

Inspection report for Somercotes Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	383816
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Somercotes Infant School URN: 112499
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Grange Private Day Nursery URN: 206256 Stepping Stones Alfreton Ltd URN: EY418015

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: November 2012



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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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents and users of the centre, the centre's coordinator and staff, representatives from the local authority, members of the advisory board and various professionals who work in partnership with the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Somercotes Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in March 2008. Its reach area covers the three distinct communities of Somercotes, Riddings and Swanwick in the Amber Valley district of Derbyshire. The centre operates from small purpose-built premises on the site of Somercotes Infant School. There are no formal links with the school as Derbyshire County Council retains responsibility for governance of the centre. The centre coordinator also manages a neighbouring centre in Alfreton and the two centres have a joint advisory board.

There are 950 children under five in the area and the birth rate is increasing. Almost all the families are of White British heritage although an increasing number of Polish families are now moving into the area. Two of the communities have much higher levels of deprivation than the third. Over half of the children across the reach area live in the highest 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country and almost one in three children live in households dependent on workless benefits. Two of the three schools in the area have a nursery but there are no daycare providers in the reach area. Children aged two years who are eligible for a funded early education place access their provision outside the reach area and the centre has links with Grange Private Day Nursery and Stepping Stones Alfreton Ltd. These nurseries were separately inspected and the reports of their inspections can be found at

www.ofsted.gov.uk. When children enter early education, usually at three years of age, their skills, knowledge and abilities are at or below those typical for their age.

Services delivered by the children's centre team and partners include play and learning sessions, child health services, adult and family learning, specialist speech and language support and targeted support for vulnerable families. The centre delivers most of its services from the centre in Somercotes but uses community venues for some larger events.

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

'I can't imagine what it would be like without it' was a typical view of parents and professional colleagues who work with the centre. Knowledgeable staff, strong networks and effective partnership working has led to the centre being recognised as a 'hub of expertise' in the community. Users bring their friends to the centre as they know it is a place to access good quality information about services and activities to help them improve their own and their children's lives.

The centre's services are rightly concentrated on providing individual support for families whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. The centre has doubled its engagement rate over the last year to over 64%, with particularly high percentages of families from target groups, such as families from minority ethnic groups accessing its services. The multi-agency team (MAT) fosters good partnership working and has established effective systems for assessing the needs of the whole family. This integrated approach has a positive impact on outcomes for children, including children subject to a child protection plan.

The centre has responded quickly with a range of initiatives to meet a recently identified need to improve children's speech and language skills. The speech and language 'Drop in' encourages early identification of children who need additional support. 'Chatterboxes', specifically designed to promote conversation in the home, are helping to increase children's concentration and extend their vocabulary.

Compelling case studies and personal testimony from users demonstrate the positive difference the centre is making to families' physical, emotional and economic well-being. Parents develop confidence in their parenting skills and build strong social networks, which extend beyond the centre. For example, some users have joined weight-management courses together and meet up to take their children swimming. A bespoke range of courses, jointly designed with adult education, has been particularly successful at giving users the motivation and confidence to progress into further training or seek employment. Retention and achievement rates are high, averaging 83% and 95% respectively for last year's learners.

The centre offers a wide range of activities to support children's learning. 'Crafty Crew' and 'Tots and Toddlers' provide opportunities for children and adults to have fun and play together. One user expressed the views of others: 'We really look forward to coming and can't wait to see what's out.' Parents and staff use 'I can do books' to record children's development and achievements. Although planning covers all areas of learning, it is not sufficiently individualised to build on children's interests and next steps in learning and the role of adults in the session is sometimes unclear. Headteachers identify that the majority of children arrive at nursery without prior experience of pre-school provision and have had few opportunities to develop school readiness skills.

A small number of users are involved in the parents' forum. They are proactive as ambassadors for the centre, contribute to decision making and generate ideas to improve the centre's work, such as the introduction of a newsletter. However, there are currently no users on the advisory board. Users who volunteer are well supported but the centre is aware that opportunities for volunteering are limited in range.

