

Milton Keynes Cluster Seven Children's Centre Group

Little Owls Children's Centre, Redgrave Drive, Oxley Park, Milton Keynes, MK4 4TA

Inspection dates	19–20 March 2015
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This group of centres is good.

- As a result of very close working relationships with the partners, most targeted groups, such as lone parents, those living in workless households and two-year-old children eligible for free education, take advantage of a range of services.
- Staff are very experienced and empathetic. They provide good quality care, support and advice that help parents and carers to develop good parenting skills and support their children.
- The quality of services and activities is good and in some cases outstanding. As a result children are well prepared for school and make a successful start to life.
- Leaders have made good investment in supporting parents and carers to obtain employment by employing a dedicated worker. Staff prepare parents and carers well for employment.
- Leaders, managers and governors have high aspirations for the parents, carers and children within the cluster. Since the reorganisation of services in September 2014, they have made rapid improvements to provide good service across all children's centres.
- Thoughtfully planned and newly built, all centres are hubs of the community. They offer a pleasant and welcoming environment where children and families feel safe and make use of facilities.

This children's centre group is not yet outstanding because:

- Managers do not receive sufficiently accurate data from partners such as Jobcentre Plus, the health service and the police to help them establish baselines and set precise targets.
- Leaders and managers are not sufficiently analytical in their approach to the self-evaluation of the provision, hindering their ability to improve the service even more rapidly.
- Staff do not provide sufficient guidance to parents and carers to reinforce the skills learnt routinely. Not all parents and carers are able to continue to support their children with their skills development.
- The centre managers are unable to meet the demand for more services due to a shortage of venues in the locality. The places for early years childcare in some localities are limited.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to make sure that it establishes a data-sharing agreement with the health service, Jobcentre Plus and the police to obtain accurate and precise baseline data on families who need help and support, so that staff and managers can identify these families quickly, set precise and measurable targets to meet their needs and evaluate the cluster's effectiveness accurately.
- To ensure the acceleration of improvements, leaders and managers should develop a more analytical approach to self-evaluation so that they can focus their efforts sharply on the most critical aspects of the services that the cluster group offers, such as ensuring that there are sufficient places for nursery-age children.
- Work with the local authority to increase the number of places for early years education for two-, three- and four-year-old children as well as identify venues from where the centres can provide their services to families.
- Give parents and carers more guidance and support so that all may continue to offer support to their children at home to consolidate their readiness for school.

Information about this inspection

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

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the Chair of the advisory board, local authority delivery managers, the Early Years consultant, the assistant headteacher of Christ the Sower Ecumenical School, family support workers, the centre group manager, parents and carers, and several partners such as the neighbourhood renewal project and the head of adult education.

The inspectors visited all three centres.

The inspection covered the following centres: Seedlings, Sunshine and Little Owls.

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

Inspection team

Harmesh Manghra, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Anthony Mundy

Additional Inspector

Barbara Saltmarsh

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Milton Keynes local authority restructured its 20 children's centres into seven clusters in September 2014. The Cluster Seven group consists of three children's centres: The Seedlings; Sunshine; and Little Owls. All three centres are based in the urban area of Furzton, Oxley Park and Grange Farm and are within a radius of two miles. The Seedlings Children's Centre is based on the site of Christ the Sower Ecumenical School. The school is subject to separate inspection arrangements and its report can be found at: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The local authority is responsible for the governance of the group. The new Cluster Seven provides a range of services and activities that include family support, health services, adult learning and family play sessions. Approximately 3,500 children under the age of five live in the predominantly urban area.

The majority of families are of White British heritage, with 42% from a wide range of minority groups, including recently arrived economic migrants from Eastern European countries. Multi-national companies in Milton Keynes employ relatively large numbers of migrant workers.

The locality has lower levels of unemployment than the national average. High-level skills are required in the local economy and the demand for skilled workers remains high. The wages in the hospitality industry, where most new migrants enter employment, are lower than the national average. The population has a high degree of social mobility.

The levels of deprivation in the locality are low. The locality has high birth rates. This has meant that more new homes are built in the area. Little Owls and Seedlings children's centres are in areas of future growth to include Tattenhoe Park to the Western Expansion Area.

The proportion of young children living in households dependent on workless benefits is relatively low. The proportion of children entering early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities are above local and national averages. The area has no pregnant teenagers or teenage mothers. The cluster does not have any children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

The main priority groups for the Cluster are: lone parents; children living in workless and benefit dependent households; and children eligible for funding for two-year-olds.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families Good

- Staff and managers have consistently increased the registration of families with children under five years of age to good levels. Managers have accurately identified the cluster priority families as workless parents and carers on benefits, lone parents and those with children under the age of eligible for free education. A very large majority from these groups are registered with the cluster and benefit from a wide range of services.
- Parents and carers promote the services of the children's centre well to families who are new to the area. Staff use home visits effectively to contact families who find it hard to access services due to low confidence. Attendance at activities is good.
- Staff work very closely with the pre-school providers and schools to support eligible families to access early education and childcare. They diligently follow up the recipients of the 'golden ticket' who do not access their free entitlement to early education services, trying to match families with the available places. Places for two-year-olds and school places for three- and four-year-olds are limited.
- Staff and managers have established strong links with partners. They share information well to identify the priority families and their needs. However, they do not have accurate and precise data

from the various agencies to set accurate starting points from which they can measure their progress.

