

Inspection report for Middle Ride Children's Centre

Local authority	Coventry
Inspection number	361066
Inspection dates	07–08 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Linda Killman HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Cherrie Russell
Date of previous inspection	First inspection
Centre address	Upper Ride Willenhall Wood Coventry West Midlands CV3 3GL
Telephone number	024 7678 8430
Fax number	
Email address	ccsoutheast@coventry.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Woodlands Nest – full day care and crèche facilities for 30 children from birth to 8 years.

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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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors held meetings with staff, representatives from partner services and local authority representatives, as well as talking informally to parents and carers. They observed the centre's work including: activities provided at the centre and in other nearby venues; documents and policies, safeguarding arrangements and data.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

The centre is located in Coventry south-east serving an area ranked within 30% of the most deprived in the country. Most children enter the nursery with skills below those expected for their age especially in communication, language and literacy. Most families living in the area are White British although most other minority ethnic groups are represented. The centre opened in August 2005 and provides the full core offer of services as a Phase 1 Sure Start children's centre. Accommodation is limited to offices and small community and group rooms. Some activities are held in larger spaces in nearby schools, community centres and the local health centre.

The centre has access to a crèche room in the John White community centre. Funded full day care is provided onsite for babies and under-fives at The Woodlands Nest nursery. This provision is subject to a separate inspection. There are close links with other nearby children's centres and some staff work across the bases. The centre manager took up post in September 2009 to manage this and three other children's centres in the locality.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

4

Main findings

This centre is a welcoming place offering a satisfactory range of services and good quality resources which reflect the community's diversity. Operational staff ensure that the centre runs smoothly on a daily basis. The centre manager has been effective in developing relationships between service partners so that they work more cohesively as a team. Children enjoy the activities provided by the centre. These activities are at least satisfactory and sometimes good and enable the children to make satisfactory progress in developing skills and competencies. Parenting strategies are making a positive difference to many parents and to more vulnerable families, with multi-disciplinary work at the heart of the provision. The centre strives to vary the timings and venues for activities to ensure equal access to all and offers free transport to other centres on occasion.

Staffing is under strength owing to reorganisation within the local authority leaving some vacancies that are proving difficult to fill. However, staff demonstrate commitment and flexibility, often working outside their remit to ensure that families are not adversely affected. The local authority is advertising widely to attract applications to fill vacancies. The centre is aware that it is not successfully reaching all groups of potential users. One parent commented, for example, that although the centre was close to where he lived, he was not aware of its existence until recently. He surmised that friends of his would benefit from its services if they knew about it. Development work in this area has been hampered by low staffing levels. Capacity is insufficient for outreach work to make contact with adults and families that are unable or cautious about coming into the centre to access services directly. This has a further impact on the centre manager's workload. Most of her available time is spent responding to immediate need with too little time available to invest in planning for the future. She is willing and skilled but is spread too thinly to manage demand effectively.

The local authority has statutory responsibility for provision, improving outcomes and reducing inequality. It is the centre's accountable body in all legal and financial matters. The local authority provides a clear steer on how it expects children's centres to operate and develop but does not set clear and challenging targets for improvement. It quality assures the centre's work satisfactorily through general meetings with centre managers and an annual conversation about each centre. To inform this discussion, the centre manager undertook a satisfactory evaluation of the centre's work. The centre is moving away from a Partnership Board to an Advisory

Board. Membership has not been finalised although the local authority is ambitious for half the membership to be made up of users, parents and carers who will require training to understand their role. It is not currently operational. Without an advisory board, there is no mechanism at local level to identify the centre's priorities, agree objectives, develop plans, monitor progress and ensure that services meet local needs.

Monitoring and evaluation is not systematic and sufficiently effective. The centre has a fairly accurate picture of the range of its provision and its reach. However, it has not gathered evidence of the impact that its work has on improving outcomes for children, parents, carers and users. In addition, inspectors found that record keeping systems and policies are not checked regularly enough to ensure that they are up to date and meet with the latest requirements. Parents assured inspectors that they feel safe and secure in the building and that their children are safe when accessing childcare provision and activities. All staff know how to keep children safe and risk assessments to reduce potential dangers are frequent. There are good referral systems in place and effective procedures for the sharing of information. Inspectors found that the centre's arrangements for child protection are secure but that systems for checking safeguarding records and policies are insufficiently robust.

The capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate because of inherent weaknesses in self-evaluation and future planning. Leadership and management responsibilities are insufficiently dispersed to be sustainable. There is no advisory board currently in place to contribute to the centre's work and act as its critical friend.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- As a matter of urgency, secure effective accountability arrangements by:
 - establishing the advisory board with appropriate representation by key partners
 - providing training for members so that they understand their remit and the terms of reference
 - providing the board with the information it needs to question and hold the centre accountable.
- Develop effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the centre's work by ensuring that:
 - all stakeholders and key partners contribute
 - the focus is on the impact of the centre's work on improving outcomes
 - policies and records, especially for safeguarding, are regularly checked.
- At the earliest opportunity, develop a written plan linked to the centre's evaluation of its services to include:

- contributions for stakeholders and partners
- priorities and sharp targets for improving outcomes and provision
- clear criteria by which the centre can demonstrate the impact of its actions
- timings, with key milestones, clearly and appropriately identified
- identification of when and how progress will be evaluated.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The centre does not evaluate outcomes for the reach area that it serves well enough to provide unequivocal evidence of improvement. However, through direct observations of activities, scrutiny of case studies and discussions with staff, partner agencies, parents and carers, inspectors were able to gather sufficient evidence to support the judgement that outcomes are satisfactory.

Parents and carers are increasing their understanding of healthy lifestyles by attending activities such as baby senses class. Here babies are introduced to a very wide range of stimuli that they find fascinating. Parents bond very closely with their children enjoying, for example, their time in the sensory room where together they explore light, textures and music. The babies are alert, adventurous and clearly stimulated by the experience.

Parents told inspectors that, through attending stay and play and the Saturday dad's club, they now relied less on television and video games to entertain their children and that their children were enjoying more creative activities. In addition, they are guided satisfactorily towards introducing their children to a wider range of healthy foods. However, there is limited promotion of the value of energetic play.

Children were observed to behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others and they make satisfactory progress in their personal development. Children in the nursery make satisfactory progress in developing their skills to help them when they start school. Parenting strategies and training are making a positive difference to more vulnerable families. Courses are offered in parenting skills and first aid and uptake is high.

Users have a reasonable range of opportunities to express their views about the activities they attend through feedback forms, post-it notes and discussions with staff. In sessions, parents from different cultures and backgrounds demonstrate respect and tolerance towards each other contributing to cohesion in the community. Nonetheless, the centre is not yet reaching a wide enough range of groups especially teenage parents and pregnant young women.

Children who speak English as an additional language and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. Good liaison with health care professionals such as the early-years mental health worker and speech and

language therapists actively supports timely intervention and the development of learning programmes tailored to need. This ensures that the children progress satisfactorily in developing skills for their future lives.

The centre has not measured the impact of training opportunities, such as development of employability skills, or tracked the outcomes for those it has signposted to other agencies. A few users have progressed to becoming volunteers in the centre to develop skills and enhance opportunities for their future employment.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre provides an adequate range of services particularly in improving outcomes for children under five years. Signposting to nursery provision is good with effective procedures in place for managing referrals to nursery provision through other services. A satisfactory range of activities are provided for babies, toddlers and infants. However the range of users accessing services is too narrow. Work with teenagers who are pregnant and other young people is in early stages of development. There is no coordination of information on outcomes for children in workless households.

The well-organised and effective 'Raise, Share, Review' process involves a wide range of professional partners in assessing, monitoring and reviewing the needs of families and children whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Assessment of individual needs is thorough and well documented. This forum demonstrates a good understanding of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) that is used effectively to identify services and action that leads to improvement in children's welfare, health and well-being. Effective multi-agency working ensures that families access the appropriate support. This, plus staff's good understanding of the CAF, ensures that care is well coordinated and reduces the burden of repetition.

A reasonable number of lone parents and families whose children have special educational needs and/or disabilities are accessing services. One lone parent with no help from an extended family praised the centre's support highly. 'The list is endless of how much the centre supports me.' She particularly appreciates the quick response she receives from staff and services in times of crisis. She has learned how to manage her own health and to protect her children from harm.

Achievements are celebrated. The family nurturing course enhances parents' and their children's self-esteem. Praise and reward are central to the course and this is enjoyed by both. Through the course, parents learn about behaviour and the impact of their actions on their children's lives. One parent commented 'It has opened my eyes to where I have gone wrong. I wish my parents had had the chance to go on it'. Similarly, when staff gain qualifications through study and training to enhance the quality of provision, the centre celebrates.

Childminders benefit from the continuous support and resources within the children's centre and find that the social contact for them and the children they care for is beneficial. The centre recognises them as valuable childcare providers and supports parents to access childminder placements if they are more appropriate than group care for children.

