

Inspection report for Conniburrow Children's Centre

Local authority	Milton Keynes Council
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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 centre coordinator and staff, representatives from the local authority, and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner services, for example health agencies and headteachers, parents and other users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

This phase two centre was designated in November 2008 and is situated on the site of Germander Park First School. Its services fulfil the full core purpose and services are available from 8am until 6pm Monday to Friday for 48 weeks of the year and once a month on Saturdays. Outreach services are available from three other venues in the community. The centre is managed directly by the local authority and there is an advisory board in place that provides governance.

The reach area covers five estates around central Milton Keynes and includes the Conniburrow estate which is among the top three areas of highest deprivation in Milton Keynes. The population is very transient. Housing is socially mixed with a growing number of multi-occupancy dwellings. White British heritage families account for 48% of the community. The remainder includes a very wide range of other ethnic groups including families of African, Indian, Polish and Somalian origins. Overall, 113 languages are spoken in the community. Some 32% of children aged from 0 to 4 live in households dependent on workless benefits which is well above the national average. The proportion of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, at 21%, is above the national average.

There are 988 children aged 0–4 living in the reach area. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early year’s provision are typically below the level 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

Conniburrow Children’s Centre provides a good service to families. It has been particularly successful in helping those most in need of support by increasing the numbers who register from the most deprived areas through taking services out into the community. Families are unanimous in their views that the centre is welcoming and that staff are able to advise them on any problem or find them the help they need. ‘I don’t know how they do it but they know about everything’ was how one parent summed up this commonly held view. As a result, a large majority of those who use the centre feel they have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives, and believe that their children make good progress and that their lives improve. Families have very positive views depicted by statements such as: ‘This place is so precious, they treat you like a friend and don’t judge you.’

Staff have a very good knowledge of the local area and through this have pinpointed where their support is needed most. The numbers overall who are registering are increasing rapidly, almost trebling in three years. The centre has been particularly successful in engaging young parents and those from minority ethnic groups overall. However, the number of Somali families who use the centre does not reflect the growing proportion in the community. In addition, staff are hampered in measuring the impact of their actions in registering lone parents, those from workless households and fathers because reach area base line data provided by the local authority are only available for those target groups with any dependent children, not just for the centre’s remit of children aged 0–4 years.

Leadership and management at all levels are good and the day-to-day management is excellent. There is a very strong team ethos even though some key staff have only

been in post a matter of weeks. The centre's action plan is succinct and includes appropriate key priorities but the targets are not based well enough on available data to ensure they are consistently measurable or time specific. Nevertheless, senior leaders and managers have a clear and accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development and there is a very strong commitment from staff and partners to see it progress even further. The good outcomes reflect this and, combined with leaders' very clear understanding of the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups, show there is a good capacity to continue to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of Somali families who use the centre by developing a range of services or activities to meet their specific needs.
- Work with the local authority to ensure that reach area data are accurate and relevant to the centre's remit in relation to all target groups; use this data to ensure action plan targets are consistently measurable and time specific.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre is proactive in effectively tackling a slight increase in childhood obesity levels, which are marginally above the local authority average. Analysis of the reasons for the increase shows a big impact from having a very transient population and cultural differences in the use of supplementing children's feeds. The centre's approach to tackling this through good links with dieticians and weaning support, cooking courses and healthy snacks at activities is ensuring that parents are given well-targeted support. Other health measures are good and improving strongly with a far higher percentage of mothers than the local authority average still breastfeeding at two months. Immunisation rates are also high and reflect good levels of engagement with general health services. Outcomes for families who need support with emotional or mental health problems are good and a large majority of families feel they have healthier lifestyles due to accessing the centre.

Parents from across the full range of target groups, including the most vulnerable, are unanimous in their views that they trust staff. Through structured parenting courses, nurturing programmes, visits from specialists, and talks about car-seat safety and hazards in the home families have developed a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Children also behave in a safe manner in the centre. They are further protected by staff who have high levels of expertise in the use of working with prevention strategies such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and higher levels of supervision. As a result, there are good outcomes for the majority of children subject to child protection plans with some families making outstanding progress.

