

Inspection report for Sure Start Wycombe (Castlefield) Children's Centre

Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	367949
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Mike Capper

Centre governance	Buckinghamshire County Council
Centre leader	Charlotte Whitlock
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	The Centre Rutland Avenue High Wycombe Bucks HP12 3LL
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Linked school, if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bambino 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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, representatives from the advisory board, the parent forum and from partners that use the centre. Inspectors also spoke to parents and carers as well as to some children.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including safeguarding policies and records, development plans and data on the impact of the centre's work.

Information about the centre

Sure Start Wycombe (Castlefield) Children's Centre is a Phase 1 centre that serves four district community areas on the western side of High Wycombe. The centre provides a full core offer of services for young children and their parents and carers. These include health advice, family support, and a range of activities for children. The main centre is based in the heart of the Castlefield community and it also has two satellite sites, one covering the Booker Hill Area and the other Oakridge.

The children's centre serves an area that is ethnically, socially and economically diverse and it is located in one of the 20% most deprived wards in the country. In the Castlefield area, the rates of worklessness are high at 49%. The proportion of children living in households that are dependent on workless benefits is 14.8% in Oakridge and Castlefield and 11.9% in Cressex and Booker Hill. The largest ethnic groups are Pakistani and White British.

The children's centre is managed by the local authority. An advisory board that represents users, the local community and service providers is responsible for working strategically with the children's centre manager to identify the needs of the centre. Children's levels of development on entry to the Early Years Foundation

Stage are below those expected for their age. The linked nursery provision is privately run.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Sure Start Wycombe (Castlefield) Children’s Centre is a good children’s centre that has successfully established itself as a focal point of the local community. Members of staff are friendly and approachable and have built high levels of trust with users. The centre is very careful about taking into account the views of parents and carers through a very active parent forum. Parents and carers speak positively about the work of the centre with comments such as, ‘The centre has made a real difference to my life’ and, ‘It has helped me to gain confidence and meet other parents.’

The centre’s good provision enables the vast majority of its users to achieve good and sometimes outstanding outcomes in many areas of their lives. The centre very effectively helps to promote healthy lifestyles, with users being given high quality guidance and advice right from before their children are born. Users have found sessions on dental health and keeping fit very beneficial. Baby massage sessions and ‘Cuddle Groups’ are popular, providing an excellent opportunity for mothers to bond with their baby or young children.

Parents and carers and their children feel safe when using the centre. This is because the centre has good safeguarding procedures. There is a strong and effective focus on teaching users how to keep safe in their everyday lives. An excellent example of this is in the way that, following advice from staff and the emergency services, several families have begun to use pan thermometers in the kitchen to avoid accidents with hot cooking oil.

Children behave well and users say that they thoroughly enjoy their time at the centre. Children develop very strong relationships with each other and with members of staff. Children achieve well and they make good progress in developing basic skills in sessions such as ‘Kidsplay’ and ‘Tiny Ballers’, where they learn and play with their

parents and carers. The centre provides some support to users to help them to improve their families' economic well-being, but there is not enough on-site guidance to help parents and carers to develop the skills or to access the services that are needed to help them find work. The centre has rightly identified this as a priority for development.

Users say there is no discrimination at the centre and that all users are given an equal opportunity to access services, whatever their background or ethnicity. The support of bilingual workers is highly regarded by users and ensures that parents and carers with limited spoken English are able to take a full part in activities. Barriers to services are removed as the centre provides crèche places so that users with young children can access its activities.

The centre is well led and managed. Members of staff are enthusiastic and work well as a team. They are fully involved in the self-evaluation process. On a day-to-day basis this is very thorough and is used very effectively to adapt plans and to respond to changing needs. Evaluation of the longer-term impact of the centre's work by leaders at all levels, including the advisory board, is still being developed as more data become available from the local authority. At the moment, strategic planning does not reflect a longer-term vision for how the centre will develop over time. Nevertheless, the needs of the main target groups are met well and there is a strong drive for improvement. The centre has demonstrated in the way that it continues to adapt to local circumstances and to successfully meet the needs of its target groups that there is a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen strategic planning by leaders at all levels, including the advisory board, so that it sets out more clearly a longer-term vision for how the centre will develop.
- Improve the impact of the centre's work on users' economic well-being by working with outside agencies to provide more support and guidance about developing the skills and accessing the services needed to help them find work.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Parents and carers develop an excellent understanding about how to support healthy living and this is a real strength of the centre's work. Activities such as 'Simply Walk', which teaches the value of regular exercise, and 'Cook and Eat', where users learn about healthy diets, are helping parents and carers to adopt increasingly healthy lifestyles. Family Support Workers very successfully help 'fussy eaters' to be more confident about trying different foods when they provide snacks at different sessions. Children get lots of fresh air and exercise at the centre, and parents especially like the 'chance to do physical activities together with our children'.

