

Inspection report for Langley Mill Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	367828
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Centre governance	Derbyshire County Council
Centre leader	Marie Eastwood
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY337018 Pre-School Learning Alliance Langley Mill Childcare

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, children's centre staff, senior managers, parents and carers, health and social care partners and representatives from agencies that the centre works with.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Langley Mill Children's Centre is located in a converted building in Langley Mill which is found on the border of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. It shares a site with its linked day-care provider. The centre is a phase one children's centre that provides the full core offer. The local authority is responsible for governance of the centre. The centre coordinator is responsible for service delivery across the reach area for this centre; she also has responsibility for one other children's centre in the locality. The centre serves an area in the top 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Services delivered from the centre by the children's centre team and partners include health services, family support, employment and training signposting, targeted support for vulnerable families and family learning.

The centre covers a wide geographical area and sits on the edge of one of its more densely populated areas. There is a large rural area within the reach of the centre. The area served by the centre has a range of housing stock including local authority properties, private rental accommodation and private housing. There are large pockets of social disadvantage. The vast majority of the population in the reach area is White British, with a small but growing eastern European community. Within the community served by the children's centre, levels of worklessness are high. Most children aged under five years are living in families dependent on workless benefits.

Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the area with skills and abilities that are lower than those typically found nationally.

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 commitment of the centre coordinator and staff team to their work is a notable strength of this satisfactory centre, as is their focus on helping families in times of need. Staff work hard to help families improve children’s outcomes by helping reduce pressure within families. The centre works closely with social services to protect children who may be at risk of harm. It is a busy centre and the registered users often access many of the services on offer. The number of families that make use of these services, however, is only a small proportion of the families in the reach area. The centre has started to identify strategies for making contact with the harder-to-reach families, but these have not yet been successfully implemented. Outcomes for these families are unknown and limit the centre’s ability to measure its effectiveness across the whole reach area.

Case studies and centre evaluations demonstrate that outcomes for the most vulnerable families who are accessing the centre are good. Similarly, outcomes for children attending the linked day care are good. This is particularly because of the careful assessment of need and the good level of support that is received. The centre has strong partnerships with voluntary and statutory partners that are used very effectively in the assessment of families’ needs and decisions about the types support packages they receive. Parents and carers are positive about their experiences when attending groups delivered in the centre and when receiving support at home. However, outcomes overall for users are satisfactory. This is because the centre does not systematically develop programmes based on analysis local need. For example, courses for parents are delivered if they are suggested by partners at advisory group meetings, rather than being developed in consultation with parents and the wider community and partners.

Day-to-day management of the centre is smooth. Centre users, who voluntarily join the parents’ forum, are becoming more active in their contributions to the running of

the centre, including representation on the advisory group. Centre staff work together as a committed and effective team. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths of the services provided and are developing their understanding about the areas where they need to improve further. The systems by which they are able to judge long-term outcomes of their work are not yet fully developed. The centre is not always effective in its use of data and evaluation to set clear targets. In addition, this limits the centre's ability to securely ensure the families most in need of support receive it and to target new registrations in the areas where most families with children under five live. It has recognised this; for example, business plans are beginning to include measurable targets for aspects such as increasing the number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks after the birth of their baby. The local authority provides useful quality assurance as well as advice, support and challenge. Performance monitoring of the centre takes place through the centre coordinator's supervision sessions and her line manager's attendance at advisory group meetings. A system is not yet in place to ensure the local authority has an annual strategic overview of the work of the centre and its effectiveness to measure the centre's delivery against its business plan and enable accurate self-evaluation. It is recognised in the newly formed management structure that this is an area for further development. Recent developments, such as changes to business planning, clearly show that the centre is going in the right direction, and that it has satisfactory capacity to build on these successes in the future and further improve outcomes for children and their families.

Users of the centre value the friendly, approachable staff who have built high levels of trust among families. The centre satisfactorily promotes the inclusion of all children and their families and is working reasonably well to promote community cohesion and respect in an area where most families are of White British heritage. The centre's work does not go far enough to influence a change in attitudes towards the multi-racial society there is in Britain. It recognises that there is more to be done to further improve community cohesion and narrow the achievement gap, particularly with regard to the levels of children's basic skills on entry to school.

When families engage with the children's centre services, their needs are assessed well. This means that the services they receive are carefully coordinated across the agencies involved with a family. Consequently, families whose circumstances have made them vulnerable are well supported through good application of the relevant parts of the local safeguarding children board procedures. In contrast, the local authority does not meet the standard required of it for children's centres because it does not provide training for staff at the required intervals. This, combined with very limited information for parents about what they should do if they are concerned about a child's welfare and some limitations in the centre coordinator's knowledge of the procedures to follow in the event of the dismissal of a member of staff, mean that safeguarding is inadequate.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve leadership and management of the centre by the local authority by:
 - reviewing the performance-monitoring, business-planning and target-setting processes to enable more effective self-evaluation
 - reviewing the systems for the cycle of delivery of initial and refresher training to designated safeguarding lead practitioners and other children’s centre staff and improving the maintenance of records relating to staff safeguarding training.