The centre uses a variety of methods to gather users' views regularly. This feedback is used well to review activities and ensure that provision is carefully tailored to meet their needs. Leaders and managers are reflective, rigorously monitor progress towards meeting the well-focused targets and swiftly adapt service planning to address emerging needs. As a result, outcomes for children and families are good overall, and the centre demonstrates good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve learning and development outcomes for children by:
 - extending provision for two-year-olds to increase their school readiness
 - strengthening planning so that all play and learning sessions are purposeful and build on individual children's interests and needs.
- Enhance opportunities for users to contribute to the centre's work by:
 - increasing their involvement in formal decision making
 - providing additional opportunities for volunteering.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre promotes the physical, mental and emotional health of users well. Attendance at the child health clinic and immunisation rates are high. Baby massage sessions promote quality relationships and a sense of relaxed well-being for both baby and parent. A high proportion of the families receiving individual support have experienced depression and typical comments from parents show the positive impact the carefully planned individualised support has had on their lives. These included: 'It has helped me loads. I am able to cope a lot better now,' and 'Anything I feel I can't deal with, I know staff will try to help me in any way they can.'

Monthly buggy walks and sessions, including 'Dancing Tots' and 'Fit Start', help to improve users' fitness. Cookery sessions, such as 'Fussy Eaters', and weaning advice have raised families' awareness of how to control portion size, explore different tastes and produce healthy meals at home rather than buying pre-cooked food. Obesity rates for children in the Reception Year are lower than the national average.

The breastfeeding group has been extended to become 'Bumps and Babies' to raise awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding before birth and help to reduce the prevailing culture of bottle feeding. Peer supporters, including some teenage parents, have encouraged a steady increase over the last two years in the numbers of babies who are breastfed at six to eight weeks. This figure is now just below the national average. Following an awareness campaign about the dangers of passive smoking, 70 users have signed the pledge to create a smoke-free home and health visitors report few families now smoke at home or in cars.

The safety and protection of all involved in the centre is given a high priority. Parents who have experienced domestic violence are very ably supported to make appropriate choices and decisions to protect themselves and their children by attending the 'Freedom Course'. Parents say they feel very safe at the centre as staff ensure they have a good understanding of the procedures in place to protect them. A recent evacuation practice led to families considering escape routes at homes. Users are vigilant and understand well the need to take shared responsibility for children's safety. Imaginative projects, such as a 'danger-zone lounge' in the foyer, are used very effectively to minimise risks in the home. Over the last three years very few children have been admitted to hospital as a result of unintentional or deliberate injuries.

The centre provides a welcoming and inclusive environment. Expectations of users' behaviour are clearly stated and staff and users are mutually respectful. Children attending the play and learning sessions exemplify the 'Fair Play Rules' by sharing and being kind to each other. They behave well and develop good relationships with each other and with adults. The centre plays a prominent role in the community and initiated the 'Community Champion' award locally. Staff have prioritised the need to extend opportunities for volunteering at the centre and increase the number of users who participate in formal decision making.

Staff have a comprehensive knowledge of services and resources to support families' social and economic well-being. Users are assisted ably to understand which benefits they are entitled to, improve financial management and make successful grant applications to purchase essential household items, toys and clothing, all of which have a material impact on the lives of families.

Almost 200 parents participated in adult learning last year. Tutors track learners' progress rigorously and there is good evidence that some parents facing multiple challenges in their lives, have successfully gained qualifications, accessed paid employment or become volunteers. Notable successes include the very positive outcomes for adults who do not speak English as a first language as all learners felt less isolated, five progressed to accredited qualifications courses and six gained employment.

The number of children in the area reaching a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage varies considerably across the three schools, with those in the most disadvantaged areas showing least progress. Across the area, the achievement gap has remained static. Children at two schools have very low starting points on entry and children's centre workers provide schools with additional support for individual children in their own homes to enhance their progress. The 'Flying Start' programme successfully supported smooth transition into the local school's nursery. Children who attended settled quicker, accepted routines more readily and their parents had a better understanding of how to help prepare their children for school but the sessions were attended by less than half the children who started nursery.

