

Inspection report for Milton Court Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	384015
Inspection dates	25–26 July 2012
Reporting inspector	Janet Sinclair

Centre leader	Becca Spencer
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Brewery Road Milton Regis Sittingbourne Kent ME10 2EE
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Linked school if applicable	Milton Court Primary School URN 118352
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Rising Stars EY 432010

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.

Report published: August 2012



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 centre management team, the local authority, health professionals, representatives from the advisory and steering groups, frontline staff, parents and partner agencies.

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

Information about the centre

Milton Court was designated in 2006 and is a purpose built phase one children's centre. There are 923 children under five years of age living in the reach area. The centre is on the same site as Milton Court Primary School. It incorporates a 26-place daycare nursery and the school's own nursery. The centre shares an advisory board with Swale Children's Centre, but has its own steering group. There is a small staff team led by a team manager who is the network manager for Milton Court and Murston Children's Centres. Additionally, there are two receptionists, a community involvement worker, an administrator, a qualified teacher, an early years practitioner and a crèche apprentice. There are a number of health professionals, such as midwives and community nurses, who use the centre. The centre's reach area is the Kemsley/Milton Regis ward of Sittingbourne. It includes large areas of social housing, some of which are new build. Milton Regis is the second and Kemsley the third most deprived wards in the area. The area is in the 20% most deprived areas in Kent for low education, skills and training. There are 19.8% of children living in workless households and 17.7% of families in receipt of Working Tax Credit. The population is mainly White British with a very small proportion of families from other minority ethnic groups.

Children's abilities, knowledge and skills are often below the level expected for their age on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision.

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

Milton Court Children’s Centre is a good centre where all staff work hard to ensure they meet the needs of all target groups in the community they serve. The high levels of commitment, support and encouragement shown by all staff ensure the life chances of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families are greatly improved.

Provision is good. The work of the community involvement worker is very successful in engaging families most in need of help and support. This is done by forming trusting relationships with them and ensuring these families get the assistance and guidance they need. Parents are very positive about the help they receive with comments such as, ‘The staff helped me a great deal when I had postnatal depression.’ Group sessions, such as Play and Sing and Little and Loud, that are run by a qualified teacher or an Early Years Practitioner ensure stimulating and engaging activities for children and effective modelling for parents. Strong partnerships play an important part in the effectiveness of the centre. Relationships are well established and support the identification of concerns and careful referrals that ensure well-focused interventions and early preventative work. This ensures good outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Parents are very happy with the centre as their evaluations of a range of services show. Comments such as, ‘It has helped with my child’s social skills,’ and, ‘The course helped my parenting skills,’ are testament to this. Families with children who are disabled or have special educational needs are well supported both by staff in the centre and through partnership work. The carefully-planned and well-organised provision by staff in the centre, and their ability to signpost families to all services available, make a good contribution to improving the knowledge, skills and enjoyment of families.

The thorough and conscientious work of the qualified teacher ensures good outcomes for children. There is an upward trend in children’s achievement, often from very different starting points, so that the gap is closing between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest. The centre gives a high priority to ensuring good care of the families who use it and to providing a safe environment. Robust procedures and safety talks and events within the centre ensure parents become safety aware. The

work of the community chef gives children and parents opportunities to make and eat healthy food. Good partnerships and effective multi-agency work, for example with health services such as the baby clinic and the Young Active Parents group, ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families get the help and support that they need. The centre provides information and guidance for families seeking employment, that is helping some to find employment but it is not yet a designated service that parents can access easily and this limits its effectiveness.

Effective leadership of the centre ensures good provision and good outcomes. The well-organised team of staff is committed to providing the best possible service to the families in the centre's reach area. Self-evaluation is accurate; the centre has a clear action plan, good-quality staff in place, with a strong commitment to continuing improvement and a good track record. This demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement. The centre's action plan, based on an analysis of its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the families it serves, is clearly directed at areas needing further improvement. However, it does not consistently identify the expected outcomes that can be measured effectively. Although, the local authority provides the centre with data that is becoming more focused on the families in the reach area, it is not always specific enough to enable the centre to measure the impact of its services accurately. Parents are encouraged to contribute ideas and evaluate the success of the various activities and courses that the centre provides, they are not so strongly involved in the Partnership Group where decisions are made. This advisory board is well led and chaired; however, leaders recognise the need for more focused evaluation of their effectiveness to improve provision further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the level of support for families seeking employment to further improve their economic well-being.
- Extend the involvement of families in the centre's formal decision-making process.
- Ensure that plans for improvement clearly state expected outcomes so that they can be measured accurately using the full range of data available.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Case studies, discussions with families and evidence from regular evaluations by parents show that there is a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by the children's centre. Many comments identify the effective support families receive when they are lonely, new to the area or in times of high anxiety. They are very positive about how this improves their self-esteem as well as reducing their levels of anxiety and improving their relationships with their children. Parenting courses run by the centre give parents greater confidence in their ability to manage their children in a positive manner. They appreciate the opportunity to meet with other parents in a place where their children can enjoy a range of activities and they can learn new

