre and its activities.

The centre serves just under 1100 children and their families living in the East and West Chesterton wards of the local authority. Much of its reach area, especially in East Chesterton, includes localities which are in the 25% most deprived areas in the

country. In contrast, West Chesterton is one of the most affluent areas of the City of Cambridge. The East Chesterton ward has high numbers of children living in workless households; the proportion of families in receipt of benefits, or subject to financial hardship, is above average. An increasing proportion of the population includes single parent families, with young children, who have limited social networks and experience isolation; at times, this is compounded by language barriers.

Many of the centre's families face health, education skills, training and living environment deprivation. The proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities are generally well below those expected for their age when they enter the early years provision. Most of the families in the centre's area are White British, but there are growing proportions of the population from minority ethnic groups, particularly families of Eastern European heritage. The centre's reach area includes a point of contact for a substantial Traveller community; 20% of the children at the linked school, with which the centre shares its accommodation, are from this community.

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

This is a satisfactory centre. In recent times, it has faced some significant challenges but the move to its new accommodation has opened up exciting possibilities for its work and development. In the months prior to the move in 2011, registrations had fallen; these have now started to rise again and the centre is reaching over 40% of the children under the age of five, and their families. The centre's workforce has been subject to reorganisation due to the disbanding of the authority's home visiting teams and the establishment of new family worker teams. Health and midwifery services have been centralised at a local medical practice. The clustering of the three linked centres, under a common management structure, is leading to a more flexible working approach. Staff at Chesterton are adapting practically to these changes. They are mutually supportive; their personal and professional skills and qualities are helping them grow as a team. One parent reflected typical users' responses when saying, 'I don't think the staff could be more helpful. They go out of their way to support us and our children.'

In many ways, the centre became a new entity from Summer 2011. Time has been short in which to build a track record of success; its capacity for improvement is still developing and is satisfactory at present. This is reflected in its self-assessment both of its effectiveness and the other key elements of its work. However, the quality of the centre's manager and staff are recognised by both its families and the local authority. Staff show a resilience and tenacity in the face of difficulties. Strong leadership is focused securely on raising standards and ensuring consistency across the cluster. Discussions are underway to improve the effectiveness of the three advisory boards by amalgamating these to reflect the new management structure. An active parents' forum plays an important role in the centre's practical work. However, its function in shaping the centre's strategic direction is underdeveloped.

The biggest challenge for the centre is in reaching out to its Traveller community. Strong links are being built with the primary school staff to achieve this. However, there is no convenient outreach base for the main Traveller site. This limits the effective use of staff time and resources in supporting Traveller families, and the increasing numbers of Eastern European heritage and Romany families living on the site. The good contact between centre and school staff is proving especially important. Joint work, aimed at closing the attainment and development gap for the lowest achieving children, is proving successful.

The centre is showing improving success with other minority groups, particularly with Asian heritage families who benefit well from the English courses for speakers of other languages. The centre is focused effectively on meeting the needs of children and family members who may be disabled or have special educational needs. Staff are ambitious to extend their work for such users; there are plans in place to develop the centre as a local area 'hub' for such families to help spread the centre's reach.

Since midwifery services were centralised at the nearby health centre, information regarding new and expectant parents has not been so easily obtained. Consequently, the centre does not always know about new mothers and their partners until it receives data about live births. This has meant the centre has not always been able to play its part in supporting actively such initiatives as ante-natal preparation for breastfeeding and encouraging smoking cessation.

In recent months, the local authority has made some important progress in developing the provision of key data to its centres. Managers are now placed better to assess the impact of their centre's work. A revised 'data toolkit' is close to completion and is due to be made available very shortly. However, the work on this has highlighted that the data provided needs to be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure all centres have access to not only the very latest reach area data but also the related national information against which their effectiveness is compared. Some elements of this remain a work in progress.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Augment the approaches established with partner children's centres and support agencies, to enable the more effective targeting of some groups, by:
 - strengthening the complementary work being undertaken by the centre and its linked primary school to reach the Travelling community
 - intensifying the centre's work to reach minority ethnic groups through the links being developed with community leaders and education partners
 - building on the resources and expertise being acquired to meet further the needs of disabled users and those with special educational needs.

- Build on the improving data being provided by the local authority to the centre manager, and enhance the impact of the work done with families, by:
 - ensuring that the improved data toolkit, currently being produced, is made available to the centre, as planned
 - ensuring that the data provided is reviewed and updated regularly to ensure access to the very latest reach area and national information
 - working with the health services to ensure enhanced information is made available to centres, particularly concerning new and expectant families.