All adults who work at the centre give the highest priority to the safety and well-being of users. Staff and users get on very well together and there are high levels of trust. This means that early intervention through the centre or outside agencies to provide additional support is readily accepted in most situations. Case studies show that partnerships with health visitors, nurseries and the emergency services, as well as links with other groups, such as those to prevent domestic violence, are bringing about good improvements to the lives of children and their families. The Common Assessment Framework and child protection plans are used effectively to identify children who may be at risk and provide them with additional help. Families in times of crisis feel confident about approaching the centre for support and they trust staff to help them. For example, a parent talked with inspectors about the practical and caring support that she had been given that had helped to give her 'hope for the future'. This is typical of the sensitive approach adopted by staff to those who are in need.

Users make a good contribution to the life of the community. Through the parent forum, there are many opportunities for parents and carers to make suggestions, and these are listened to and, where possible, acted upon. For example, a group of parents and carers asked for a sewing club to be set up. This was quickly established and this club is now enjoyed by a good number of parents and carers.

The centre supports children's achievement effectively in the many activities where they play and learn alongside their parents and carers. Good links have been established with pre-school providers and the linked nursery and these also contribute well to children's achievement. For example, staff at the linked nursery have been able to benefit from additional training in supporting children with speech and language difficulties. Support from specialist workers, such as the centre's portage workers, have a good effect on the development of basic skills, and their work is greatly appreciated by parents and carers. As one said to the centre, 'I cannot rate portage highly enough as it has educated me and my family in the best way of helping my son develop.' Leaders have accurately identified that there is a gap in their provision in that there are no sessions, other than crèches, where staff work with children of pre-school age alone so that they can do more to support their learning and development. Parents have said that they would find this helpful to smooth the transition into pre-school settings or nursery groups. Nevertheless, the high numbers of children who come to the centre with little or no spoken English quickly improve skills and this lays a good foundation for their future learning.

There are many strong features to the way that the centre supports users to develop life skills and to prepare for the world of work. A high percentage of teenage mothers who attended the 'Step Up' club have now moved back into full-time education or into work. An advocate is readily available to give advice to families who are having problems with immigration issues, and users speak very positively of the help they are given if they are having financial difficulties.

The centre serves an area where worklessness is high and increasing. Although it

provides information for users about adult learning opportunities and work vacancies, there is insufficient on-site support and advice for parents and carers about the options open to them to access training or to improve their chances of returning to work.

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	1
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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a warm and welcoming environment and is effective at meeting the needs of its reach areas. Families from the different ethnic groups within the reach areas feel well supported by the centre and the services it provides. They feel the centre is extremely responsive to their needs and they cite many examples of how it has impacted positively on their lives. Parents are kept well informed, although even then some would like more information. The centre recognises that this is an area where it could do better, for example by providing more leaflets in home languages and developing a website.

Provision is good because the centre is very thorough in the way that it assesses the needs of the community. The ideas of different groups are used well to adapt activities to need and to ensure that there is no group that is missing out. A good example of this is the way that a 'Dads Behaving Dadly Group' was set up so that male carers could be more involved in their children's learning.

Adult users are pointed in the direction of training that will help them to improve their skills. This has helped, for example, the centre to increase the number of childminders in the community who are from minority ethnic groups. The 'Holding Hands' project has also been greatly appreciated by parents and carers as they feel that it has helped them to learn new ways to support their children's learning.

Specialist workers such as speech and language therapists have a highly positive effect on the work of the centre and beyond. They ensure that their good practice is maintained when children move to pre-school providers or the linked nursery by providing training sessions to staff at these establishments. Family Support Workers and other outreach services are well managed and have a positive impact on the lives of users. They are very responsive to the needs of each family or individual and provide tailored support when, for example, families need financial advice or help from the emergency services to improve the safety of their homes.

