

Inspection report for Ironville Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	21613
Inspection dates	25–26 May 2010
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Louise Cooke
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	Cinder Bank, Ironville, NG16 5NB
Telephone number	01629 532601
Fax number	
Email address	louise.cooke@derbyshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Ironville and Codnor Park Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Clowns Nursery, Ironville.

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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.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority representatives, staff and parents. Inspectors looked at the centre's self evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, minutes of the advisory board and inspection outcomes for the nursery, pre school providers and schools with reception classes in the centre's reach area.

Information about the centre

The centre is run directly by the local authority after a transfer of management from the Primary Care Trust in 2008. It serves a community which is in one of the 30% most deprived wards in the country. A district manager appointed in June 2007 provides the principle local authority leadership. The centre manager took up post in May 2009 and shares her time equally in managing another local authority children's centre. Almost all families are of White British heritage.

An advisory group, chaired by the centre manager, contributes to the strategic management and direction of the centre. It is working towards providing a full range of commissioned services. The centre provides a base for a range of services including a health visitor, a speech and language therapist, qualified teacher visitors and a job centre plus staff member. The centre includes a private day nursery, leased by the local authority, with places for six children under two years old, 18 children under three years old and up to 75 children in total aged 0-5 years. There are currently seven children in the nursery with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Evidence indicates that the skills and knowledge with which children enter the nursery are well below those expected nationally for their age.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Overall, the centre provides satisfactorily for the needs of users and the wider community. Due to an improving quality of strategic leadership and management, particularly from the centre and district managers, improvement is being made to the centre's provision for children and in its services to the community. Many developments are at an early stage such as the re-engagement of parents to the Advisory Board and the establishment of a new parent forum. The impact of such work is yet to be clearly demonstrated in all the outcomes for children. Consequently, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

The strengths of the centre include the emerging quality of leadership, the contribution of a wide range of partnerships with local agencies and the increasing impact of the local authority's monitoring of the centre's work. There is good quality outreach provision and the centre effectively evaluates the range of users' views following their access to the centre's activities and provision. Safeguarding procedures are robust, work with key agencies is effective and as a result children are safe, protected and their welfare concerns are identified and supported.

Relationships between staff and users are friendly, encouraging and productive. Many parents express a view of strong appreciation for the centre's work particularly for the support they receive in times of crisis and particular difficulty. The staff are approachable and very knowledgeable about the local community. They successfully provide good care, guidance and support for the Ironville community. The centre can point to several cases of successful intervention with families and children where the impact of their effective support and guidance has led to improving outcomes for those affected.

Inspection evidence shows that the percentage of children in the lowest 20% of achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage grew in the period 2006-2009. However, the data shows significant variation among the various providers. In the current academic year, local authority monitoring shows clear improvement to this

measure. The percentage of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieving the expected level of attainment in communication, language and literacy, and in personal and social education is improving and is largely in line with national expectations.

The centre's provision for adult education, particularly to improve the levels of adult literacy and numeracy, is underdeveloped. There have been no courses available in the last two years though some are planned to start in September 2010.

The development plan outlines the centre's key priorities for improvement and provides the broad aims and criteria for measuring success. As yet, there is a lack of correlation to the outcomes of local authority monitoring and the main issues arising from this are not identified in the plan. The priorities lack precision and the timings for accurately evaluating the success of these actions are too long.

The local authority has recently improved its processes for providing the data needed to analyse and evaluate performance across a range of national indicators. This is not yet complete and several indicators are unavailable. This reduces the rigour of any evaluation of the centre's performance and restricts the accuracy of targets for improvement.

The outreach work of the health visitor is a strength of the centre's work. Many parents spoke to inspectors about the support they have received. All new births are registered with the centre and all new arrivals into the community are also identified. Parents voiced their concerns that access to a range of health services including midwifery is not available at the children's centre or at the local doctor's surgery. They pointed out the difficulties caused by a lack of public transport in the area. This results in families occasionally contacting the emergency services for support which in most communities would be available locally.

