

Inspection report for East Staffordshire Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	361076
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Anthony O'Malley

Centre governance	Management Advisory Board
Centre leader	Peter Gerrard
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	East Staffordshire Children's Centre Nursery Roundabout Special Needs Nursery

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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.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

East Staffordshire Children's Centre opened in August 2004. It is a phase 1 children's centre providing nursery, health and outreach support, and vulnerable children's services to families and children in the East Staffordshire area. The centre's hub is in Burton upon Trent and there are various venues within five local areas: De Ferrers, Paget, Paulet, Abbot Beyne and Thomas Alleyne. Three of these areas have elements of significant deprivation and are categorised as lower super output areas.

The area has a rich cultural mix with the highest proportion of Black and minority ethnic residents, and teenage parent residents in Staffordshire. The proportions of adults unemployed and families claiming benefits are close to the national averages.

The nursery operates from four rooms within the purpose built building in Burton, delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage. A maximum of 60 children may attend the nursery at any one time including up to 12 places for vulnerable children identified by social services. On entry to the nursery, children's development varies considerably, reflecting the wide range of groups who choose to use its service. However, the proportion of children with skills below those expected for their age is greater than is usually found. Currently, there are 110 children on roll from birth to five years. There are a further 10 places available in Roundabout, a special needs nursery which is registered with Ofsted separately.

The centre is a local authority managed provision which is supported by a

management advisory body comprising parent, statutory and voluntary representatives.

Overall effectiveness

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The children's centre provides a good range of services that bring important benefits to its users and their community. Throughout the inspection, users were keen to share their experiences of how the provision has benefited their families, in some cases helping to transform their lives. Central to these successes are the effective partnerships, most notably with schools, health services, social care, the community and learning partnership, and the voluntary sector. Working closely with these partners the centre is able to offer good quality services to the whole community. It helps many children, especially those who may be disadvantaged in some way, get a good start in life. There are numerous examples of the centre winning the confidence of adults so that many move on from occasional contact to fully accessing universal services. However, the centre has yet to establish systems to that will encourage users, or partner agencies such as schools or colleges, feedback on the long-term impact of their services.

The centre manager has shared successfully his vision of how integrated services can improve lives. The result is a senior leadership team and staff who work tirelessly to provide effective services. Morale is high and relationships between staff and users strong. Despite a lack of clarity over the actual catchment area and a lack of accurate information about the different groups within its reach, an increasing number of users, including fathers, are engaging with the centre. Parents, carers and local residents from minority ethnic groups make good use of services provided. A good number serve as volunteer workers in the centre. Families and individuals also value the integrated support offered through home visits and other outreach work. Services are located in outreach centres, including phase two and three children's centres, and these improve access and broaden the range of support available. There is evidence that these services have a positive impact on children from vulnerable families and on adults with low self-esteem who are struggling to cope.

The centre's partnership with social services to ensure the safety of children is particularly strong. There is a very good understanding of how the common assessment framework helps ensure that those most at risk receive well targeted support at an early stage. The centre has a good record of improving the safety of children subject to a child protection plan. The centre's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is similarly clear. One user who speaks English as an additional language confirmed how dual language speaking staff have enabled her to access a wide range of support for herself and her five children, including advice on housing and benefits.

Children, including those with disabilities, gain much from the imaginative range of activities on offer. They make good progress when attending the nursery or classes such as 'Special Start', 'the Weaning Group' and 'Tantrums to Treats'. In particular, the centre can show how it is improving children's social and emotional development through communication and play activities where children and their parents learn new skills. When they leave the nursery, increasing proportions of children have the communication and personal, social and emotional skills expected of young children.

In this way, the centre is contributing well to their future life chances. However, currently the centre does not receive information detailing how successfully schools build upon these achievements, for example, by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre is contributing to the long-term goal of reducing child poverty through the advice it gives on benefit entitlement and training, but recognises that stronger links with Jobcentre Plus would add further to adult users' employment opportunities.

There is a wide representation of partners on the Management Advisory Board and the board provides both challenge and support to the senior leadership team. The senior leadership team evaluates accurately the effectiveness of the centre and the system for recording the impact of services supports their role as quality assurers. However, at present monitoring and evaluation highlight qualitative outcomes more clearly than quantitative outcomes. This is mainly because the centre does not have sufficient data to measure some of its outcomes, for example, smoking cessation or the percentage of mothers, supported through the centre, initiating and sustaining breastfeeding. A relative weakness of leadership and management is the quality of improvement planning. It identifies 95 priorities but these lack precise targets and measurable success criteria and so do not clearly demonstrate the centre's ambition to provide an even more successful service. However, the accuracy of self-evaluation, the quality of the services observed, the strength of partnership work and the increasing engagement with users demonstrate the centre's good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should establish agreements with local partners to ensure that the centre has:
 - a clear understanding of the actual catchment area it serves
 - sufficient information about the different groups it serves to be clear about the proportions of users from each group who are benefiting from its services
 - sufficient data, for example from health and education services, to be able to show precisely its impact on outcomes for the whole of the children's centre reach.

- The senior leadership team should review development planning documentation to ensure that:
 - it identifies a manageable number of key priorities that will help achieve its stated aims
 - the management advisory board can track precisely progress made towards clear targets and measurable success criteria.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Users respond well to the centre's promotion of healthy diets and of regular exercise in sessions such as 'Family Food and Fitness'. Breakfasts and lunches cooked on site

are healthy and provide children with nutritious and enjoyable meals. Health workers can point to the sustained impact of sessions to reduce obesity in early childhood, but typically there is limited data to measure precisely the impact of activities. There is a high take up and good retention rates in parenting classes such the 'Weaning Class' and 'Simply Play'. Evaluations and discussions with parents and carers, show that these classes develop successfully the skills necessary to promote healthy lifestyles.