Families thoroughly enjoy all the activities such as the 'Young Parents' Group' where children make the most of wet weather in the well-equipped outdoor area. The Early

Years Foundation Stage profile results have improved strongly over the past three years and at 80.2% are well above the national figure. However, the gap between the lowest 20% and the rest increased slightly over the same period, although at 23.3% in 2012, it is still well below the national average. Close links with schools in the area, the work of the children's centre teacher and initiatives such as 'Bookstart' are already focusing effectively on reducing the gap. Tracking a sample of children's progress when they move on and anecdotal evidence from schools and early years settings show that children who access centre services generally make good progress from below average starting points. Parents also confirm this, saying their children are encouraged to be 'brave and experimental' so their confidence is greatly enhanced, making the transition to school smooth. Most families using the centre develop their skills in some way especially when they are given confidence through English language courses, parenting programmes or are encouraged to become volunteers. 'It has brought more confidence out in me' was how one person succinctly put the views of many.

Families feel fully involved in the centre and are able to express their views freely and frequently by hanging comments on the 'Celebration Tree', and responding to evaluations and surveys. They are consulted each year on the centre's 'Golden Rules' and have the chance to meet more formally at the parents' forum. A good number of parents sit on the advisory board; one is currently the vice chair. The majority of families' economic and social well-being is enhanced well through effective advice about benefits, housing and support to get back to work, with some notable successes. The centre has also supported a substantial number to access funded nursery places for two-year-olds as well as other childcare options which has a positive impact on outcomes for children and parents.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	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	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

Staff knowledge and understanding of the local community has led to significantly

higher numbers of local families registering in the past 12 months. As the designated centre in the local authority for young parents, the centre is especially successful in engaging very effectively with this target group. Similarly, by opening venues in the community, such as at the 'Kindling', holding Family Play sessions at Downs Barn School, and by attending baby clinics, staff are taking their support out to the hardest to reach groups. This, plus the work of the community mobiliser, employed by the local authority to encourage community cohesion, is already having an impact on numbers from the most deprived areas using the centre. For example, 58% of children from minority ethnic families are registered and the highest percentage of registrations, 64% is from the most deprived area. Actions are already being taken to engage more Somali families through contacting community leaders and providing a pictorial timetable with captions written in Somali, for example. But at present, the numbers using the services are relatively low.

Popular, well-attended groups with a strong, carefully planned focus on children's early development and helping parents support their children to learn lead to good outcomes for the majority of families. Achievement is celebrated well, for example through journals that keep a picture record as well as rating children's involvement and well-being in various sessions. Consequently, aspirations are raised and built on effectively through extending skills further or through volunteering.

The quality of care, guidance and support is enhanced by the good partnerships that are in place that enable bespoke packages to be put in place. Parents describe the staff as 'warm, animated and caring, who care for the whole family' and will 'go the extra mile'. They encourage families to access help, accompanying them to appointments, for example. This support is especially effective and appreciated by the most vulnerable families in times of crisis such as imminent eviction or where children are at risk. Looked after children and those on supervised plans receive very good one-to-one support from Family Support Workers. Many parents have been empowered to improve their own circumstances by being given a renewed sense of self-worth.

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

Leadership and management at all levels are good. The centre coordinator leads her team with enthusiasm. The whole staff team works cohesively towards meeting the centre's vision statement of 'freedom to create your own destiny'. Clear governance

and accountability arrangements and a well-informed advisory board also have a positive impact on outcomes as partners are fully involved and the board challenges the centre effectively. Everyone has an accurate picture of the centre's strengths and areas for development and plans are already in place to engage even more families from the most vulnerable groups who are isolated. Rigorous tracking and using all available data are assisting the centre to pinpoint where its services are most needed and to build on its successes.

High quality resources, that include very experienced staff, and the bright and enticing environment are managed well by the coordinator and have a positive impact on outcomes. This is encouraging groups such as fathers to come to the centre to attend week-day sessions and also the monthly 'Saturdads' group. Young parents also maintain their interest in their weekly group because it is adapted to meet their needs and their views and because of the highly effective support of the teenage midwife and Connexions. The refurbishment of the venue at the Kindling has done much to enhance the centre's role in the community in general as well as increasing the numbers from the most needy part of the reach area. All of this has had a positive impact on outcomes and results in good value for money.