In the last eighteen months there has been significant increase in the staffing levels so that the centre's ability to provide outreach services is significantly improved. An additional example is the appointment of a full-time receptionist who provides increased security, ongoing contact, communication and daily signposting of services to people in the community.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the educational outcomes for children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Increase the opportunities for adult learning in the community especially with regard to the promotion of literacy, numeracy and basic skills.
- Improve the centre's development planning so that more consistent use is made of the outcomes of the rigorous monitoring systems to specifically target the key priorities and ensure that regular and systematic measurement is made of the progress towards these targets.

- Ensure that at a local and district level, progress towards all the National Data Indicators are effectively monitored and evaluated.
- Improve access to midwifery and health services at the children's centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Outcomes for children and families are improving. The centre's increased staffing levels, combined with improving and developing leadership, are beginning to improve provision and have a positive impact on outcomes although it is early days for many initiatives.

The centre manager and her staff have built good effective relationships with many families who they know well. There is a strong focus on ensuring that the most vulnerable children are well provided for. The processes relating to the common assessment framework are firmly embedded and, together with effective child protection systems, result in prompt intervention and support. This often negates the need for higher level social care work. Entry to the premises is effectively monitored with a variety of systems in place to ensure that all visitors are identified. Movement between the first floor occupied by the centre and the ground floor, which shares use of the reception area with the day care setting, is managed well with systems such as key fobs, fingerprint recognition for parents, pass codes, badges and permanent receptionist cover.

Initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles are mainly at the embryonic stage and it is too early yet to assess the long-term impact. Guided walks and 'Stay Weigh and Play' sessions are attracting increasing numbers of parents who access health advice from the health visitor. Increased numbers of activities during school holidays such as 'bug walks' and outdoor fitness sessions, are having beneficial effects upon the health of families in the local community. Good use of the centre's receptionist and attractive displays signpost parents to medical advice and treatment. Involvement with the centre's garden allotment has increased community cohesion, helped some parents gain an entry level qualification and raised awareness of healthy living.

Recent inspection reports show that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in the nursery, pre-school and Reception class settings throughout the area. Even so, their attainment by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are below those found nationally and this is especially so for the lowest achieving children.

Parents' views are valued highly by the centre and feedback is always sought from parents following their participation in the centre's activities. This is used well to inform the centre's leadership and helps shape future events. Parental involvement in the governance of the centre through the advisory board is at a very early stage and does not yet make a meaningful contribution to improving the centre's provision and performance.

The support of Jobcentre Plus has recently been extended at the centre to provide

fortnightly opportunities for 1:1 discussions. These meetings allow parents to access the internet, view job vacancies and seek personal advice about job seeking. Opportunities for parents to develop their education skills and qualifications are limited. Some courses are offered, such as through the speech and language therapist and a stress management course run in the nursery. No formal courses have been run for some time to extend adults' literacy and numeracy skills. 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	3
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	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 Early Years Foundation Stage settings including the nursery successfully plan and provide a good range of activities across the range of every child matters outcomes. Robust assessments are made of children's needs and of their progress. Resources in the centre and the nursery are bright and motivating for children and displays of children's work celebrate their achievements. Assessments of adults' needs in the community are less strong. The centre responds to individual personal needs well by listening to parents' views and acting decisively to provide effective support and guidance. It does not yet plan proactively for adult learning needs and there is a lack of opportunities for adult learning in the community.

Parental feedback in discussions with inspectors indicates that there is as yet no direct service other than signposting given to support families with alcohol, drug or sexual health issues. There is no midwife support at the centre. Initiatives to promote healthy living are in place such as cooking sessions, fitness in the park, walks, talks on healthy living and access to the health trainer. Parents praised how outreach staff do internet research into some of their children's medical conditions on their behalf. The health visitor works closely with the centre's staff to promote healthy eating, and the benefits of an active lifestyle.