First time parents are offered appropriate advice and support. One father commented on how his partner had been supported well by the centre to continue breastfeeding through a difficult period. The centre supports parents during times of crisis. They support their applications for housing and safety equipment ensuring children's safety and well-being are prioritised. A user confirmed the good care and advice she received when faced with domestic abuse.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

The local authority introduced a new model for children's centre delivery last August in an attempt to achieve more consistency, improve reach numbers and ensure that equality is promoted. This resulted in new team responsibilities under new management at Middle Ride. The centre manager is clear about the local authority's commitment to the concept of integrated service provision and is an advocate of a

multi-disciplinary approach to provision, building the team around the child. She is the driving force behind successful team building that has brought partner services together so that information is shared profitably in the best interests of users.

Professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements for staff within the centre are satisfactory. Centre staff demonstrate that they understand the work of the centre and are now working with a common purpose, often showing willingness to step in beyond their remit and cover gaps in provision. They receive appropriate training to develop their professional skills, knowledge and understanding.

Keeping children and users safe is a priority for staff. The centre intervenes swiftly in response to need and is quick to recognise mental and emotional health issues so that appropriate action is taken. Nonetheless, monitoring arrangements are not rigorous enough to ensure that documentation and records are kept up to date and comply with the latest requirements. Staff contribute to risk assessments and secure arrangements are in place for staff's safety when working away from the centre.

Leadership and management is too dependant upon the centre manager. Responsibilities are not shared equitably. The centre's development is compromised by the absence of an advisory board with appropriate representation by parents, users, staff and partners services to strengthen accountability and shape the centre's work at a local level. This has also meant that much of the leadership and management's work in the past year has been reactive. Too little time, at all levels has been invested in improvement. Monitoring arrangements are ineffective in providing hard evidence of its effectiveness. Thus the centre's view of its strengths and weaknesses is weak. No ambitious targets are set to aspire to, underpinned by a robust plan for development with timings and key milestones, clearly and appropriately identified.

The centre promotes diversity which is celebrated through resources and staffing that reflects different faiths, cultures and backgrounds. Parents and users from minority ethnic backgrounds use the centre as widely and confidently as those from the ethnic majority.

The accommodation is clean, well-kept and welcoming. Resources for children's learning and development are of good quality but some, such as the high quality sensory room, are underused. Finances are managed competently. Outcomes and provision are satisfactory, thus, despite some considerable weaknesses in leadership and management, the centre is providing satisfactory value for money.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	4
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider	4

community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	4
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	4
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

The care inspection of early years provision carried out in September 2007 at The Woodlands Nest under Part XA Children Act 1989, as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000, and under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Actions taken to address the quality and standards of care and education recommendations from the report have contributed to the judgement on capacity to improve in this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Middle Ride children's centre on 7 and 8 July 2010. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Like you, we were greeted with a warm welcome when we arrived at the centre and found staff very communicative and helpful. Many of you confirmed how supportive and responsive staff are to your needs. We gathered evidence to confirm that you are very satisfied with the service you receive. We were particularly impressed by how well the centre staff work together to ensure that you receive the right support and advice quickly. Some of you commented that you have lived close to the centre

for a long time but didn't realise what it could offer until recently. We think that it could do more to reach out to others in the community who could benefit.

We found that the centre helps you to understand how to keep your children healthy and safe. The centre protects your children appropriately but it doesn't always check carefully enough that paperwork is up to date so that it complies with requirements.

The centre provides helpful courses on how to develop your parenting skills which improves your relationship with your children. Some of you told us that taking part in them has helped you to learn about the importance of play and find new ways of entertaining your children. The children themselves hugely enjoyed their sessions and we were impressed by your willingness to join in.

The centre runs smoothly on a daily basis and the new centre manager is ensuring that you are not affected adversely by staff shortages at the centre. However, the centre's leadership and management is not currently strong enough at all levels to ensure that it continues to improve. The leadership and management are too thinly spread to spend enough time on planning for the future and setting targets to aim for. The centre needs to put an advisory board in place as a matter of urgency to look after its interests. The local authority is keen that half of the board's membership is made up by parents and users. So, if you would like to have an input and help to shape the centre's future for you and other families in the community, tell someone at the centre! We have asked the centre to check how much of a difference its work is making to your and your children's lives.

It was a pleasure to meet many of you during the inspection. Those of you that we talked to are strong supporters of the centre. We hope that you, your children and many more parents and carers who live in Willenhall and surrounding areas will continue to enjoy and benefit from all of the services available to you in the future. Thank you for contributing to our evidence base by sharing your comments and thoughts so openly.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman

Her Majesty's Inspector

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