

Inspection report for Matlock Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Castle View Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Tree Tops Private Day Nursery

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 headteacher, the multi-agency team (MAT) manager, centre coordinators and staff, representatives from the local authority, representatives from the advisory group, health professionals, frontline workers and centre partners, parents and other users of the centre's facilities.

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

Information about the centre

Matlock Children's Centre is a phase two centre located on the site of Castle View Primary School. It serves the villages of Riber, Tansley, Starkholmes, Darley Dale, South Darley, Winster, Cromford, Matlock Bath, Elton and Wensley. The governance of the centre lies with the local authority in conjunction with an advisory board. Since April 2011 multi-agency teams have been established to serve each locality. Direct line management for the children's centre coordinator is delegated to the MAT manager.

The centre serves a community which is predominantly White British with a very small percentage of black and minority ethnic groups including traveller families, who have now settled in the area. The majority of the areas within the reach are ranked in the top 10% most socially deprived and disadvantaged areas in the country. The percentage of children living in workless households is below the county and locality averages at 12.3%. However, some areas within the reach are considerably higher. Most children enter early year's provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those expected for their age.

The centre was designated in 2007 and provides the appropriate range of services to meet the core offer including outreach family support. Partnerships with a wide variety of agencies and professionals have been established including Tree Tops

Private Day Nursery. As with Castle View Primary School, separate arrangements are in place to inspect this provision and reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Matlock Children's Centre is a good centre which achieves good outcomes for the families it serves. Families respond well to the wide range of health and safety advice, campaigns and promotions leading to strong improvements in their health, safety and well-being. Parents are engaging in family learning programmes resulting in a better understanding of how to support and build on their children's educational development at home and prepare them for school. In addition, pathways to education, training and employment are effective due to firm partnerships with adult education providers.

The leadership and management of the centre are good. The centre has experienced several changes within its day-to-day management and a local authority restructure has led to a reduction in staffing levels and some services. However, temporary management has been extremely proficient during this turbulent period keeping the centres' work firmly on track. The staff team have remained steadfast and undeterred in their commitment to supporting families and making a positive difference to their lives. Furthermore, an experienced centre coordinator has just been appointed and is being well supported into her new role.

Staff are well equipped for the wide range of work they undertake due to the priority given to their continuous professional development and supervision. The advisory board is well established with good representation from partner agencies. Members are well informed about centres' on-going performance and therefore able to monitor their work and provide increasingly good levels of support and challenge. Business plans are rightly targeted and drive improvement. The centre has exceeded its current target to register at least 60% of families and is firmly focused on raising this to 80%. Parents' role in governance arrangements is still evolving but linked to the centres strategic planning. However, the business plan is not consistently sharp as some priorities lack rigorous success criteria to measure progress over time.

The centre understands the needs of the community well and works hard to tackle barriers to engagement associated with rural communities and address some of the gaps in provision in the wider community. As a result, registrations across all target groups continue to rise and participation rates across most activities are good. However, participation data is not clearly defined so it's sometimes difficult for staff to analyse trends and ensure engagement is sustained, purposeful and effective. This is particularly so for teen parents whose attendance has begun to drift.

Families are provided with a good range of provision which responds to personal progression and changing needs. The MAT provides a cohesive approach to the allocation of family support and plays a pivotal role in the protection of families who are most at risk. Families benefit from the good relationships with a growing range of partners hence strongly improving outcomes. However, the consistency of evaluations undertaken by the centre and partner agencies does vary, which prevents them from being able to meticulously measure outcomes, particularly in the longer term.

The secure links with families accessing services in the reach area, good outcomes, and the value given to its services, confirm that the centre's overall effectiveness and capacity to sustain improvement are good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the provision and leadership and management of the centre by:
 - working with the local authority to improve the clarity and analysis of reach data to more rigorously analyse engagement trends of target groups, sustain meaningful levels of participation and to inform the development of outreach services to the wider community
 - working more closely with the local authority, advisory board and partners to develop a consistently sharp approach to evaluating the longer term impact of all services on outcomes, and to improve the quality and effectiveness of business plans.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

'This place is brilliant, it's changed our lives.' and 'I've got my confidence back and I'm ready to do things for myself.' are typical comments from parents who have taken steps, guided by dedicated staff, to make significant changes in their lives. Parents engaging in a programme to address their difficulties with mental illness and abusive relationships all report increased confidence and subsequent ability to begin to re-build their lives.

Parents state that they feel safe, secure and welcome when using services on offer.