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	3
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

As a result of the centre's determination to increase participation rates a very large majority of families from the most disadvantaged areas now use the centre's

services. The centre staff know their families well. They work effectively with a wide range of other agencies to provide a personalised and sensitive response to the individual needs of users, both in the centre and through their outreach work.

The centre's reach area is challenging as the three communities are very different. Support for individual families is offered, according to need, across the whole area. Teenage parents, disabled children and children of disabled parents are well supported through individual family support and specialist services delivered in partnership with the coordinator's other centre, resulting in extremely high participation levels. Most lone parents and fathers are registered with the centre and engagement with these groups is increasing steadily.

Leaders and managers use the wide range of network meetings they attend to share knowledge effectively, identify emerging needs and adapt provision to ensure appropriate services are on offer. Information about an increase in the number of Polish families locally led to courses for those whose first language is not English being swiftly provided. Staff use procedures, such as the family profile and Common Assessment Framework, skilfully to gain a better understanding of users' needs and work with them to take small steps forward in their lives. Parents, particularly those who experience depression, appreciate this sensitive approach. The staff team fosters warm and trusting relationships with users, which builds parents' confidence to seek help when they need it.

The centre's computer and telephone, available free to parents, are well used to make appointments, search for employment and sort out any concerns about their housing. Although most services are delivered from the centre's premises in Somercotes, monthly coffee mornings attended by a range of agencies ensure that families in Riddings are also able to seek advice locally.

Courses are structured effectively to promote personal development and build on learners' previous achievements. Feedback is used well to monitor satisfaction and inform future delivery. Taster sessions at fun days provide opportunity to gauge interest in courses such as information technology skills and healthy eating, ensuring that programmes meet the needs of potential learners. Tutors are diligent in supporting learners with individual information, advice and guidance about their next steps in learning. Photographic evidence shows the pleasure and pride on learners' faces as they receive their certificates at celebratory events.

The centre's playroom is bright and well resourced, particularly the baby area. Children have regular access to outdoor play where the environment has been enhanced with a sensory area through a project involving young people from the community. Some families extend their children's learning at home through loan of 'story sacks' and request additional activities, such as recipes for playdough, to prevent their children being bored at home. The size of the centre's premises places constraints on the play and learning provision and no suitable venues have been identified in the community. Currently, only about a quarter of the number of children anticipated to be eligible for two-year-old funded places are accessing

provision.

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	3
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 are strong. Members of the advisory board understand their role well and effectively take responsibility for supporting and challenging the work of the centre. Reviews of the centre's achievements are rigorous and future planning accurately reflects local priorities. Detailed analysis of increasingly reliable data and local knowledge from partner agencies ensure that the centre's work is well targeted. There are clear links between the centre's business plan and the council's strategic vision for children's and young people's services.

Team meetings enable practitioners to share and improve practice. The coordinator strives for continuous improvement and has introduced systems to measure the impact of services on outcomes for children and their families more precisely. Consequently, staff morale is high as the team can identify more clearly the difference its work is making, particularly for the most vulnerable families.

Feedback on centre services indicates a high level of enjoyment and satisfaction. Users' and partners' views are regularly sought and used to inform services. For example, users were consulted before making changes to the times of the 'Under Ones' session and families were asked whether they would use a credit union to help them manage their finances.

The centre is very well used by other agencies because of its child-friendly environment and easy access to information about services. Resources are used to best effect through the sharing of staff expertise across the coordinator's two centres, use of staff's individual specialisms and location of work in the most disadvantaged parts of the community. The centre provides good value for money as it is making a positive difference for the vast majority of families it works with, particularly those from target groups.

