

Inspection report for Stoke Heath Children's Centre

Local authority	Coventry
Inspection number	365854
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Jean-Marie Blakeley AI

Centre governance	Coventry Local Authority
Centre leader	Anne Balder
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Stoke Heath Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Crescent Nursery

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.

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior managers from the centre, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and representatives from Coventry local authority. Inspectors also met with a number of partners from health, education, Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, voluntary organisations and community representatives. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Stoke Heath Children's Centre opened in 2006. It is a phase one children's centre providing nursery, health services, outreach support and vulnerable children's services to families and children in the Stoke and Stoke Heath areas of north-east Coventry. The centre is located on the Stoke Heath Primary School site. The centre is managed by the local authority and is supported by an advisory body comprising parents, statutory and voluntary representatives. The children's centre manager manages two centres in the north-east cluster, and the centre's leadership team works across both centres.

Stoke and Stoke Heath Priority Neighbourhood is one of the most deprived communities in the country, with average household incomes 10% lower than the average for the city. The census of 2001 showed that 79% of the centre reach was of White British origin. While the ethnic composition of Stoke Heath remains predominantly White British, the proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups

has significantly increased. The largest of these groups is of Asian and Asian British heritage. The number of economic migrants, particularly from Eastern Europe, living in the reach area has also increased. In the neighbouring school, at least 32 languages are spoken. Local unemployment rates are above the local and national averages. A high percentage of children live in families that are dependent on workless or means-tested benefits.

Within the centre, The Crescent Nursery provides day care for up to 33 children aged one to four years and is open weekdays from 8.00am to 5.30pm. On entry to the nursery, children typically have skills and knowledge lower than those expected for children of their ages. This provision was inspected in March 2011. The report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The overall effectiveness of Stoke Heath Children's Centre is satisfactory. The leadership team and local authority recognise that services have been stretched during the last twelve months. This is because there are staff shortages due to the local authority's freeze on recruitment, absences because of long-term illness or maternity leave. As a result, some vulnerable families are not benefiting from the good-quality activities the centre provides. The centre leadership has endeavoured to ensure that families continue to benefit from a range of targeted quality services to meet their needs. However, the number of families and children they are currently reaching is only satisfactory. The local authority has recently lifted the ban on recruitment and the centre is currently seeking additional staff to fill vacancies.

Working closely with most of its partners, the centre offers a range of appropriate services to the community. However, the partnership with health services is a weakness, despite the centre's and local authority's efforts. The local health authority's issues concerning the sharing of information limit the centre's ability to demonstrate its impact on health outcomes for the centre. Data that are available, indicate that relocation of health staff has resulted in weakening the links between

the centre and health personnel, and has had a negative impact on improving health outcomes for users.

Users who met with inspectors have a high regard for the centre, particularly the excellent childcare and learning provided in the nursery. One parent said: 'My partner and I are both able to work because our child goes to the nursery. The staff are excellent. They identified early on that our child has some special needs. It makes such a difference that staff here are qualified to level three. I'm sure it wouldn't have been spotted so early in some provision.' Although the nursery always accommodates referrals for children in need, 50% of places are taken by working families from outside the reach area and few places are available for free nursery entitlement. One parent said: 'My elder child is doing really well at school, this is because of the great start they had in nursery. I wanted the same opportunity for my younger child but there wasn't a space. Although I'm happy with the childminder, the nursery offers much more learning.'

Adults enjoy sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and family learning. Some users have opportunities to make good gains in their personal development through the long-established volunteer programme. Improving partnerships with Jobcentre Plus are providing support for some adults. However, the centre has little evidence to demonstrate that adults are gaining qualifications, progressing to training or gaining employment.

Safeguarding is good, and rigorous procedures are in place to ensure users' safety. The centre's partnership with social services to protect 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's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is clear, although, recent staff shortages have limited its success in reaching some target groups, such as workless families. The proportion of users from minority ethnic groups is increasing in line with the changing nature of the local population. The centre is successful in supporting teenage parents through strong partnerships with Connexions. Although the centre provides services for children with disabilities, the numbers accessing the centre are low in comparison to the high number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities in local schools.

The centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for further improvement through its understanding of its own effectiveness and the issues that are having an impact on improving outcomes for users. However, leaders do not use management information or available data on the outcomes of the centre's work effectively to evaluate impact or set precise and measurable targets for improvement. The advisory board is committed, ambitious and keen to support the further improvement of the centre. The lack of precise data and targets for improvement makes it difficult for the governing body, including the advisory board, to hold leaders to account for the centre's performance.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should ensure that:
 - the centre has sufficient staff to provide services to meet the needs of users in the reach area
 - children from deprived families have sufficient local access to high-quality day-care provision.

