

Inspection report for Mansfield Woodhouse Children's Centre

Local authority	Nottinghamshire
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Reporting inspector	Tim Bristow HMI

Centre governance	Local partnership board
Centre leader	Lisa Buxton
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

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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

This is a phase 1 children's centre providing the core offer to a community which is in one of the 30% most deprived wards in the country. The centre provides a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training and early year's advice and guidance. It takes referrals from, and supports families with, children in five local schools and two Early Years Foundation Stage Settings. The centre coordinator manages the services provided by the centre and coordinates those provided by its partners. The local authority is responsible for the performance management of staff in the centre and the local partnership board is responsible for overseeing the day to day running of the centre and its strategic development. Currently Nottinghamshire is in the process of reviewing its governance arrangements. The centre does not have on site Early Years Foundation Stage provision. Onsite crèche facilities which are registered on the voluntary part of the Childcare Register are provided.

Within the community served by the children's centre there are 15 super-output areas. Four are within the 20% most deprived areas in England and three within the 10% most deprived areas. The large majority of families are of White British heritage. Evidence indicates that the skills and knowledge with which children enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage settings are below those expected nationally for their age.

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 outcomes for users are good overall. This is because of strong centre leadership that has ensured that families, particularly those that are vulnerable, benefit from a range of good quality services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs. Consequently, the centre has successfully improved the health, safety and economic well-being of vulnerable and disadvantaged families and their children who take advantage of its services. As one parent reported, explaining the benefits the centre has brought to her family 'I am looking forward now, we are a happy confident family'. Presently, procedures for safeguarding are comprehensive and robust. The centre is rightly recognised by users as a place of safety.

The extent to which users contribute to the decision making and governance of the centre is satisfactory. The centre encourages adults to take part and values their evaluations of services, making changes in response to their views. However, too few are involved with governance and important decision making because they are not yet as well engaged with the responsibility for the centre or work in the wider community as they could be.

One reason that provision is good is because of the thorough procedures for assessing the needs of users, and in particular the disadvantaged and vulnerable families. These procedures have been successfully established because of the good partnerships between the early year's staff, family support workers (FSW), social care and the health visitors and other partner agencies that are responsible for users' health, safety and economic well-being. Parents and carers, particularly those with complicated needs cannot speak highly enough of the quality of the care, guidance and support that they receive which is outstanding. As one user reported, 'I was in a very dark place, but I am now very positive about the future. I wouldn't be, without the centre's support, guidance and understanding.'

The children's centre demonstrates good capacity for improvement. The leadership of the centre coordinator is very good. She demonstrates a passion and relentless determination to improve the life chances of families in the local community. In this she is ably supported by a very strong team that work extremely effectively together and with their partners. As one worker explained, 'We are all very proud to work here.' In consequence, the lives of the large majority of vulnerable users have been

improved greatly because of the success of the centre's work.

The improvement plans show that priorities are based on a sound understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for further development. This is because the centre understands the needs of its users very well. However, centre leaders have correctly identified that better use could be made of information about the community and the outcomes of their work with families to sharpen up their priorities for improvement.

The local authority has successfully established robust procedures for supervising staff and holding them to account for the quality of their work. The partnership board demonstrates a good understanding of the work of the centre and its priorities within Mansfield Woodhouse. However, it does not yet take sufficient responsibility to oversee the strategic development of the centre or for holding it to account for its work.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the contribution of users to the governance of the centre by identifying how to increase their engagement and influence in its work.
- Strengthen evaluation procedures by making more effective use of information available so that the centre is better able to demonstrate its achievements and can identify more specifically how they will judge the success of improvements made.
- Strengthen the partnership board's understanding of its strategic responsibilities so that it is more effective in holding the centre to account for its work.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The emotional well-being of users is greatly improved by their engagement with the centre. Parents, such as those who have suffered from mental health problems or post-natal depression are particularly well cared for. As one parent reported. 'I think I would have cracked up without the centre's support.' Local health services held at the centre, such as the baby clinic, are effective in ensuring that parents gain good advice which they appreciate is improving their parenting skills.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted well though successful initiatives such as the Baby Bistro where parents and carers are taught how to prepare healthy meals for babies. The Little Roots project is an excellent initiative that is making a very important contribution to the lives of users and the wider community. Parents and their children were observed being given excellent advice and taking part in growing vegetables on the centre allotment. Parents spoken to are now growing vegetables in their gardens or coming to the allotment regularly for advice and to work on the land. The term allotment does not adequately describe the very exciting and stimulating environment that has been created for users of all ages to learn and play.