Good partnership working means that knowledge is shared, support is coordinated and actions taken are decisively supporting the most vulnerable families. The good quality of outreach work quickly identifies and supports individual family needs. Overall, there is good care, guidance and support for families and children in the

community.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre manager provides clear direction and her vision for the development of the centre's provision is well supported by all the staff. The local authority district manager works closely with the centre. The impact of the leadership on the outcomes for children and families is increasing as the systems and processes for monitoring and evaluating the centre's performance become more firmly established. Governance through the advisory board is in its infancy but a sound start has been made. Performance management arrangements are in place to hold the staff to account for the outcomes of their work.

Targets are set by the leadership to help drive improvement and these are suitably based on an accurate evaluation of the main priorities for the centre's improvement. With the increasingly robust monitoring of the local authority there is more detail and precision to identify these key priorities. As yet, these have not fed through to the centre's action planning so that targets lack specific milestones or a systematic measurable means of evaluating their success.

Resources are appropriate for the needs of the children and community. The outcomes resulting from the deployment of staff and the use of all resources are currently satisfactory and so the value for money is also judged as satisfactory.

The centre responds particularly well to the needs of the vulnerable members of the community and parents value highly the support they receive in times of crisis. Equality and diversity are valued in the day-to-day work of the centre and through its policies and procedures to promote this. However, the outcomes for the lowest achieving children, whilst improving, are not yet good enough. Nor is there sufficient provision for the learning needs of all adults, especially in the development and acquisition of basic skills needed for future economic well being.

The procedures for safeguarding children and families are good. Policies and procedures to ensure the protection of children and to keep everyone safe are effective so that people say they feel safe. Security measures are appropriate and supervision is vigilant. Staff are clear about their roles in safeguarding, training is up

to date and the required checks, including to the Criminal Records Bureau, are made to ensure safe recruitment. Intervention strategies are successful and with multi-agency support ensure that the needs of vulnerable children are quickly attended to.

The leaders have encouraged and developed a range of partnerships which are increasingly providing well for all users. For example, the health visitor makes rigorous referrals to the centre regarding new-born babies so that information and guidance about the centre's services can be quickly provided to parents. The library service acted on the feedback received from parents to the centre by adjusting its timetable so that parents and children in the nursery and children in school can now regularly access the mobile library service. The centre actively encourages the views of the community to feedback on its activities and after attendance at courses this is used well to steer future provision. The outcomes of the now good monitoring carried out by the local authority are not yet evaluated quickly or rigorously enough to drive improvement planning.

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	3
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	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	2

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ironville centre on 25 and 26 May 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre's manager has built a staff team who work hard to provide a range of courses and activities to serve the children and families in the community. Together they use a number of other agencies such as the health visitor and Jobcentre Plus, to make sure that the most needy children and families are particularly well supported. Parents who spoke to inspectors told us that they get on well with the centre's staff and appreciate the advice and guidance which is given, especially when times are difficult. We judge that this is a good feature of the centre's work.

We also heard from parents that they like to be asked about what they think about a course or an activity. We think the staff do this well and then use it to plan future courses though we judge that the centre does not have enough courses for parents to improve their mathematics and English skills.

Parents told us that they felt sure that the right checks are made before any member of staff works at the centre. Inspectors agree with this and judge that the arrangements to keep children and families safe are good. Parents spoke to us about how good the security is at the centre and we agree that the full time receptionist has strengthened this in many ways. The centre is governed by an advisory board and some parents are members. This is only just getting established and it doesn't yet make a real difference to the work of the centre, though it is improving.

Children are well looked after and are making progress in their learning. We think that they make mostly good progress but improvements are needed to make sure that every child achieves what they are capable of.

The local authority gives good support to the centre and is now working much closer with the centre manager to measure how well they are doing. This information needs to be used better so that further improvements can be planned and made to some areas such as providing more courses for parents to learn about managing their money. The increase in the number of staff is making a big difference to the services which the centre provides. However, inspectors agree with the views of parents who said that there should be better health services at the centre including a midwife.

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