- The health authority should improve its partnership with the children's centre to ensure that:
 - services for users are cohesive and lead to improving health outcomes
 - the centre receives sufficient information to be able to demonstrate its impact on health outcomes and plan provision.

- Increase the collection and use of management information and data in order to enable:
 - the centre to improve the evaluation of outcomes
 - leaders to set precise and measurable improvement targets
 - the local authority and the advisory board to challenge outcomes.

- Provide users with more guidance on qualifications, training and volunteering opportunities and monitor users' outcomes in improving their economic well-being.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Families are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to keep healthy through the promotion of healthy meals, snacks and physical activity. Outcomes for children in the nursery are excellent. There is little precise data available from the health authority for the centre to measure its effectiveness. However, the centre is aware that the number of mothers who breastfeed their babies is low and too few women give up smoking during pregnancy. The portage service provided for children with complex additional needs and the 'Together Like Me' group support the well-being of some families with children with special educational needs.

There is evidence of improved outcomes for children subject to the Common Assessment Framework process. The centre keeps up-to-date records on vulnerable children, including looked after children, and detailed minutes of its 'Raise, Share and Review' meetings. These demonstrate how, through strong partnership work, interventions have led to reduced levels of concern about children's well-being and, in some cases, successfully resolved the issues.

Children in day care make excellent 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. Parents and carers who engage in the centre's activities enjoy their sessions and improve their confidence and parenting skills. Although the number of families accessing the good-quality family learning courses is low, those attending enjoy the sessions and their outcomes are good.

Children's behaviour is good and relationships between families and with staff are warm and respectful. Parent volunteers help others by supporting groups, and some are members of the advisory board. The number of users from minority ethnic families is increasing, although none are currently members of the advisory board. A recently formed parents' forum is enabling more users to participate in decision making. The 'Parent Volunteer' training programme has been successful in helping some parents gain skills and employment. Parents interviewed highly value this support to become volunteers. However, the number of users benefiting from this good opportunity is low and limited by the centre's ability to provide staff mentors. 'The centre has been great for me. It made me believe in myself. I would never have my job if it wasn't for them,' commented one user.

Information and advice, provided through partnership with the Connexions Young Parents' Advisor, are successful in helping some young mothers to improve their education and employability skills. In the last year, the partnership with Jobcentre Plus has strengthened, although there is evidence of only two users having gained employment and two going on to training. The centre does not have evidence to demonstrate the number of parents improving their employment opportunities by gaining qualifications through adult education or training.

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	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	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

Careful and effective assessment of children's needs in the nursery has a positive impact on their outcomes. The Common Assessment Framework process is used well in partnership with other agencies and leads to effective individualised support for

families and children. The centre is trying to find ways of identifying and assessing the needs of those families not currently engaging with them.

Provision to help children to learn and develop in the nursery is excellent. For other users of services, the centre promotes learning adequately. Adults interviewed enjoy coming to sessions in the centre, gain confidence and are developing parenting skills. Sessions are of good quality and staff and volunteers work hard to provide a good experience.

The flexible range of services provided by the centre meets the needs of users adequately. Registration is increasing but participation rates are low. The centre is successful in engaging with some of its target groups, such as teenage parents, but does not engage enough with workless families and disadvantaged children. Existing users are consulted about the range of activities provided and users' needs inform development planning. A good example of this is the 'Different Voices' family group for speakers of other languages. Some targeted work offers interesting activities to engage males, but the centre recognises that participation rates are still low.

Children in the nursery receive excellent care and those parents who have contact with the centre receive good support and advice. Parents report that their involvement in the centre has built their confidence. One parent said, 'I had no confidence. Coming to the centre has helped me learn to speak English and make friends. My children really enjoy the play sessions.' Outreach workers provide universal services and the most vulnerable families receive individual care packages. However, staff shortages have reduced the centre's ability to identify and provide one-to-one support and home visits to all families that may benefit from their guidance.

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	2
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?

3

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and members of the advisory board are increasing their understanding of their role. There are clear links between strategic planning and service provision. However, local authority cuts and health authority reorganisation have limited the leadership's ability to ensure high-quality integrated provision. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and

responsibilities. Professional supervision and management arrangements at the centre are aligned and relevant information is shared.

Leaders and managers are motivated to seek further improvement and are effective in focusing the centre's efforts on its priorities. They know the centre's major strengths and areas for development, including who their key target groups are, and the challenging factors influencing outcomes. Most partners are involved in planning and some services are integrated. However, management information and data are not used effectively to enable precise target setting and careful evaluation of outcomes.