Users are well taught how to behave in ways which are safe for themselves and others. For example, there is very good advice given in the baby massage sessions for parents on how to deal with colic. Vulnerable families, for example, those with children on the child protection register or who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported through procedures such as the Common Assessment framework (CAF). Partner agencies, such as social care regularly use the centre for meetings because they recognise that families feel safe and secure in this environment.

The social skills of children in the community are improving well. Successful initiatives such as the transition project led by the centre in partnership with local Early Years Foundation Stage settings have contributed to this. As one Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator of a local school reported, 'The behaviour of vulnerable children who have been helped by the centre is better so that they settle in well.' The speaking and listening skills of children are improving well. The centre, in partnership with the speech therapists, have worked successfully with parents and their two year old children to strengthen their communication skills so that they are now better prepared for learning when they enter the local nurseries.

The many adults spoken to report how much they enjoy the courses they have successfully completed and are very proud of their achievements. Users benefit from a range of courses carefully designed to improve their economic well-being. For example, users had benefitted from courses to improve their self esteem, such as assertiveness training before then embarking on literacy and numeracy courses to improve their basic skills. There is now a regular stream of users attending the local college in preparation for work, and a minority have gained full-time employment. As one parent reported 'I have even started looking for a job which I never even dreamed of doing before coming to the centre. It has given me my confidence back.'

A few users now have the confidence to sit on the partnership board and there are a growing number of them that are trained to do voluntary work in the centre, such as acting as learning champions. A few now have voluntary roles in the community, such as school governors. The centre regularly acts on the opinions of its users to improve provision. It rightly recognises that users now need to take more responsibility for the centre's work and need to be better included in the important decision making processes.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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	2

their personal and social development	
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The care, guidance and support for users are outstanding because of the extremely safe and nurturing environment created in the centre that is successfully fostering considerable improvements in the well-being of users. All staff are very aware of the contribution they must make to this work. For example, well trained administration staff ensures that all users receive a very warm welcome, because of their awareness of the crucial importance of this first contact. As one user reported, 'I know that if I ever need advice there is always someone there to help.'

Observations and the recent inspection reports identify that Childcare within the Centre and that delivered by its partners is good with a number of outstanding features. Childcare offered within the centre's crèche through 'Stay and Play, Little Learners and the Young Parents Group are excellent. Children make rapid progress, and parents/carers are supported and praised, leading to a strong sense of empowerment and achievement.

Some very effective multi-agency work, such as with the mental health, counselling, benefits advice and debt counselling services, combined with the carefully integrated services provided by the centre ensures that the needs of vulnerable families are met extremely well. For example, one parent has now gained tax credits and reports that, 'centre staff arranged for an advisor to meet them at the centre, without their help I would not have made a claim as our knowledge of benefits was small to none.'

Centre staff match detailed assessments of users needs with a thorough understanding of different services and agencies so that they very effectively target provision to users. Partner agencies recognise that this is a centre strength which enables them to work more effectively with users. For example, the local college appreciates that the centre nurtures and fosters confidence in users and develops their basic skills so that they are well prepared for training courses. It is appreciated by the college that without this crucial foundation work users would be unlikely to embark successfully on their courses.

The very positive attitude of centre staff to the achievements of users has resulted in all adult users spoken to reporting that the centre has raised their confidence and self esteem. For example, the weekly parent's forum is well used by parents to identify the training and help that they require. This is expertly facilitated by the family support and the community involvement worker.

The centre has very thorough outreach procedures for supporting families in crisis, such as those provided by the FSW. This results in these families getting swift support from the appropriate agencies so that they are safe.

Centre staff recognise that they are successfully meeting the needs of the very large majority of users in their area, but are rightfully aware that more could be done to engage a very few families that are still hard to reach.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

One member of the centre staff described the leadership of the coordinator as inspirational. This is certainly supported by the opinions of the many users spoken to. The high quality of supervision that the staff benefit from has been successful in established a very strong sense of common purpose. All staff feel valued and respect the contribution each makes to improving life chances of users. Consequently, the concerted and effective work of the centre has created a safe, friendly environment where there are high expectations of its users. The centre offers good value for money because of the great care taken to provide services for users that are specifically tailored around their needs. This enables the large majority of users to be much safer than they were, and has improved their health and economic well-being.