- Refine the use of data available to the centre to:
 - target registration in areas where families with young children live
 - ensure that families who need help the most get it
 - track the effectiveness of the centre and develop sharp targets.

- Improve the existing evaluation procedures to ensure service delivery is having the desired effect.

- Extend the scope and range of activities delivered to begin to change attitudes to diversity in Britain.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Activities provided by the centre have a strong focus on developing healthy lifestyles. Parents and carers who access sessions such as ‘Cook and Eat’ and ‘Fit Start’ are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. They appreciate and use simple recipes they are given at home, for example, to introduce vegetables into their families’ diets in tasty and creative ways. Despite this work, the number of children who are considered to be obese at the end of Reception Year is increasing. Breastfeeding is promoted at the centre with good additional support, provided by a voluntary breastfeeding mentor and health visitors, for those who need it. However, this positive action is not having sufficient impact, as the number of mothers who breastfeed beyond six to eight weeks after the birth of their baby continues to be low. The very well-attended weekly ‘Stay, Play and Weigh’ session is valuable in that it provides regular checks on children’s well-being and is effective in identifying at an early stage where a child or family might benefit from additional support.

Planned support packages provide parents with good emotional support which is leading to improved relationships between them and their children. They develop in confidence and increase their attendance at group sessions at the centre. As one parent commented, ‘The centre is good for children, they make friends and develop social skills.’ Children who use the linked day-care provision at the children’s centre make good progress in their learning and development. Across the reach area, children are improving in their personal, social and emotional skills, and their

communication and language skills compared to children in previous years. However, the gap between the achievement of the children who find it harder to learn and their peers is widening.

'It's my safe haven,' is a reflection of how comfortable and confident parents and carers are in the centre. Their children are happy and approach staff and visitors confidently and without hesitation. This is a reflection of how safe they feel. Work with more vulnerable families who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework or who are subject to a child protection plan is secure and they are well supported. This is having a positive effect by reducing the number of families who are referred to agencies for subsequent support. Despite this, parents and carers who take part in activities and groups at the centre have very limited knowledge of what to do if they have a concern about the welfare of a child.

Parents and carers who attend the parents' forum are actively involved in shaping the services and activities on offer. They are enthusiastic advocates for the centre who volunteer and give their time to the benefit of the centre. Other parents are taking initiative, for example, a gardening group developed out of a time-limited vegetable growing project. The parent leading this group is now working with the centre to develop this further so that more families can access and benefit from home-grown vegetables. The volunteer programme is a popular feature at the centre. Volunteers are keen to work with the centre and a small minority are thinking more about their future. Although these are all constructive elements in developing positive attitudes and values in families, they are relatively new and their impact on adult learning, development and progression into employment is yet to be seen.

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	3
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

Assessment of users needs when they are referred for support is strong and thorough and takes into account all aspects of a family's circumstances to ensure any

underlying causes are identified and addressed. The skilful way this is managed by children’s centre workers effectively ensures the package of support provided for the family is targeted where it is most needed. Staff are adept at developing adults’ confidence levels. As a consequence, users feel able to approach the centre when they are in need of help, whether it is to help resolve housing issues or more urgently to ensure they have food for their children to eat.

The range of activities and services provided in the children’s centre programme over time is adequate. It takes into account what is known about the reach area from data and the views of parents and carers who use the centre. There is a significant gap between the number of families with children under five years who live in the centre’s reach area and those who actually use the centre. In addition, the data are not being analysed effectively to ensure that target groups, such as families living on workless benefits are being reached. Centre users recognise that the centre is not used by as many families as it could be and have raised this with the centre. Consequently, the centre is not engaging with all families in the reach area to ensure that the needs of the wider community are being considered in the provision of services.

Activities, advice and support sessions at the centre are enjoyed and appreciated by families who use them. They are used practically to tackle local issues such as children’s communication skills and to develop parents’ confidence. The needs of adult learners in the local community are not systematically identified to ensure that programmes of learning meet local and national needs. In the best examples, learning opportunities are linked to local need. For example, programmes have been developed for speakers of other languages that are focused on helping parents to seek and understand health advice. The number of adult learners involved in accredited learning is low, although, once enrolled, retention rates are good. However, the centre does not collect robust data to track and monitor the progress of these learners.

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	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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre is in a period of development and change. Newly created structures within the local authority and recent inspection experiences have led to changes in

the way the centre is led and managed. The impact of these changes is yet to be seen. Until recently, the work of the advisory group and the parents' forum has not been focused on the development of the centre or the provision of challenge to the centre. The advisory group has been restructured to make it more effective, and the parents' forum now has terms of reference. The culture of these groups is changing and members of the parents' forum commented that they now feel like they are doing what they should be doing.

Professional supervision arrangements for centre staff are in place and the recently implemented management structure is well understood. Built into the coordinator's supervision cycle is the local authority's support and development process for the children's centre. This process does not support the business planning and target-setting process for the centre well enough. In turn, this has led to the centre working to a plan that has success criteria that cannot be measured effectively or used to enable accurate self-evaluation. Annual reviews of the centre's performance do not routinely take place. Therefore, it is unclear how the local authority or the centre coordinator know how effective the centre has been in meeting its priorities.