The use of resources has a satisfactory impact on outcomes for users. Leaders prioritise the deployment of staff appropriately to meet the needs of the most vulnerable families. Accommodation in the nursery is used effectively and the centre extends its services through outreach provision. The centre building, although a bright and welcoming environment, is small and cramped, which restricts the number and range of activities it can provide. Good partnership working with the co-located primary school means that their current building development will also benefit the centre. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Centre staff and partnership agencies are committed to promoting the inclusion of all children and their families. Inclusive practices are promoted for children and parents with disabilities. Action to promote greater equality has resulted in increasing the number of teenage parents and families from minority ethnic groups engaging with the centre. However, there is little analysis of the participation of workless families or the centre's impact on community cohesion or narrowing achievement gaps. Working parents have access to a limited number of activities and some parents are unaware of what is on offer.

Safeguarding is good. Policies and procedures to ensure the protection of users on the site are effectively implemented and updated. The centre demonstrates good practice across all areas of its work. Staff have a clear understanding about their role in identifying and reporting concerns and do so promptly. As a result, users' ability to stay safe is increasing. The centre collaborates effectively with other key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. The centre has clear systems in place for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment of staff. Activities are risk assessed and include the views of users. Users say that they and their children feel safe at the centre. However, parents, carers, the centre and the primary school share concerns regarding the lack of a safe crossing on the busy road.

Self-evaluation is systematic and is supported by some evidence of the impact on outcomes. There are clear links between the centre's on-going evaluation of its services and priorities set out in its delivery plan. The local authority and advisory board monitor and evaluate the work of the centre. However, evaluation lacks challenge, as the focus is mostly on the extent, quality and enjoyment of services and not sufficiently on outcomes. The centre is developing and improving its systems to evaluate the longer-term impact of the provision on improving outcomes for

children and adults.

Partnerships with other services contribute to outcomes for users. Services are mostly integrated and generally deliver cohesive provision for users. A strength of the provision is the good partnership with the school that enables good transition arrangements for children in day care. The partnerships with childminders are helping to develop and increase opportunities for good-quality day care. The centre seeks and makes use of feedback from parents to develop the range of provision, although this relies too much on the use of questionnaires. Outreach provision is effective in encouraging the community to engage with services. Users make a good contribution to the advisory board and are increasing their involvement through a 'Parents' Forum'. Those engaging with the provision express high levels of satisfaction.

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	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

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspection of The Crescent Nursery has been taken into account to a limited extent when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in the report.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Stoke Heath Children's Centre on 29–30 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

I would like to thank all the people who spoke to us. Those of you we spoke to told us you enjoy coming to the centre and that it meets your needs. Your views were very helpful.

You told us the staff are friendly and give you good support and that services provided are helping you and your families. We found that, because of staff shortages during the last year, the centre has not been able to engage with as many families as it wants to. The centre knows that families value one-to-one support, but they have not been able to provide as many home visits as they would like to.

The centre works well with most of its partners, for example, schools and social care. This joint working helps the delivery of services to the community. The health authority does not provide the centre with enough information on how well its services are helping families in order for the centre to plan more services for you. The centre's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is clear. It helps children, especially those who may be disadvantaged in some way, get a better start in life. The centre has worked with Connexions to engage with the high number of teenage parents. Families from minority ethnic groups are increasingly making use of services provided and appreciate the 'Different Voices' group. We found that the centre is not engaging with many of the workless and most disadvantaged families in the area. The centre is already planning to deliver more services out in the community to reach these families.

We found that staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and that they are well trained. You said that you feel your children are well cared for and that they are safe at the centre. However, because of staff shortages, the family support workers have not been able to give one-to-one support through home visits. You share the centre's and school's concern over the lack of a safe crossing on the road.

You enjoy the sessions such as 'Stay and Play' with your children. Some parents attend family learning classes, but not many have gone on to take qualifications. The centre is working with Jobcentre Plus to develop opportunities for you to access information and support to gain employment. We would like the centre to help more of you to get involved in volunteering and training and to take qualifications to help you build skills to gain employment.

Children are happy in the nursery and make excellent progress. We would like more of the most deprived children to have the opportunity to benefit from such outstanding provision and to increase their enjoyment and achievement.

Your children behave well and you all get on well together. The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities they offer. Some of you are involved in making decisions about your centre through being on the advisory board. We suggest that the advisory board, local authority and centre staff monitor the outcomes more closely and really challenge the centre to improve further. The advisory board and the centre staff really want to improve the centre. Because they already know the things they need to do we are confident that the centre will continue to improve.

Thank you very much for sharing your views with us. We wish you all the best for the future.

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