The centre knows its users very well and can demonstrate its success on an individual and activity basis because of regular evaluations by users and centre staff. It does not use the available information sufficiently well when demonstrating whether it is more successful than in previous years. For example, the centre improvement plan rightly identifies the need to continue to increase the rate of breast feeding amongst mothers, and has demonstrated success in the past and good links with the relevant health partners in order to do this. However, its criteria for success are not sufficiently sharp enough because current information about breast feeding in the area has not been included in the plan.

The partnership board is successful in championing the work of the centre to its partners and the local community. This results in the centre's work being increasingly respected in Mansfield Woodhouse. This represents good progress as many people in the community used to hold inaccurate negative views about the centre's work which

was a barrier to them accessing its services.

The local authority rightly identifies that the governance boards are not as effective as they could be and that they need to review and strengthen these arrangements. Consequently, some members of the board are not clear about their responsibilities. For example, members understand the centre's work and the success of the activities that take place, but they do not grasp the strategic purpose of the centre so that they are not equipped to challenge whether the activities provided contribute to its aims for the future. This lack of clarity also means that the engagement of users in shaping the work of the centre and the wider community is less well developed than it could be. Users do have some impact on individual activities and a few are board members, but they are insufficiently engaged at a strategic level to influence the centre's work.

The centre has been successful in breaking down the barriers that vulnerable users experience ensuring the equality of access to services. For example, users reported how isolated they felt before becoming involved in the work of the centre. The centre successfully ensures that the CAF is used effectively so that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the services that they are entitled to. The FSW accurately identified the needs of a group of parents from Eastern Europe and provision has been put in place which has successfully engage them in the work of the centre.

Safeguarding is given high priority by all staff. Good recording ensures children and families who give cause for concerns are well monitored. Presently all policies and procedures are in place to safeguard users and are reviewed annually. The centre provides a very safe environment that is appreciated by all users and partner agencies.

Partnerships are of a high quality because a strong belief in collaborative working is at the heart of the centre's ethos. All agencies speak highly of the centre and demonstrate a commitment to working together. There are a few partnerships that are less well developed than they could be, such as the one with Job Centre Plus. However, the centre has overcome this by establishing a strong link with the local college and other employment agencies to aid users into work and higher education.

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	3
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,	2

illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	
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	3
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	3

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

Inspectors looked at the centre's self evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, minutes of the partnership board and inspection outcomes for the centre childcare, pre school providers and schools with Early Years Foundation Stage children in the centre's reach area. Discussions were held with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies and parents.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Mansfield Woodhouse Children's Centre on 15 and 16 June 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

The strong centre leadership of the coordinator and her dedicated team have provided families with a range of good quality services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs. People that use the centre are now much more able to stay safe and healthy and to provide for their families. The parents we spoke to were particularly proud of their achievements. These ranged from becoming better parents to gaining voluntary or full time work because of the skills they learnt at the centre. The children that use the centre are also well catered for. This means that they settle well into the local nurseries and make better progress than they would if they had not benefitted from the centres services. Inspectors think that some of the adults could make a bigger contribution to the life of the centre and the local community if they were offered more opportunities to do so.

Parents told us that they think that the centre is a safe place for them and their children. Inspectors agreed with this view and think that staff work very well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. The centre is also good at helping children in need to be safe by working well with other agencies such as the health service and social services.

The care, guidance and support that families and children receive are excellent. Parents told us over and over again that coming to the centre had increased their confidence and self-esteem. This is because the staff are excellent at helping all parents to decide how to improve their lives and then making sure that they access the right services to do this. Parents also liked the warm friendly atmosphere in the centre and the fact that there is always someone to help when they need advice. Parents who have felt isolated and alone with their problems have made friends as a result of the centre's work.

The centre staff and their partner agencies have provided families with a good range of varied services that cater for all needs. For example, families thoroughly enjoy working and playing on the allotment and adults enjoy attending the parent's forum where they learn many skills that equip them well to improve their lives. The services for children are also good, such as the Little Learners, where they thrive.

The centre is governed by a partner board that has successfully raised the profile of the centre in the community. It could do more to check that all the necessary steps are being taken to make further improvements in the centre's work.

The centre coordinator and other senior staff understand the needs of the families very well and they check regularly that their workers are doing a good job. They are well aware of where they could make more improvements, but do not always pay enough attention to the information they have about the community when making their improvement plans.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements by:

- Providing more opportunities for adults to make an important contribution to the centre's work.
- Using the information about Mansfield Woodhouse more effectively when making plans for improving the centre's work.
- Strengthen the partnership board's role in checking the work of the centre.

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