Those receiving family support in particular, describe how they are reassured by vigilant staff who 'keep an eye on them for signs of concern'. They understand the necessity for this and feel the centre is an essential safety net during times of difficulty. Strategies such as the 'Team Around the Child' and the 'Common Assessment Framework' (CAF) are effective in assessing need and the delivery of pertinent services. Early intervention has led to tailored support, de-escalation from child protection plans and in some cases, avoided children being received into local authority care.

Consistent messages about the importance of good health, exercise and nutrition are increasing the take up of smoke free homes, contraception advice and promoting engagement with the 'Family Healthy Start Group'. 'I've bought a steamer because boiling vegetables takes all the good nutrition from the food.' states one well-informed parent. The prevalence of breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is higher than both county and national averages with further targets in place to tackle reluctance to breastfeed within more deprived areas. Similarly, obesity levels in reception year children are lower than national averages.

Children make good progress in their learning and development given their starting points; as a result the achievement gap between the lowest 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage is narrowing. Parents attending the 'New Parents Group' and 'Under 1's Group' explore early childhood development and their important role as first educators. Furthermore, speech and language programmes have shown improved outcomes for children likely to be at risk of language delay. Disabled children and those with special educational needs accessing services, receive an individualised approach to their learning and subsequent transition to school.

Centre data confirm that parents across all target groups are beginning to engage in family learning and/or more formal education or training due to the centres' persistence. Consequently, parents have accessed English, maths, English Speakers of Other Languages and some have gone on to accredited qualifications and employment securing a better future for their families. In addition, centre data confirm a reduction in the percentage of children living in workless households in some of the reach areas. However, the centre has not yet established a robust system for tracking education and employment outcomes more systematically. Some parents play an active volunteering role by supporting the delivery of specialist provision such as 'Parenting Additional Needs'. Parents routinely share their views and a newly established 'Parent's Forum' provides a more formal route to the advisory board. However, the number of parents engaged in this process is limited.

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	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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Care, guidance and support are good. The centre provides a haven for support and is highly valued by families using services. 'The staff are always there... sometimes just in the background and just in case you need them,' is a typical comment from parents. Centre workers are adept at putting parents at their ease, working with them respectfully and valuing their small but often, momentous steps forward. Everyday health and safety guidance is a lifeline to good parenting for some. For example, some parents recognise that they are 'always learning' and welcome the constant stream of information and leaflets which they file and use to make them more independent as parents.

The engagement of parents and children across all target groups is increasing despite some earlier turbulence in services. Fathers are using the centre independently and some have engaged in the 'bring your dad to nursery day'; providing an opportunity for them to enjoy quality time with their children and learn about the importance of play. In addition, 'Party in the Park' activities provide a wider range of activities for families as a whole. The centre has 100% of teen parents and children with disabilities recorded as registered and participating with the centre. However, the quality of the contact is not routinely tracked preventing the centre sustaining purposeful contacts with some groups and individuals.

Well-established inter-agency working between centre staff, the multi agency team, health professionals and social care in particular, ensures support is swift and effective across all levels of need. Developing provision is now focused on meeting the needs of families with circumstances that make them vulnerable. Consequently, the centre is now providing 'Story-Time, Action and Rhyme' promoting speech and language development for children needing extra support. Links with an employment agency is also tackling barriers to employment within workless households.

Good communication between partners alongside staff's presence at local 'Weigh, Stay and Play' groups have taken play sessions into the community and improved pathways to registration. Furthermore, centre staff have established supportive links with local private, voluntary and independent childcare providers. However, the development of further outreach provision is only just beginning following the

recruitment of new staff.

A programme to engage parents as partners in their children's early education is successfully raising parents' awareness of early childhood development and the important links with children's musical, sensory and linguistic experiences. Simultaneously a transitional project is supporting children's readiness for school. Planning and assessment programmes link to the Early Years Foundation Stage across all activities ensuring purposeful learning opportunities for all children attending. Furthermore, local settings are providing nursery places for vulnerable two-year-olds and data confirm 100% take up of free nursery education entitlement.

Parents engaging in the 'Kick Start' programme typically progressed to family learning, higher education and some went on to secure a range of employment; although these learning journeys are not always well documented by the centre. Parents engaging in this training reported 'increased confidence and aspirations for themselves', subsequently, they are setting themselves personal goals and planning their next steps towards employment.

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

Despite some earlier disruption within the leadership team the centre leaders have maintained a good rate of progress within the centres work. Clear accountability arrangements have ensured the delivery of good quality services appropriate to needs. Effective mentoring supports the thorough induction of new staff. As a result, the new children's centre coordinator and the two new centre workers have a secure understanding of their roles, responsibilities and the complexities of the reach area. Staff training and supervision arrangements are robust and ensure all members of the team receive good levels of advice, guidance and support particularly in relation to safeguarding and case file management.