The centre's business plan illustrates that it knows what the local priorities are and who its target groups are. However, the centre coordinator has yet to drill down into the data available to her to ensure that the centre is concentrating on targeting registrations where they are needed. For example, they are not targeted on a street-by-street basis taking into account other key factors such as worklessness, but they are targeted according to the level of deprivation in an area.

One partner commented that the centre is absolutely key to everything it does in its work with children in need and children who have a child protection plan. This reflects the very strong multi-agency working that is in place with both statutory and voluntary sector partners. Work with the local women's refuge to deliver the Freedom Programme in the centre is a good example of how thoughtful relationships benefit the work of the centre in supporting families. The restricted accommodation at the centre is used to good effect to deliver a broad range of activities over time, but limited use is made of community settings to further extend the reach of the centre. This restricts some families in their ability to access centre services. The low number of families in the reach area registered with the centre, and even lower numbers of residents in contact with the centre means that the centre delivers only satisfactory value for money.

The procedures for assessing the suitability of new staff are robust. Health and safety procedures, including risk assessments are in place and effective. The work that the centre does with families is very effective in reducing the need for intensive intervention in many instances. Children's centre workers were praised for their professionalism. They work very well with partners and do not hesitate to make contact, for example, with a family's social worker, if they feel there is the need. They do not wait for planned meetings as they appreciate the delay may have a significant impact on the family. In contrast, there are some significant gaps in the way the local authority ensures that the designated person responsible for

safeguarding children maintains up-to-date knowledge and understanding. Refresher training is not provided every two years, as required by children’s centre guidance. In addition, some members of staff have experienced difficulty in accessing their refresher training. Training records for some staff, including the designated person, are incomplete. An indication of the impact of this is the designated person’s lack of knowledge of the Independent Safeguarding Authority and who would be responsible for making a referral if a member of staff was dismissed from the centre. For these reasons, the judgement for the effectiveness of safeguarding policy and procedures is inadequate.

The demographic of the reach area has not changed significantly for a number of years and is recognised as an area where nationalist organisations are well supported. The centre has taken this on board and takes care to ensure that displays and equipment depict children and families from a range of cultural and racial backgrounds. In addition to this, the centre includes the celebration of festivals in its activity programme. However, these actions do not go far enough to help to change and challenge negative attitudes towards a multi-cultural society.

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	4
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

The findings linked to outcomes for children and the progress they make in their learning and development from the inspection of the linked day-care provider Pre-School Learning Alliance Langley Mill Childcare EY337018 conducted on 29 October 2010 have been used to contribute to judgements made at this inspection.

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 Langley Mill Children's Centre on 10 and 11 August 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to speak to us. We also spent some time reading the comments you make about the activities and courses you attend at the centre. Using this information, we know that you appreciate the help and support that you get from the staff at the centre. We found that the centre is really good at assessing your needs when it is asked to help you. The centre is good at working with the different people involved in supporting a family and at making sure the right people are working with a family. These partnerships work well in practice to help and support your families. However, there are too many families with young children in the area who do not benefit from the centre's work. We have asked the centre to use the information it has to try to improve this situation, and to make sure that the families who need help the most receive it.

When the centre works with families, we found that their home and social circumstances improve. However, some things, such as the number of children who are obese at the end of Reception Year in school, are not improving. The centre coordinator works hard to make sure that the activities and services provided by the centre are useful to you. We have asked the centre to make sure that it knows that the activities and courses are making the difference to families' lives that it thinks they are, by asking better questions of you and using the information it is given in smarter ways. The local authority works with the centre manager to look at the work the centre is doing. However, it does not have an annual review of the centre's work to find out if the centre has achieved what it set out to achieve. In addition the local authority has not helped the centre to put a strong enough business plan together that has clear enough targets to help the centre or the local authority to monitor and evaluate how successful the centre is. We have asked the local authority to improve on this.

The centre is careful to keep children and adults safe when they are in the centre. The work it does with families who find themselves in a vulnerable position is well planned and is helping to improve relationships between parents and their children. The people with whom the centre works find that the centre staff are professional and attentive in their work. However, we found that the centre does not do enough to help parents and carers who use the centre to understand what they would do if they were concerned about a child. We also found that the training of some staff and their knowledge of some aspects of safeguarding children procedures are not as up to date as they should be. We have asked the local authority to improve this.

We know that children do well when they attend the nursery at the centre. There is a lot of good work done to make sure this happens. A number of you give your time to the centre's work, either through volunteering in specific roles such as providing support to breastfeeding mothers or by acting as members of the parents' forum or advisory group. You are enthusiastic about the centre and are keen to promote it in the area. This willingness to volunteer in the centre helps us to know the centre is looking to help adults to think about their future and their community. However, we also know from the centre that some people in the area have strong views about the racial and cultural make-up of Britain. The centre does some work to introduce children and their parents and carers to aspects of different cultures. We have asked the centre to look at the work it does to promote the diverse society in Britain to improve on this even more.

Thank you, once again, to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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