

Charnwood Children's Centre Programme in Leicestershire

Shelthorpe Children's Centre, Woodthorpe Road, Loughborough, LE11 2NF

Inspection date		4–6 March 2014	
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
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 is a good centre.

- Very strong partnerships between the group, Charnwood Borough Council, Leicestershire County Council and health agencies result in Charnwood families having access to a good range of services and activities in the heart of their communities. Recent years have seen a rapid increase in families' registering with the group and their use of what it has to offer because of this community focus.
- Services and activities are good quality. They are thoughtfully planned so that families receive highly appropriate support and guidance from them.
- Children and adults using group services make good progress in their personal development. Children who are vulnerable to falling behind their peers are well supported to attend good quality play and learning activities with their parents to help them prepare for school. An excellent example of adult progress is the outstanding development and progression of volunteers in the area, some of whom have moved into employment or higher education.
- The safety of families is a primary concern of the group. All of its buildings are well-maintained, safe and secure. Staff are attentive to and understand well procedures to protect the welfare of children and vulnerable adults in the area served by the group.

It is not outstanding because:

- Outcomes for families in the Charnwood area as a whole are improving year on year, however, there are pockets, most notably in the Cobden area, where they are not improving rapidly enough.
- The measure of engagement of families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable is too narrow and focuses only on the most intensive work packages of guidance and support they receive. It does not count vulnerable families' use of other group services and activities, consequently engagement appears low.
- It is known that there are inconsistencies in how supervision records and case records are reviewed and kept and new processes are being introduced. Their effectiveness is yet to be seen. As a result, some issues, such as a small number of families experiencing a delay between a case being allocated to a family outreach worker and them being contacted, are not identified quickly enough.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Anstey Sure Start Children's Centre, Cobden Sure Start Children's Centre, Loughborough West Sure Start Children's Centre, Mountsorrel Sure Start Children's Centre, Shelthorpe Sure Start Children's Centre, Shepshed Sure Start Children's Centre and Thurmaston Sure Start Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff and representatives of the local authority, the locality partnership group, partners and commissioned service providers.

The inspectors visited all of the children's centres in the group, Anstey United Reformed Church, Baxtergate and The Moira Centre.

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

Inspection team

Joanne Smith	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maxine Mayer	Her Majesty's Inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector
Alan Comerford-Dunbar	Additional inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Charnwood Children's Centre group operates from seven main sites across Loughborough. The group is managed by the local authority. Private day care providers run nurseries on five sites. Beacon Nursery EY460601 at Shelthorpe Sure Start Children's Centre; Cobden Pre-school EY396750 at Cobden Sure Start Children's Centre; Superstars Activity Club EY439357 at Mountsorrel Sure Start Children's Centre; Tiddlywinks EY335541 at Thurmaston Sure Start Children's Centre and The Oak Treehouse EY360642 at Shepshed Sure Start Children's Centre. These are subject to separate inspections and their reports can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Charnwood Children's Centre group has operated the seven centres in the area under one manager since it opened in 2007. The centre serves an area that is approximately 20 miles from north to south. It serves a varied range of communities, including the densely populated town centre with a large student population, and smaller rural communities.

The group is an integral part of the locality partnership group, which is a multiagency commissioning partnership for children and young people aged 0-19 years. With partners the group delivers parenting advice and support, parent and child activity groups, adult learning, volunteering opportunities and health appointments alongside one to one work for families.

There are around 9120 children aged under five years living in the area served by Charnwood Children's Centre group and the large majority are from a White British background. The area served by the group is in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. Across the area the levels of deprivation vary with Shelthorpe, Cobden, Loughborough West, Mountsorrel and Thurmaston being the most deprived. Worklessness is in line with the county average across the area, however, it is significantly higher in the Cobden area. The number of families dependent on workless benefits is higher than county averages and in Cobden, Loughborough West and Shelthorpe it is significantly higher than county average figures. Around 1350 children under 0-4 years live in households dependent on workless benefits.