Managers have a clear understanding of the centres strengths and areas requiring further development hence their accurate self-evaluation and clear priorities within their business plan. The local authority has improved systems to manage the centre performance leading to an alignment with reach and strategic priorities. Quarterly centre reports and effective communication ensure the advisory board have an up-to-date picture of the work of the centre enabling them to offer appropriate levels of support and challenge. The centre is on track to meet targets within their current

business plan although some priorities lack rigour and clarity about how success will be monitored and measured systematically.

The centre provides good value for money. The building is well maintained and utilised. Positive links with the host school enables families to access additional space and resources. Consequently, the sensory room, computer suite and the on-site Toy Library enhance the range of services on offer. Provision has been extended to local baby clinics which have forged good links with health professionals and increased contacts with families. Provision for children and adults with disabilities or special educational needs exists, creating a safe and inclusive place to meet, learn new skills and make friends. Furthermore, increasing engagement from fathers, lone parents and families from minority ethnic groups confirms equality and diversity is central to the centres work.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Staff receive good levels of training in relation to child protection procedures and safeguarding referral pathways are effective. Appropriate records are maintained in relation to Criminal Bureau Record checks and those pertinent to their partner's agencies. Parents are well informed about the centre's statutory duties to protect children and families. Sensitive family support and good quality interventions help parents to tackle the impact of low self-esteem and vulnerability. This is particularly so for families at risk of domestic violence.

Partnerships with local schools and childcare providers are developing securely with the support of the Early Years Improvement Team and this is having an impact on the availability of good quality childcare within the reach. In addition, the multi agency team provides a secure route to social care and wider partnerships enhancing provision for families in need of swift and intensive support. Parents consistently share their views via regular satisfaction surveys, group evaluations, 'Parent's Forum' and the 'You Said We Did' board. However, their strategic role in driving improvements remains in its infancy.

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	2

adults	
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	2

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

The inspection reports for Castle View Primary School and Tree Tops Private Day Nursery were considered as part of this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Matlock Sure Start Children's Centre on 31 October –1 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of our inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff and centre partners who work with you.

We found that the centre provides a good range of activities and services which help you and your children to lead healthier lives and that keep you safe. Some of you enjoyed the 'Family Healthy Start Group' because you learnt that steaming food is better for you than boiling food and you also learnt how to cook healthy food on a budget. New mothers have received lots of help through the 'New Parents Group', which has provided good opportunities for them to talk to other new mum's, learn about safe sleeping and weaning for babies, and get help with breastfeeding if they need it.

Those of you who spoke to us stated that the centre is a safe and welcoming place to be and you value the help and support you receive when circumstances in your life are very difficult to cope with. Parents told us that they valued the expertise and sensitive support from staff. As a result, this has helped them to move away from abusive relations, get help to overcome problems with post natal depression and some have received lots of health, safety and parenting guidance which has helped them to be better parents. We also found that the centre has good systems and procedures in place to protect children and families. For example, the centre has been successful in really improving home life for some families who have previously found it difficult to care for their children without support.

We found that courses and activities help you understand how your children learn and develop and this is helping you to support early learning at home and prepare children better for school life. Groups such as 'under 1's', Baby Massage' and 'PEEP's are also providing children with opportunities to explore music and sensory experiences and some of you are learning about the importance of speaking and reading to your children. Such activities are well planned by staff making sure all children have good opportunities to progress in their learning.

Equally, we spoke to many parents who have benefited from adult courses and this has had a significant impact on their confidence, self-esteem and willingness to find solutions to their problems. More of you are joining adult learning programmes and this is improving your level of education and opportunities to seek employment. The centre keeps some records to show the range of courses and activities you have completed but they don't always know about how these changed your life in the longer term, perhaps by going on to college or work. So we have asked them to improve these records.

The leadership and management of the centre are good even though the centre has experienced some changes in staffing and management. However, the temporary manager has looked after the centre very well and she is currently supporting the new manager into her role. The centre has developed plans to improve your services further and they have already met some of their targets. However, they need to get better at tracking the difference the centre makes to your lives and they need more details in their plans to show how they will do this successfully.

We found that the centre works well with other agencies and professionals and this is helping to increase the number of families registered with the centre and using services. However, they don't always have a clear picture of the types of activities certain people are using to make sure they get the best from the centre. This is particularly so for teen parents, so we have asked them to look at the information more carefully.

The centre knows it is important to get your views about how good services are, which is why they often ask you to complete questionnaires. They have also encouraged some of you to get involved in the parents forum and the advisory board. However, they want more of you to be involved with the running of the centre and they already have plans in place to address this.

Thank you to all those who took time to speak with us and we wish you all the very best for the future.

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