- Enhance the centre's leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the advisory boards of the three centres, which are under the leadership of the centre's manager, complete their discussions on a proposed merger and plans to increase their strategic effectiveness
 - working with the parents' forum to enable the views of users to be reflected increasingly effectively in the shaping of the centre's direction.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre does not provide day care itself but signposts to a number of local settings; these have proved to be at least satisfactory when inspected, with the majority being good. Crèche provision at the centre has proved valuable in enabling parents to have access to their own training courses. Parenting courses have been particularly successful; parents say how these have helped them to build positive and close relationships with their children. One parent commented, 'There is a very supportive atmosphere. I found talking with staff very helpful.' A group for young babies and their parents is attended well, and evinces comments such as 'Tiny Feet is always a highlight of our week.' Such sessions prove important vehicles for promoting home safety, first aid advice and healthy lifestyles. Users say that the sessions on 'cooking on a budget' are most beneficial. Such activities have helped reduce significantly local childhood obesity rates.

The centre is working to ensure that its users become more involved in shaping its direction. While satisfactory, a key aspect for development involves improving outcomes for the local Travelling community. A visit to the main sites, centre records and case studies show that the family workers listen carefully to this community's needs. They act successfully and supportively where they can. Staff show an open approach to understanding the often very different cultural needs of the community.

However, where the importance of establishing trust is paramount, the lack of an outreach base for the Travelling community restricts regular staff contact and availability. Working with community leaders is seen as vital in resolving this.

The centre is increasingly successful in signposting users to literacy, work-related, educational and life-skills courses. A range of such courses is run weekly by an education partner which also supports minority ethnic communities. Young parents are catered for well through local authority commissioned services. These have meant that nearly 90% of mothers in the area who are under 25 years of age are being supported regularly. There are high success rates in helping young parents, both mothers and fathers, back into employment and training. Parenting courses for fathers and play sessions with their children have proved a successful part of the centre's work. Such activities have also been extended to grandparents who find themselves as carers; these have proved invaluable for those participating.

Families most at risk, including those from target groups, confirm they feel well-supported by the centre staff, particularly at times of their greatest need. Users say they feel relaxed and safe while at the centre because of the good care and attention the staff pay to their welfare; this encourages their children to behave and interact well with their peers and other adults. Case studies, including those relating to child protection, show the centre is prompt to take action, and successful in the support of its more vulnerable children and families. Their needs are assessed properly through the Common Assessment Framework process. Families benefit well from the coordinated support they receive when they require multi-agency assistance.

The centre encourages a sound focus on children's speech, language and communication development. Case studies support the good impact of work with the centre's visiting speech and language therapist. Parents show their appreciation of the sleep clinic, where they can discuss their children's problems and share their experiences with others. This gives families confidence and helps to improve their emotional health at crucial times in their children's development. Centre staff are good at raising users' self-confidence and esteem. As one wrote on a course evaluation, 'I had been worried about coming because I lack confidence, but was made to feel comfortable and soon made friends.'

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	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	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups,	3

contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	
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

There is a universal approach to the provision of the centre's services. It welcomes all who come through its doors, and provides a good range of activities which meet well most users' needs. However, limited outreach facilities and resources mean staff are restricted in the impact of their work with the area's sizeable Travelling community. Otherwise, centre data show it is building registrations equally well from across its reach area. This is ensuring a representative cross-section of heritage groups from its communities, and this is proving good for community cohesion.

The crèche playroom and its outside area are equipped well and offer a safe and secure environment for children. Crèche staff are starting to embed the use of 'learning journeys' as a way of recording and assessing children's progress and development. They are involving parents increasingly successfully in contributing to these. Effective partnership links have been built with childminders in the area. Joint approaches are supporting parents' ability to contribute to their children's learning and development, particularly in encouraging talk with young children to build their language skills. The family workers speak a good range of languages, particularly Eastern European tongues; this proves of valuable assistance for users.

