

Inspection report for Ellesmere Area Children's Centre

Local authority	Shropshire
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Linked school if applicable	123365 – Ellesmere Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	224090 – Ellesmere Ducklings

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

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, centre staff and parents. Discussions were also held with a representative of the advisory board, a range of partners including schools and local early years settings. The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Ellesmere Area Children's Centre is located in Ellesmere, a small market town in north Shropshire. The centre shares a site with Ellesmere Primary School.

The centre is governed by the local authority, and an advisory board, which is shared with three other children's centres, is in place. The centre was designated as a phase two children's centre in November 2007. It provides the full core purpose through partnership with a range of organisations and settings including Welshampton Toddler Group, Criftins Primary School, Criftins Toddler Group and Cockshutt Toddler Group. Early years provision is through a number of early years settings and childminders located within the reach area.

The centre's reach area is mainly rural. It is 33.2 square miles in size and contains six super output areas. One is ranked in the top 30% most deprived areas in the country and the other super output areas are more affluent. There are 321 children aged 0–4 years living in the reach area, of whom 10% live in households where no one is working. Among the adult population, 12% are in receipt of Jobs Seekers' Allowance and 7.9% of local people who claim benefits receive Incapacity Benefit or Disability Living Allowance. Most local families are from a White British background with 4% of families from a range of minority ethnic groups.

The primary school and the on-site early years setting, Ellesmere Ducklings, were not part of this inspection as they are inspected separately. The reports are available on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are in line with those expected for their age.

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 children’s centre. Parents value the services on offer and feel included. A typical parental comment was, ‘If the centre was not here, then the lack of support would affect my family.’ Relationships between staff, children and families are good, and the centre provides a comfortable, attractive and well-planned environment for activities. Parents’ views are valued by the centre and then carefully evaluated to inform improvements. Families are consulted and involved in decision-making about the centre. However, too few are involved in the advisory board.

Effective links are in place with other services across the reach area to enhance the support available. Safeguarding of children and their families is a key strength. Centre staff are well trained, have a good knowledge of child protection and liaise effectively with social care as and when needed.

Children’s learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage are promoted well across the centre and through links with local childminders, pre-schools and primary schools. Local young children are benefiting from high-quality opportunities for learning and development, for example, through mathematical play with wooden blocks. Consequently, outcomes for young children are improving and the gaps between different groups at age five years are narrowing. This strong emphasis upon children’s learning is reflected by parents benefiting from shared opportunities to play, have fun and learn together with their children, for example, through the popular under-one’s group.

Self-evaluation and planning are linked to strategic priorities. Centre leaders know the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement. For example, the centre recognises that overall engagement and outcomes for target groups are generally satisfactory. However, some of the planning and evaluation is unclear and not

systematic. This is partly because of satisfactory levels of data provided by the local authority and health partners which result in limited measurable targets in the centre development plan.

Challenge to centre's self-evaluation from the local authority has a satisfactory impact upon the improvement of services, however there is not enough focus on the impact the centre is having on all target groups. Staff performance is managed well and staff have good access to professional development. The small staff team is well deployed to deal with the centre's priorities, and links with partners are increasing. The centre adequately meets the needs of local children and families and the outcomes are improving. This indicates that the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Identify and implement strategies to further increase the engagement of, and outcomes for, target groups of children and families.
- Improve action planning and self-evaluation by:
 - ensuring that targets are specific and measurable and focused on improving outcomes
 - developing self-evaluation procedures which focus more clearly on the impact the centre is having, including for all target groups
 - working with the local authority and health partners to improve the quality and quantity of data provided
 - increasing the level of challenge given to the centre by the local authority about self-evaluation and improvement.
- Improve the governance and accountability of the centre by increasing the number of parents involved in the advisory board.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for children and families, including those in target groups and those considered to be in most need of intervention and support, are satisfactory. The centre is having the greatest impact in the extent to which children and parents enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development. This is illustrated by the attainment of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage which showed an improvement from 32.2% achieving 78 points or more in 2008 to 68% in 2011. Crucially, the gap between the lowest-achieving children and the rest has reduced over the same period of time from 26.4% to 21.8%.

Parents report that they have become more confident to support their children while

they themselves have gained new skills and knowledge from adult education courses. Through training and adult learning opportunities, some families are improving their economic stability and independence, including finding suitable employment. Centre staff and partners signpost parents to the local Jobcentre and, as a result, the take-up of appointments, for example by lone parents, is high.

Parents make an effective contribution to running some groups and to self-evaluation within the centre. They say their views are welcomed by staff and are used to inform decision-making. Families can point to examples where their views have improved services.

Relationships between centre users are positive and there are no recorded instances of bullying. In one locality within the reach area where relationships between residents have been more challenging, the centre has been working with the local authority and school partners to promote greater cohesion. Together with its increasing engagement in other community initiatives, the centre is beginning to establish a role within the reach area.

A majority of parents in the area are engaging with local health services. For example, all local children are immunised when they are one year old. The high level of promotion and support about breastfeeding, enhanced through participation in the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, has led to high initiation rates for breastfeeding. However, this is not yet being reflected in the rate of breastfeeding at six to eight weeks which was 44% in 2009 and remained at this level in 2011. Nevertheless, case studies show that, as a result of the work of the centre, individual mothers have felt more confident to breastfeed.

Parent groups and advice around healthy eating have been a key part of the centre's work. Levels of family participation in such activities are good and evaluations show the impact upon families. Consequently, the level of obesity for Reception Year children across the reach area reduced from 16.5% in 2009 to 8.5% in 2010.