skills, for example the cooking sessions with the community chef. These sessions are very successful, as comments such as these testify. 'It made me more aware of how to prepare healthy food for my children and my family,' and, 'The children are choosing to eat more healthy snacks now.' Fathers also feel very welcome and one who comes every day appreciates the way the centre responds to his son's needs so that 'he loves coming'. Children behave extremely well in the centre, engage happily in the wide range of well-planned activities on offer and learn to share and develop independence. All children know to wash their hands before eating and enjoy a healthy snack of wholemeal bread and fruit. The centre helps parents to enhance their employability through, for example, accredited courses and lists of relevant jobs advertised at the job centre, but this is not yet a strong aspect of the centre's provision.

Children are making increasingly good progress The proportion of children reaching the expected level for their age by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is rising from a low of 37% in 2009 to 58% in 2011, which was very close to the national expectations of 59%. There is also a significant narrowing of the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest, from 35.2% in 2009 to 23% in 2011, which is well below the national average of 31.4%. Very effective work by teaching staff, and close links with the attached day nursery which also provides 'Free for 2 year olds' (a scheme to provide free places for the most vulnerable children), support this well. Parents and children are made aware of safety within the centre. For example, children know not to throw sand as it could go in someone's eye and parents attend first-aid training to improve their safety awareness. Case studies show that effective multi-agency work and a clear understanding of the Common Assessment Framework are helping to keep children and their families safe, including those subject to a child protection plan.

New mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies say that the good support they get helps them to persevere through the initial difficulties. They enjoy the Bumps to Boobs weekly meetings that help with this. Breastfeeding rates are rising and obesity rates are lowering, but are not yet in line with local averages. Children's physical development is good and is helped by the weekly Little and Loud sessions that focus on improving this through dance and action rhymes.

Families who attend the centre have strong and positive relationships with all the staff that helps to promote their well-being and raise self-esteem. These help them to be confident to share their views and attend training courses, such as positive parenting, and becoming breastfeeding volunteers. Parents do not as yet have a strong voice in making important decisions about the centre's planning for the future.

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	2

concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	
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

The centre works hard to meet the needs of the families who use it and plans well to ensure it is successful. Strong partnership work ensures that health visitors pass on information about births in the reach area so that the centre can make contact with parents and encourage them to attend its activities. All services work cooperatively to ensure that any families with particular needs and across target groups receive the additional focused support that they need through higher levels of intervention or referral. Regular inter-agency meetings ensure the interventions provided and the impact on families is carefully monitored. There are effective procedures for developing the 'team around the family', including child protection plans where necessary. The effective work of the community involvement worker, who links successfully with outreach services, ensures good support for less urgent cases. There is good provision for target groups, for example young parents, through weekly groups.

There is much provided by the centre to promote purposeful learning, such as the excellent Play and Sing sessions, trips for families and events such as the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Fete. Good emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of target groups. For example, participants in the young parents group who meets weekly at the centre say going to the group has helped make them to be more playful with their children. Staff are very effective in promoting good parenting skills, modelling good interactions, demonstrating a range of activities that engage children and in providing ongoing advice and support. Although there are limitations with some of the buildings, with the main children's activity room being upstairs, the centre ensures it works with families of children with disabilities and special educational needs to enable them to have full access to services and groups with their children, including the well-used sensory room.