The good care and guidance provided for families is illustrated through the work of the breastfeeding support group; 'drop-in' sessions are particularly effective. The large majority of mothers attending the centre sustain breastfeeding. This is due not least to the expertise of health workers, an experienced volunteer midwife and other mothers who together help create a calm and encouraging atmosphere. They are effective in involving fathers, ensuring a family's receptiveness to their baby's well-being is paramount. The monthly 'clothing swap', initiated by the centre but run by parents, is a valuable resource for families; it also provides an introduction to the centre's activities resulting in increased registrations. The centre signposts to Jobcentre support, but staff also provide good support through their own expertise. As one parent said, 'I found the family workers' advice on my personal career development very useful.' Adults and children are consistent when they say they enjoy learning at the centre and are improving their personal skills and understanding.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The local authority has undertaken a significant amount of recent work to improve both the scope and quality of the data it provides to its centre managers. New systems are being introduced, but there remain some elements which are not yet fully effective. This includes the ability of centre managers to access registration and hard-to-reach group data at the touch of a button. This is said to be imminent, but not yet in place. The centre has been operating in its new premises for less than a year, and the staff are still developing their work as a team, but the centre is providing satisfactory value for money.

There are some important emerging strengths. The centre has been building good partnerships, for the mutual support of its work. Firm foundations are being established for the benefit of all families. The framework for multi-agency support is secure. Self-evaluation is reflective, and has resulted in practical planning for the centre's future development. Key focus groups have been identified, such as those for Travellers and families with members who may be disabled or have special educational needs. Plans to extend the centre's services for such groups are in hand, but at a relatively early stage of implementation. Consequently, the centre's very clear commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity for all has yet to result in sufficiently sustained improvement for the Travelling community in particular.

The good safeguarding arrangements stem from an approach which is understood well and practised by all staff. All necessary checks are undertaken regarding the suitability of staff and adult volunteers to work with families. Child protection, health and safety and risk assessments systems and approaches are established firmly and operate efficiently. The importance of early intervention is prioritised.

Governance is satisfactory overall. Systems for accountability are embedded, both within the centre and through the local authority. The centre manager is working with her advisory boards on the implementation of a streamlined approach to the management and governance of her cluster of children's centres. Work is in hand to extend the influence of the parents' forum on the centre's future development.

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
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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 groups	3
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	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	3

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

The findings of the inspection of the Shirley Community Nursery and Primary School in November 2010, when it was judged to be good, were also used to guide the inspection team's findings with regard to educational provision and outcomes for pre-school children.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Chesterton Children's Centre on 4–5 July 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. We would like to thank you for allowing us to join with you during some of your sessions and for sparing the time to talk with us about the centre and its activities. The discussions we had with you about your experiences, and those of your children and families, were most helpful.

Chesterton is a centre which is taking good advantage of the improved facilities it now has as a result of its move to its new building. The management of the centre has also seen some changes over the past year. Your new centre manager and her staff, with your help, are seeking constantly to bring new ideas and approaches to build on the centre's developing work. We found that the staff of the centre have particularly good links with other service providers and share a clear determination to meet the needs of all the families in your area. This stems from the good work of the

centre's manager, supported by the local authority and the locality manager, and through good partnerships with other providers.

As you may know, your centre manager also leads the work at the North Cambridge and Arbury children's centres. She is working hard to extend the services all three centres can offer, and take advantage of the expertise and teamwork of the staff. The advisory boards of the centres are looking to combine their work to help their monitoring and support for the centres, and to help them become more efficient. You have an active parents' forum, and your centre manager is now looking to encourage you to take more of a role in shaping the centre's future. These are exciting times, and we do hope you take full advantage of the developing opportunities.

In the last few months, the numbers of you registering and using the centre has been increasing. We have discussed, with your centre manager and the local authority, their plans to expand their services now that the staff have had time to settle into their new roles and accommodation. These relate particularly to the centre's work with those of you from minority heritage groups, particularly the Travelling community, and families who have members who may be disabled or have special educational needs. We are encouraging the centre and authority to follow through these ideas. In the past few months, the local authority has improved the range and quality of data it provides to centre managers to enable them to both evaluate and target their work and services on your behalf. We have discussed this with people from the local authority and asked them to continue to make sure that the centre has the information it needs, and in ways which are increasingly helpful and easy to use.

There are a number of positive things about your centre. You told us about how your experiences here have helped lift your confidence, particularly by developing your parenting skills. This has clearly enabled many of you to engage more happily with your children, keep them healthy and safe, and help them learn and develop more effectively when they start school. You told us you feel safe at the centre, and that its work with you helps you to take better care of your children in your homes. We saw for ourselves how the centre's effective collaboration with health and local authority staff, for example when implementing the Common Assessment Framework processes, is keeping children safe and providing timely support for families in need. The staff pay good attention to your welfare.

We thank you again for all your contributions to the inspection and hope that, in the months and years ahead, even more families from the communities in your local area will be able to join you and benefit from the centre's growing services and activities.

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