Parents are beginning to develop a clear understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe. Where families need specific support, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used effectively to identify their needs. The number of such assessments and the quality of recording is increasing year on year because of the increased coordination across agencies. Parents are fully consulted in the planning process. As a result, there is evidence of improved outcomes for children, including those subject to a child protection plan and those children in care. Parents typically commented that at times when they faced difficult personal circumstances, the centre was 'a life saver'.

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	3

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	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

Both the on-site school nursery and on-site pre-school were good when inspected in 2009. The centre signposts parents to these and a range of other good or better local Early Years Foundation Stage providers, including childminders. Other provision made by the centre to support children's learning and development is good. For example, group activities promoting early mark making have engaged fathers and mothers in meaningful, high-quality experiences with their children. The personal development and achievements of children and adult learners are regularly noted and celebrated by staff.

The centre receives adequate data from the local authority about the population of the reach area. Staff mainly rely upon their local knowledge and links to other organisations to refine their understanding of target groups and those in most need of support and intervention.

The care, guidance and support from staff are making a discernible difference for some families, including those from target groups. Within universal activities, such as 'Stay and Play', parents are accessing targeted support about behaviour management, child development, accident prevention and healthy lifestyles. One of the local groups who are partnered with the centre have found that giving parents such support is difficult for them as an outreach service with no centre worker routinely present. There are good relationships with health visitors and this is a key means by which referrals are made to the centre. This link enhances the assessment of individual and family needs, including the use of the Common Assessment Framework in planning support.

Some fathers, teenage parents and those from minority ethnic groups are using and benefiting from services, but the use of data to track engagement across target groups is not systematic or well developed. In addition, contact with disabled children and those with special educational needs is low but information about the local level of need is unclear.

During the inspection, evidence was seen of how a toddler group working with the centre was able to effectively support a child with special educational needs on

transition to one of the local primary schools. Parents frequently tell staff how centre activities have helped to reduce their social isolation. As one father said, 'Perhaps as a result we'll all be able to say a "hello" to one another outside of here.'

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	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Centre leaders have an improving picture of what the centre does well and where further improvements are needed. Partnership work with a range of local organisations is improving. Supervision procedures to check the work of centre staff are good. Partnership with a range of organisations informs planning and provides additional opportunities for families. It has some impact on improving outcomes.

The centre development plan and self-evaluation demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of the target groups within the reach area and the priorities for improvement. However, the success criteria are not sharp enough for leaders and the advisory board to fully judge progress. This results in satisfactory provision and outcomes. Consequently, the centre gives satisfactory value for money.

All required Criminal Records Bureau checks and recruitment checks are in place to ensure the suitability of those employed or visiting or working with families. Clear protocols are in place for referrals to social care and links are in place to support children subject to a child protection plan. Staff are aware of the signs of domestic violence and know how to help parents gain more specialised support for their needs. Quality assurance of safeguarding is well developed.

Staff are well qualified and have good access to a range of professional development. As a result, they have good knowledge of child protection, disability and special needs and a wide range of issues faced by families including substance misuse and depression.

The local authority's system of accountability is having a satisfactory impact on the self-evaluation of the centre. However, other means of support are more effective. For example, staff learn from working in more than one team and there are regular meetings for the centre leaders to ensure that there is a consistent approach to service delivery across centres. The advisory board has an adequate understanding of the centre's priorities and activities. However, the involvement of parents in the advisory board is limited. This means that the centre is only adequately being held to

account by local families.

Good use is made of children’s books to promote an understanding about differences between people including gender, sexuality and language. Festivals and celebrations are used satisfactorily to promote diversity. Staff act inclusively, for example, helping minority ethnic families living in an isolated part of the community to access groups. The centre has a good knowledge of activities outside the reach area to which it can signpost families, for example, the ‘Playpals’ group at another children’s centre aimed at disabled children and those with special educational needs.

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 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	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

The inspection reports for the primary schools, early years settings and childminders within the reach area were consulted before the inspection to learn about outcomes for children.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ellesmere Area Children's Centre on 19–20 September 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. This means that there are some things that the centre does well alongside others where improvement is needed.

Thank you for contributing to the inspection. We found it very helpful to talk with you about the centre. We also watched a range of activities, spoke to children and centre staff. We visited a local parent and toddler group, spoke to local schools, to a representative of the advisory board and to members of the local authority.

Your centre is particularly successful at providing good learning opportunities for babies and toddlers as well as two- to four-year-olds. We judged that this is having a good impact upon their development and upon their readiness for school. We were also pleased to find that there are good opportunities for you to play, learn and have fun with your children. Your centre is an attractive and welcoming place to be and we found that there are many good procedures in place to keep you and your children safe.

It was pleasing to hear that, when life is difficult, the centre is there to support you. We were encouraged by the comment from a parent who told us, 'If the centre was not here, then the lack of support would affect my family.' We were also pleased to hear several of you say how much you valued opportunities to meet other parents through group activities.

Although it was good to find how much the centre evaluates its work with you and uses your views to improve, we judged that more parents should be supported to become members of the advisory board. This will help the centre to keep adapting and improving its work to meet the needs of all local children and families and be more accountable to local people.

We judged that the centre needs to get better at reaching those children and families in your community who are in most need of support. We also want the centre to have a greater impact on the lives of all families including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

The local authority and health services can help the centre and we are recommending that they provide the centre with better data about the Ellesmere area. We are also recommending that the local authority improves the system by which it helps the centre to know how well it is doing. Centre leaders need to improve the way that they plan and evaluate so that they are clearer about the progress that they are making.

We believe that the centre has the capacity to improve and that by following our recommendations it can become good and even better. Thank you again for your help.

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