Apart from relatively low numbers of Somali families, the range of families coming to the centre accurately reflects the highly diverse community it serves. Everyone treats each other with respect, as this is modelled so well by staff and included in the 'Golden Rules'. There is zero tolerance to any form of discrimination. Staff who speak community languages, displays and information boards that celebrate diversity and provide information in Polish and Somali are all aimed at ensuring everyone feels welcome. Key to this is also the length of time each day the centre is open and the warm welcome everyone receives. Resources such as the sensory room that are designed to meet the specific needs of disabled children and those with special educational needs also ensure that equality and diversity are at the heart of the centre's inclusive work.

Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding including recognising where there may be concerns of abuse or domestic violence. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out or verified on anyone working with families. Policies are clear and information about different aspects of safeguarding are liberally spread throughout the centre ensuring parents have a clear understanding. Recent restructuring of the local authority's services into Children and Family Practices has brought different support agencies together and the centre uses those strong partnerships effectively, to provide tailored support to the most vulnerable families.

Other effective partnerships do much to improve outcomes for families. For example, links with pre-school settings and all three reach area schools, but especially the co-located Germander Park School, ensure a smooth transition and mutual professional respect. School children also delight in having play time in the centre's activity room as a weekly reward and this also fosters good relationships with parents. Close work with adult education colleges and other children's centres has had great benefits for a majority of families and especially for young parents.

Families using the centre are fully involved in evaluating and shaping services and children’s views are also taken into account through photographing their responses and noting their preferences. As a result, most families express high levels of satisfaction, as reflected in the comment, ‘This place is really crucial to us’, and feel their opinions are valued and acted upon.

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	2

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

Nothing applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Conniburrow Children’s Centre on 21–22 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection and for taking the time to tell us about the centre's work. It was very helpful to visit activities taking place in the centre and the community and thank you for welcoming us into your groups. Here is a summary of what we found:

Outcomes overall are good because the centre makes good provision for all the families who use it. You told us that you have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives through having help with how to wean and feed your children, with access to specialist health services such as the dietician. Also, if there are any specific concerns in relation to speech and language or if you feel depressed, the centre has been very helpful in working with others to resolve the problem. One parent's views summed up many others by stating, 'I don't know how they do it, but they know about everything.' You all feel very welcome and safe in the centre from the moment you enter and receive a warm greeting in the reception and have high levels of confidence in staff turning to them in times of crisis. Many of you made similar comments such as: 'This place is so precious, they treat you like a friend and don't judge you' and talk about the 'warm, caring staff who care for the whole family'.

Many of you are very pleased with the progress your children have made as they are more confident and you have been helped to understand how they learn. The 'Bookstart' scheme has played a good part in this for some of you. A large number of you feel that children are encouraged to be 'brave' and 'experimental' and so are confident when moving on to the next stage of their education.

Your own skills and aspirations have been raised by the centre through English language courses, for example, or being given the opportunity to volunteer. Those who have been involved through these or through sitting on the advisory board say that your confidence and self-esteem are much improved, described by one parent as: 'They have brought out the confidence in me'. This, plus good advice around benefits and housing, for example, has had a positive impact on your economic and social well-being. You all feel your views are listened to well and can comfortably approach staff or add ideas to the 'Celebration Tree' or via the advisory board or parents' forum.

It is clear that the centre is highly inclusive in a community that is very mixed and where families move in and out of the area a lot. More and more families are using the services, especially since the Kindling opened. The centre has been particularly successful in being designated to hold the young parent group for the whole of Milton Keynes and many families have benefited from this. There are also high numbers from a wide range of different ethnic groups who access the centre although the number of families from the Somali community is relatively low. This is something we have asked the centre to address.

We have also asked staff to work with the local authority to ensure that it has accurate information about how many people from different groups are in its area, such as lone parents and fathers. This is so that it can gauge its success more

accurately in relation to how many from each group register. We would also like the centre to use this information to make its targets easier to measure and to put time-limits on the priorities too.

Everyone, including families and partners who work with the centre, is committed to continue to improve outcomes for families in the community and increase the numbers who benefit from the services. Although some staff are relatively new in their roles, they are already very knowledgeable about the particular needs of the community, especially those who need help most. The centre coordinator's enthusiasm and excellent leadership ensure that all staff are committed to pursuing the vision of 'freedom to create your own destiny'. Having already had a positive impact on outcomes and improved the lives of many families, the centre is well placed to continue to improve.

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