The centre promotes a very strong ethos of mutual respect. All staff recently accessed training to inform their work with a small number of Traveller families who reside in the area. Parents of disabled children and those with additional needs are well supported with advice, practical help and access to additional play resources. Working parents are encouraged to participate in large one-off events held during

holiday periods and at weekends. Fathers feel comfortable to access the centre and prefer family events to specialist sessions. Childminders receive information to pass on to their minded children's parents about the centre's programme of events, services on offer and activities for parents and children to share at home.

Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and liaise very effectively with other agencies so that they are clear about their own professional boundaries. Supervision of staff's caseloads is supportive; progress made and next steps for each family are well monitored and appropriately recorded in case files. Records demonstrate robust safer recruitment procedures are implemented effectively, including a criminal records bureau check for all staff and volunteers before they start work. Premises are checked daily prior to sessions, risk assessments are thorough and timely safety checks are conducted.

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

As the link providers had been inspected more than twelve months ago, their inspections reports were not considered in making judgements.

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 Somercotes Children's Centre on 14–15 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

It was clear from those of you we talked to and the information we read about the staff's work with individual families that you find the centre very useful to you, especially when you need help. It is making a big difference for you in helping your families to be healthy, make friends and be more aware of support available to help you to manage your finances more effectively. Staff use their extensive knowledge about services and resources in the area to ensure you benefit from them.

The centre is good at helping you to keep your families safe, especially when you are experiencing a crisis in your lives. Staff are well trained to ensure that they can work with you in a sensitive way. They help to put together plans with small steps for you to take which will help improve your lives and those of your children. At the centre, staff make sure that you know and understand the centre's health and safety procedures and this helps you to feel that you and your children are safe at the centre. Ideas from the centre help you to think about safety in your own homes such as the 'danger-zone' lounge in the foyer.

The centre promotes breastfeeding well and it is good to see that the number of babies in the area being breastfed for at least six to eight weeks is improving steadily, although it is still less than in other parts of the country. Staff are keen to ensure you understand how much this benefits your baby as they know that is it more usual in your families for babies to be bottle fed. It was also good to hear that many of you have signed the pledge to make your homes smoke free.

We found that many of you have attended courses which have helped your own learning and development, such as parenting programmes. Courses are well designed to help you progress at your own pace and your feedback is used to plan future courses. Many of you have used your new skills and confidence to go on to further training, gain employment or volunteer to help the centre. The centre has already planned to support more of you to become volunteers and we have asked them to make sure that they progress this work. Some of you are involved in the parents' forum and make a valuable contribution to the centre by acting as ambassadors and sharing ideas. The centre is good at seeking feedback from users and listens to your views carefully. However, there are no users represented on the advisory board to ensure your views are heard directly.

The centre provides a wide range of play and learning sessions for you and your children to experience together. There are also opportunities for those of you who have concerns about your children's speech and language to seek advice and make sure that your children are well supported at an early stage if they need any

additional help. You told us how much you enjoy sessions such as 'Crafty Crew' and feel that your children benefit from them by learning how to share and get along well with other children. We talked with some of you about the folders you are keeping to record your children's progress and identify their next steps in learning. We have asked staff to make sure that when they are planning, they take more account of your children's interests and stage of development and that they are clear about what their own role in the sessions should be so that your children benefit even more from these sessions.

Some of you took your children to the 'Flying Start' sessions before they started nursery at Somercotes Infants School but these were attended by less than half the children starting nursery. We have asked the centre to find ways to provide opportunities for more children to participate in sessions which will help them to be ready to learn when they start nursery.

Leaders and managers of the centre use the information they receive from the local authority and the feedback that you provide very effectively to develop the services they offer, assess how well they are doing and to set targets for improvement. These targets have been chosen well to ensure the centre is effective in helping you to improve your lives and those of your children. The advisory board regularly monitors how well the centre is progressing towards meeting its targets and its members are very skilful at identifying when there are new priorities so that the centre needs to change what is on offer.

Thank you very much for your welcome and for taking the time to talk with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and sharing your experiences. We wish you every success in the future.

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