Social workers rightly value the expertise among staff and their commitment to protecting the most vulnerable children. There is good evidence of improved outcomes for children with child protection plans. However, the 12 day-care places available for children referred by social services are not always sufficient to meet the demand. Despite a flexible and imaginative approach to provide additional support for the most needy, occasionally children have to wait before they can benefit fully from the centre's services.

Children make good progress in their personal and social skills, and their communication, language and literacy skills. These gains are the result of well-planned and enjoyable learning in the nursery and family activities such as those focused around the 'Lend and Learn Toy Libraries'. The full range of provision prepares the children well for their futures. Parents and carers also enjoy and achieve well. They benefit from opportunities to gain qualifications in a range of courses for example, First Aid, Food and Hygiene, and the Next Step computer courses. The centre is aware, however, that the lack of information about the population it serves means that it may be not be engaging as fully with all groups as it would wish. It also recognises that there remains scope to increase adult involvement in training and education.

The Parents' Forum is a very inclusive group and has a strong voice in decision-making and governance of the centre. Its membership reflects the range of social and ethnic groups who use the centre. Adults who were initially lacking in confidence and self-esteem are now among its most active members. It, and other groups, contribute strongly to community cohesion in the locality while initiatives such as the Krizevac Project make links between the centre and families in the wider world.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2

The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2
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How good is the provision?

2

Strong links with its partners enables the centre to understand its users' needs well and tailor services accordingly. For example, a referral from a health worker led to one lone parent providing better care for her child following input at her home by the Health and Support Family Team to improve parenting skills. Later on, Connexions helped to secure voluntary work opportunities for the mum, and the Citizen's Advice Bureau provided advice enabling her to deal with debt and receive her benefit entitlement. Mum is now caring well for her child who will shortly start full time school.

The 'Friday's 4 You' sessions and the 'Young Dads' project' are helping young parents enjoy parenthood and benefit from expert advice on health related matters. Other parents spoke very positively about provision for babies born prematurely and for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, the Sahara group provides carefully targeted outreach support to Asian families with young children who have additional needs, while the Roundabout Nursery offers a caring and stimulating environment for children up to the age of five who require additional support with their development.

Participation rates across the range of services have increased significantly over the last two years. The centre is aware, however, that gaps in its data about the area it serves may mean that, despite imaginative efforts to publicise its services, some vulnerable families may be missing out on provision that could improve their lives.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements are well established and all major partners are active members of the Management Advisory Board. Reports by the senior leadership team and minutes of the meetings of the board demonstrate a strong commitment to securing effective services and the efficient use of public funds. Regular meetings

between the centre and its partners, for example the monthly breakfast meetings with staff from the health agencies, support the successful implementation of service level agreements and ensures that the centre is responsive to emerging local needs. Appropriate performance management systems are in place for centre staff, but the centre does not contribute to the performance management systems of its partners. There is accurate self-evaluation of services that identifies appropriate areas for development. However, although the centre's development plan takes these evaluations into account it fails to emphasise the key priorities and the precise outcomes it is striving for in the year ahead.

The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the centre's vision. Positive images and resources, reflecting all members of the community, highlight the centre's determination to reach out to groups who may be subject to discrimination. Staffing reflects the diversity of the community. Users' and staff safety and security are a priority and the centre's safeguarding practice, across all areas of its work, is good. Users can point to striking examples of how they have participated in decision-making. For example, a very significant improvement in the provision for indoor play, to open in July, is a direct response to issues raised by the Parents' Forum.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	2

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

The inspection of registered early years provision carried out in July 2009 judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to be good with outstanding elements. Actions taken to address the recommendations from the early years inspection have contributed to the judgement on capacity to improve in this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the East Staffordshire Children's Centre on 26–27 May 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

The children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping children and families in East Staffordshire. Throughout the inspection, parents and carers were keen to tell us how they had benefited from support provided by the centre. We were also impressed by the very positive comments users made about the services on offer and the case studies that show how lives have been transformed through links with the centre.

The centre is working very well with partners such as schools, health and social care and offers good quality services to the whole community. It helps many children, especially those who may be disadvantaged in some way, get a good start in life. There are also many examples of the centre winning the confidence of adults so that many move on from occasional contact and become regular users of the centre. Parents, carers and local residents from minority ethnic groups make good use of services provided. A good number serve as volunteer workers in the centre. Families and individuals also value the support offered through home visits and other outreach work. It is quite easy for families to access the support available because the centre provides services all around the local area.

The centre works closely with social services to ensure the safety of children. It has a good record of improving the safety of children subject to a child protection plan. The centre's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is similarly clear. Children, including those with disabilities, gain much from the imaginative range of activities on offer. They make good progress when attending the nursery or classes such as 'Special Start', 'the Weaning Group' and 'Tantrums to Treats'. In particular, the centre can show how it is improving children's development through communication and play activities where children and their parents learn new skills. When they leave the nursery, increasing proportions of children have the skills

expected of young children. In this way, the centre is contributing well to their future life chances.

The Parents' Forum is a very effective body for helping users give their views about services and suggest ways of improving things. The building work currently taking place shows the impact parents and carers have on decision-making. Parents and carers are represented on the Management Advisory Board which provides both challenge and support to the senior leadership team. The senior leadership team evaluates accurately the effectiveness of the centre and has the qualities necessary to improve the centre still further.

The inspectors have made these recommendations to help improve the centre.

- The local authority should help the centre get full information about the area it serves so that it can be sure that all groups are equally benefiting from its services and can measure more accurately the impact of its services.
- The centre should identify more clearly the important things it wishes to improve in the future and state precisely how these improvements will benefit children and other users.

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