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

The centre is well led and managed by the centre leader, who is very well supported by a strong staff team and a supportive, and increasingly challenging, advisory board. These are the key factors in the centre's good capacity for further improvement. The very calm purposeful environment that is created and the clear focus on supporting all families, including target groups and those with specific needs, ensure good outcomes for all. The advisory group provides effective governance by using personal expertise, skills and the clear focus on meeting the needs of target groups through agreed action plans. However, these are not always specific enough for the impact of actions to be clearly measured. Additionally, there are not enough families actively involved in the strategic development of the centre. Effective staff training and the setting of targets through performance management ensure all staff understand their roles and how to make improvements

Resources are effectively used and managed to provide a range of services that meet the needs of families well. For example, services are timetabled very carefully to make sure the centre is used as much as possible. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Training for staff is well targeted to ensure families are kept safe and can be well supported. For example, all staff have had equality and diversity, and child protection training. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks are undertaken and staff vetting and recruitment checks are rigorous. The centre provides good value for money because resources are used and managed effectively to ensure they meet the needs of as many families as possible.

The centre promotes equality and diversity effectively. A member of staff leads on this area and engages volunteers to help with translating and interpretation of materials where necessary. The community chef provides foods from different countries to raise awareness and celebrate cultural diversity. The site is secure and there are effective and robust systems in place to ensure the safety of all who use the centre. All policies and procedures are securely in place and regular staff training ensures that all staff have a good knowledge of all aspects of safety related to the centre's users.

Partnerships with all groups associated with providing services to the centre's families are strong. Health visitors, midwives, social workers and community nurses all contribute well to ensuring the physical, emotional and well-being needs of the

centre's registered users are well met. The centre's leader is very effective at flagging up vulnerable families and will support all meetings to ensure that 'nothing slips by her'. The work of all partners ensures that the life chances of the most vulnerable families are greatly enhanced.

Self-evaluation is accurate and the centre's leader and all staff are committed to further improvement through a constant drive to improve what is provided. Parents' views have resulted in changes and improvements within the centre, but their involvement in the work of the advisory board is not strong and this limits their ability to be involved in the important decisions about the centre's direction.

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	3

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

Not applicable.

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 Milton Court Children's Centre on the 25 and 26 July. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection, we talked with staff, parents, partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We would like to thank those of you who took the time to talk to us and share your views of the centre.

All of you we spoke to told us just how much the centre had helped you and your families through all the activities, courses and events they provide. Those of you who have experienced very challenging circumstances are particularly pleased with how the centre has helped you to overcome them through its support and guidance.

We could see how much you and your children enjoyed the Play and Sing sessions and how you could join in the singing and activities and help your children learn new skills and independence. You also enjoy the opportunity it gives you to meet with other parents and to get advice and support from the agencies involved with the children's centre. So much so that some of you have become volunteers, some have undertaken training, such as the positive parenting and the breastfeeding volunteers accreditation that you have undertaken. We could see that there were many ways that the centre had helped you understand how to make you and your families' lives healthier and safer.

The good outcomes for you and your children owe much to the hard work and commitment of the staff at the centre who ensure they plan a good range of activities that engage your children. The very good input from the qualified teacher impacts well on you and your children, ensuring they have engaging activities that promote effective learning. The staff also support you well by helping you to develop and extend your parenting skills so that you feel much more confident in your ability to do so. You all agree that the centre is very friendly and you feel very comfortable attending it.

The centre has very good systems in place to keep you and your children safe. All the correct checks have been carried out and extensive staff training has taken place. You have learnt a lot about keeping your children safe, through, for example, first-aid training. You are all full of praise for the community chef who has been inspirational in giving you ideas for cooking healthy food.

The centre is well led and managed and this ensures everything runs smoothly. Everyone at the centre works extremely well together as a team with the sole aim of ensuring you get the support you need and can access services easily. The very informative quarterly newsletters help with this. Effective links with the on-site nurseries and the school ensure a smooth transition at each phase. Strong provision for children's learning and development within the centre ensures that children achieve well.

As well as what you tell the staff, the centre gets a lot of information to help it improve its services even more. We have asked the staff to ensure more of you get the opportunity to be on the group that discusses changes so that they know exactly how you feel about the centre and what you think can be done to make it even better. They do have plans for how to make things better and we have asked that they make these more specific so they, and you, can clearly see how successful they have been. We also think they could help you more when you are seeking employment by providing, for example, clear well-targeted advice through small group work.

Thank you again for helping with the inspection and please get more fully involved in making the centre even better.

We wish you and your families all the very best for the future.

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