- Using local intelligence, they design a range of programmes to meet the health, education, parenting skills and employment needs of the families. For example, good joint working arrangements with the health service mean that families access seamless services. Ante-natal classes at Seedlings and Little Owls, which are sometimes held in the evenings, prepare mothers well for birth and breastfeeding.
- Strong partnership with the adult education service is working well. As a result, staff run family learning classes, such as Story Sacks, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and some vocational courses.
- The neighbourhood employment partnership works well to support families from priority groups. Through close liaison with the Jobcentre Plus, staff secure valuable information on jobs in advance. Staff prepare parents and carers well to seek jobs through a range of programmes that improve their confidence and provide opportunities for vocational training and volunteering programmes. This has helped many parents and carers to obtain permanent employment.
- Staff track children's progress over time through learning journeys and other means and pass this on to schools. However not all schools get this information. This makes it hard for teachers to plan more challenging work for the children from the outset.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Staff plan their sessions particularly well with clear objectives and a broad range of activities that engage parents, carers and children fully. They enjoy singing and role play, which develop well children's confidence and language skills. Almost all sessions contribute to a good level of development for children, such in as speech, language and social skills. All children achieve equally well.
- The quality of 'Stay and Play' sessions for all families is outstanding. Parents and carers receive detailed information on the vocabulary the children will learn during the session and the way they can reinforce this learning at home. However not all staff give sufficient guidance to parents and carers on what learning has taken place in each session and how they can accelerate their child's development and learning at home.
- Health staff deliver invaluable sessions on ante-natal and post-natal services that help parents or would-be parents to prepare well for the birth of their child and issues such as post-natal depression. Some mothers have benefited from outstanding support for post-natal depression, which has helped to overcome their isolation.
- Parents learn the clear advantages of breastfeeding for their babies from high-quality sessions. Most adopt breastfeeding enthusiastically. They learn useful hints and tips and apply this knowledge to breastfeed and wean their babies. They also learn their legal rights at work for breastfeeding.
- Parents and carers enjoy highly interactive sessions on healthy eating, cooking and exercise. They learn to cook healthily with their children, using fresh ingredients. This is helping parents and carers to develop good eating habits among children in order to prevent obesity.
- Parents, carers and grandparents benefit from very useful first-aid courses. They gain the knowledge and skills that they can use confidently in case of an emergency at home.
- Staff work very sensitively with women who suffer domestic violence. They help them to recognise the triggers of violence, gain confidence, become assertive and protect themselves and their children. A bespoke domestic violence course, 'Ilam-e-Hifazat', for a group of Asian women has helped them explore some of the cultural barriers. The women have begun to make use of various services to benefit their children.
- Staff provide good support and guidance to parents and carers to develop their confidence and parenting skills. Several parents and carers have undertaken childcare and child development courses and progressed to higher education and employment. Managers promote volunteering among parents and carers as a stepping stone towards employment.
- ESOL classes help parents and carers from minority ethnic communities to better understand the

norms and culture of Britain. The classes help them to develop good listening and speaking skills to interact with the staff, other parents and carers and their children. This helps ease the transition of their children into school.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have set a clear vision and mission for the children's centres. The strong commitment from politicians of all parties to maintain children's centre services has helped managers to consolidate the services.
- The chair of the advisory board of Sunshine Children's Centre is very knowledgeable of the area. He takes keen interest in supporting the staff and challenging the managers to do better. The managers are still working to establish a cluster-wide advisory board.
- Governance is strong. While evaluating the performance of the cluster, local authority managers involve main partners in the process to conduct review against a range of key performance indicators. This engenders greater accountability from all partners to support the work of the cluster.
- The cluster manager is inspirational. She enables her staff to deliver the very clear vision and mission of the centres, focusing on ensuring that children and young people in the cluster have a happy, healthy, safe and successful start in life.
- A good range of training has helped staff to improve their knowledge and skills to provide high-quality service. Training plans link very closely to the centres' priorities. Staff and managers are held to account by the chair of the advisory board and local authority officers for their performance against targets.
- Managers and staff make good use of parents', carers' and children's views to identify needs through a variety of methods to design and improve the provision. End-of-term parties, organised by parents and carers, foster good relations and provide opportunities for them to learn about each other's cultures.
- Learning resources and the learning environment at all centres are outstanding. At Little Owls, children enjoy 'mud kitchen', water play and gardening as well as an extensive range of toys and books. Good use is made of outside areas to support learning in other centres.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good with strong focus on keeping children and families safe. Staff including volunteers are checked for their suitability to work with children. Staff have good awareness of safeguarding issues. Most case files contain high-quality information and indicate good or developing outcomes for families.
- Managers do not have accurate and reliable data on various aspects such as live births, immunisation, workless households and domestic violence. The data on obesity levels and accidents are out of date. It is difficult to set targets and measure their progress against them.
- Managers produce a detailed and descriptive review of the services but this lacks critical evaluation on the quality and impact of services on families and children, to which the lack of hard data contributes significantly. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than the grades proposed in the self-evaluation.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
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Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and, as a result, inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's well-being and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Group details

Unique reference number	85387
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	453936
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,500
Group manager	Ann Train
Date of previous inspection	No previous inspection
Telephone number	01908 520261
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This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21229 Sunshine Children's Centre
- 21284 Seedlings Children's Centre
- 22295 Little Owls Children's Centre

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