Activities planned by the centre staff and other support workers promote good learning and development for its users. 'Stay and Play' and 'Messy Play' sessions are greatly enjoyed by parents and carers and their children. They are well organised and support good progress in basic skills. Activities take good account of the starting points of the children and rightly there is a strong focus on developing early language skills for those where English is not the home language. There are, however, fewer opportunities for pre-school children to learn away from their parents so that activities can be even more sharply focused on individual needs and raising achievement further.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leaders and managers at all levels are focused on ensuring that the children's centre meets the needs of its users and of the different groups within the community. They have a good understanding of their needs and continue to adapt their programmes to respond to the neighbourhood priorities. This means that the centre is well placed to ensure sustained improvement. The centre provides good value for money, with a community leader commenting that 'it has been pivotal in transforming the area and raising aspirations'. Parents feel that 'leaders always do their best for the children and are always willing to listen'.

Governance of the centre is good because there are clear lines of accountability for all stakeholders, including the local authority. The advisory board is very enthusiastic and includes many partners from support services as well as a good number of

parents. They support leaders well but they do not yet play a full enough part in developing a long-term vision for the future of the centre. Across all levels of leadership, self-evaluation is stronger on a day-to-day basis than over time. This means that while planning to respond to immediate need is good and the impact of activities is checked thoroughly, the centre’s vision for its future beyond one year is not fully reflected in strategic planning.

Relationships in the centre are harmonious. Different religious beliefs and cultural needs are recognised and valued by centre staff. This helps to ensure that there is a good level of engagement in the centre’s activities from people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds. Skilled interpreters ensure that language is not a barrier to participation. Support from specialist staff such as portage workers ensures that children with disabilities are supported well and are able to take a full part in activities.

Safeguarding processes and procedures are good. All workers undergo Criminal Records Bureau and recruitment checks. Health and safety systems are robust and risk assessments are thorough and carefully evaluated. Training in how to recognise child protection issues is regularly updated for staff and they respond quickly when they have concerns about families at risk, working well in partnership with outside agencies to ensure that the right level of support is given. Users also understand safeguarding and how to deal with any concerns they may have. Victims of domestic violence are supported successfully through the ‘Freedom Programme’. The Police Community Safety Officer is a regular visitor to the centre and this ensures that security and safety are constantly being reviewed.

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	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	2

integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sure Start Wycombe (Castlefield) Children’s Centre on 16–17 February 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection, we held meetings with most of the centre’s staff and with many of the people such as health visitors and midwives who come to help you. We were pleased to be able to speak to some of you to find out what you think of the centre and the services it provides. We would like to say a particular thank you to those of you who came in especially to talk to us. We took your views into account when we made our judgements.

Some of you told us that the centre has made a big difference to your lives. We found that the centre has good systems for finding out what it needs to provide to help you and your children. We found that the centre is particularly successful at helping you to learn about healthy lifestyles and it also helps you to keep safe and to make a positive contribution to the community. You told us that you enjoy learning with your children at ‘Stay and Play’ sessions and we could see that these sessions are very enjoyable and promote good learning. Many of you spoke positively about the ‘Holding Hands’ sessions that help you to learn how to manage your children’s behaviour.

The centre provides a good number of services and helps to promote community cohesion by helping families from different groups meet with each other. The family support workers are good at finding the right kind of help and support. You told us that you are very pleased with the way that staff help you to fill in forms when you have financial difficulties. We also found that the advocate provides very valuable help when you are having problems with visas or other legal problems.

The centre’s staff work very well with partners from health and social services and specialist support such as speech and language therapists to make sure that the help you are given from the different agencies meets your needs.

You told us that you greatly appreciate the way that the centre takes into account your views. The parent forum gives you a good opportunity to talk about the centre and what you think it does well or could improve. The centre’s staff listen carefully to

what you have to say and we can see that activities are changed or added so that they meet your needs.

You were right when you said that staff are friendly and approachable and they help your children to learn well. You feel well supported and comfortable about sharing your problems and asking for help. Staff such as the interpreter help to ensure that all groups are able to take a full part in activities. You told us that the centre provides you with lots of support when you are having problems. One area where we found that the centre could do more was in providing you with more guidance on finding work. We have asked the centre to work more closely with outside groups, such as Job Centre Plus, to help with this.

Many of you said that you think highly of the centre manager and you can see that she is making things even better. Along with the centre's staff, and all the partners that provide a service at the centre, she is working hard to make the centre the best it can be. In order to do that, we have asked the centre to think about how it is going to develop over time so that it can meet the needs of the local community even more effectively.

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