Children enter school Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and knowledge in line with or below those expected for their age, this varies across the area served by the group.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve and refine the information collected and used by the group to monitor the engagement of target and vulnerable families so that the group has an even clearer overview on which to base their work.
- Continue to focus the group's work on reducing health and achievement inequalities in areas where outcomes have remained low or been slow to improve.
- Evaluate the changes made to how case files and staff supervision are recorded to ensure they are having the desired impact on timeliness of contact and quality of recording.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Registration and engagement is improving rapidly across the whole of the reach area, including in areas where it has been very low. Work to continue the positive trend continues in earnest in areas such as Mountsorrel and Thurmaston where registration remains stubbornly lower than in other areas. Family outreach workers target these rural areas to promote group services, and activities are delivered in community venues, such as church halls, which are familiar to families.
- Much improved partnerships with the midwifery service are instrumental in the registration and engagement of families. The group now receives a 'notification of new parent' form when women are pregnant, which is used to good effect to risk assess families for any early help they may need. As a result, target and vulnerable families are very well identified and support is offered as soon as possible, for example through attendance at 'Cherub' groups. The group, however, does not capture the engagement of these families well enough.
- Leaders and managers use the information they have about families in the reach area extremely well to provide timely and appropriate service delivery. A good example of this level of scrutiny is the group identifying that too many women suffering domestic abuse were waiting too long for a place on an appropriate programme. The locality partnership group reviewed local resources and identified funding to provide more programmes, leading to reduced waiting times. Women using the domestic abuse programmes experience very positive life changes.
- Most parents of 2-, 3- and 4-year-old children who are eligible for funded early education take up the opportunity for their child to attend a childcare provider. The local authority works hard to encourage parents to choose settings that are good or better. Where parents of 2-year-olds choose a local setting that does not meet these standards the setting is well supported to improve their practice. Children make good progress in their development and are learning skills that prepare them well for life at school.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Partnership working is highly effective in developing new skills for parents and improving their employability and work readiness. Good and strong arrangements are in place to ensure families benefit from programmes of adult learning, work related benefit calculations and personal skills development in order to improve their economic well-being. Rates of achievement and progression to further learning and/or employment are high and local worklessness is significantly reducing.
- Parenting programmes are well designed and outcomes for families on these programmes are highly positive. The very large majority of parents complete their programmes and their personal skill development is carefully monitored, measured and evaluated. Parents gain significant increases in confidence and demonstrate good parenting skills and see improvements in their children's behaviour.
- The group has an outstanding and innovative programme for volunteering delivered through excellent partnership working. The group has an extensive network of volunteers who support many different activities within the children's groups. In particular the well thought through and planned 'Moving on Up' programme provides invaluable salaried work experience for existing volunteers seeking employment. Progression rates of volunteers entering employment or further education are excellent. Volunteers are an essential resource in the group's plans to sustain the good levels of activities offered to families in the future.
- Services and activities are very carefully planned for highly relevant delivery across the Charnwood

area. In Loughborough West, for example, strong emphasis is given to increasing children's skills and knowledge as children in this area do not do as well as their peers in other areas at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Likewise, Cobden is known to have a transient population with a changing ethnic make-up and health outcomes are not improving rapidly enough for families in this area so healthy lifestyles are promoted strongly in an attempt to make a change to this.

- Family outreach workers provide families with very good personalised support and guidance. They use a visually effective progress measurement tool sensitively with families to help them see the progress they make when they are receiving support. Group activities are delivered by partners who plan them very well, in line with the group's requirements. Session leaders are highly skilled at presenting simple and inexpensive play activity ideas and help parents to value children's play as a learning experience. They explain what is happening in easy to understand terms and parents use the ideas they are given in their homes.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have robust and rigorous processes in place to monitor the quality and effectiveness of the services they commission from external partners and providers. Quarterly reports from providers are scrutinised to make sure the group's targets for engagement and impact are being met. Quality of delivery is regularly checked by providers and by the group. Underperformance is tackled effectively and contracts changed or terminated when necessary.
- The group has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses resulting from a performance management cycle that is clear and effective. The group's annual review is conducted by senior officers from the local authority and an honest appraisal of the group's progress against previous targets is produced alongside priorities for the coming year. These are highly visible in the group's development plan, which then feeds into the service commissioning cycle.
- The locality partnership group is a successful and effective part of the governance and management of the group. Parents and partners are an integral part of this well-informed group. Their excellent knowledge of the Charnwood area is used well to influence the group's service delivery. Decisions on funding and commissioning services are made after thorough scrutiny of need and of contracts so that the group is getting the best possible value from them.
- Attention to health, safety and welfare in all buildings that make up the group is very strong. Staff are highly attentive to safeguarding practices. Buildings are safe and welcoming and staff make excellent use of wall space to inform, educate and reinforce key messages for staff, visitors and group users.
- The group is a key member of the locality hub, which assesses the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people in Charnwood and agrees who might best meet their needs. When children are subject to child protection, the local team around the child and family processes or child in need plans staff work closely with other key agencies, such as social work teams, to help families to achieve their targets.
- Staff use the relatively new computer based case file record system with varying levels of success. Supervision has not always picked up in a small number of cases when contact with a family after allocation has been delayed. A local authority audit identified similar inconsistencies and as a result new processes and standards are being introduced. Their impact on files is yet to be seen.
- The staff team is well qualified and skilled. Family outreach workers each have a specialism. They are supported very well to extend and improve their specialist knowledge and share this with colleagues

so that all have a broad knowledge base to draw on in their work.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
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 wellbeing 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.

Children's Centre Group details

Unique reference number	80234
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	430100
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	9120
Centre leader	Rachel Sharman
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as a group
Telephone number	0116 305 5241
Email address	rachel.sharman@leics.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20097 Anstey Sure Start Children's Centre
- 20772 Cobden Sure Start Children's Centre
- 21864 Loughborough West Sure Start Children's Centre
- 22067 Mountsorrel Sure Start Children's Centre
- 22683 Shelthorpe Sure Start Children's Centre
- 22687 Shepshed Sure Start Children's Centre
- 23312 Thurmaston Sure Start Children's Centre

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