

Inspection report for Old Moat Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	384037
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Reporting inspector	Marian Pearson HMI

Centre leader	Cathie Booth
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Old Moat Sure Start Children's Centre (500159)
	Old Moat Playgroup (EY236604)

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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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out immediately prior to the inspection of the centre under Section 49 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, staff working from the centre, members of the advisory board and the Family Forum, representatives of the local authority, and the statutory, community and voluntary organisations working in partnership with the centre. They also talked to parents, carers and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Old Moat Children's Centre is a phase one centre, designated in 2003, in south west Manchester. It operates from premises which were purpose-built for a local authority day nursery in 1989. This is now the centre's designated day-care provision, Old Moat Sure Start Children's Centre nursery and was inspected immediately prior to the centre's inspection. Old Moat Playgroup, which is managed by a voluntary committee, is also based at the centre and was inspected in October 2009. Inspection reports for these providers can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre is governed by the local authority supported by an advisory body and family forum. There have been several recent changes to the leadership of the centre, with an acting centre leader appointed three months ago, pending the outcome of a local authority review of children's centres. The local authority has also experienced a prolonged period of change in its children's services department.

A merger of day-care provision, following the closure of a nursery at a satellite centre, has reduced the amount of space available to the centre. A joint venture with the school and a regeneration project has created a community learning centre on the local primary school site that is used by the centre for additional activities and adult-learning courses.

Within the reach area there are pockets of extreme deprivation with one area being in the highest 5% and three in the highest 20% of the most deprived areas nationally. When they start early years provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are generally below those expected for their age. Although the current numbers of people in receipt of key out-of-work benefits are comparable with national averages, the city has the fourth highest number of children in families in receipt of out-of-work-benefits at 40%. Those in work are generally in low paid employment. The ward has one of the highest domestic burglary levels in the city and there is a high incidence of domestic violence. The population is transient, with large numbers of students and two hostels providing accommodation for homeless families. The community is increasingly diverse. A large majority of residents are of White British heritage with the largest minority ethnic groups being of Indian and Pakistani origin.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Old Moat Sure Start Children's Centre offers good support for children and families. The centre has successfully established itself as a hub in the community where families access good quality care, guidance and support. Users feel safe and confident when visiting the centre as it provides a warm, welcoming and friendly environment for everyone. Diversity is celebrated well and users of all backgrounds are fully included in activities. One lone parent said: 'The centre was a lifeline to have somewhere family-centred to walk into when I had my first child.'

Strong collaborative working is facilitated by the co-location of a multi-agency team and results in detailed knowledge of the reach area, its families and their needs. Information and resource sharing is very effectively supplemented by close links with the local school and the ward support officer who covers housing, crime and disorder issues. Well-ordered file records indicate that families receive thoughtfully-created support packages swiftly in times of crisis because of perceptive information sharing across partner agencies.

Safe practices and healthy lifestyles are adopted very successfully by users and their families. They eagerly participate in 'Busy Bodies' physical exercise sessions and learn about new tastes to enhance their diets through the centre's achievement of an 'Eco' award. Users say they feel safe when using the centre and, using their newly acquired knowledge from safety-related courses, are confident to raise any concerns they have. These are quickly addressed by the advisory body.

The centre has very effectively developed trusting relationships with the community and helped overcome traditional difficulties of engaging with local families. Consequently, users are keen to participate in the 'Family Forum' and are well represented on the advisory body. Users make a positive contribution to the centre by volunteering to support delivery of sessions. One volunteer explained: 'I want to give back to other parents the support and encouragement that I received.' Children make good progress in their personal and social development as they learn how to form amicable relationships with adults and other children. They play together harmoniously, behave well and participate eagerly in activities.

Strategies to improve children's educational achievement overall and skills to support adults' employability have been less well-focused. As a result, these outcomes are only satisfactory because the centre cannot demonstrate clearly the impact of its work. For example, the number of children attaining a good level of development when assessed at the end of Reception Year has only increased 1% over the last three years and remains below the national average. Nevertheless, outcomes for children and families are good overall as there have been some obvious successes in achievements for users in the most vulnerable groups. For example, some users who speak English as an additional language have successfully gained qualifications in reading and writing that have enabled them to secure employment.

A prolonged period of change reduced the local authority's capacity to provide support, robust challenge and scrutiny for the centre. In addition, reliable data have not always been readily accessible to enable accurate evaluation of the centre's impact and inform planning. The advisory body and staff team have continued to use reliable local sources of information to correctly identify, prioritise and meet the most immediate needs of families, particularly those who are vulnerable. The former centre leader ensures consistent, good quality leadership as chair of the advisory body. She projects an ambitious vision for the centre which motivates the staff team. The local authority has now re-established its role in holding the centre to account by introducing a well-designed performance management tool to focus the centre on making a difference for children and families across all outcomes.

Some uncertainty remains until the local authority review is completed. However, based on overall outcomes and provision being good, improved local authority management and strong partnership working, capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In partnership with the local authority, increase the rigour of self-evaluation and monitoring by ensuring that reliable, up-to-date data are collected and analysed to evaluate the impact of the centre's work across all outcomes, determine priorities and inform planning.
- Improve outcomes by:
 - identifying and implementing additional strategies to increase the number of children in the reach area achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and narrow the achievement gap.
 - engaging more users in identifying individual pathways to learning to enhance their skills and experience and gain accredited qualifications to improve their future employment prospects.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre supports emotional and mental well-being very effectively through dedicated counselling sessions, positive-thinking courses and introduction of baby-massage techniques. Support from the BIBs ('Breast is Best') group has increased the number of babies breastfed at six to eight weeks to above the national average. Obesity levels for children aged six years of age are very low at 8% because parents and carers know how to feed their children well. They control portion sizes based on advice in the weaning sessions. After attending 'Yummy Mums and Dads' sessions, one parent said: 'I can cook now. I cook more healthy food rather than buying frozen meals.' Take up of universal health services is good with high immunisation rates and good attendance at ante-natal appointments and baby clinic. Smoke-free homes are increasing following a concerted campaign by centre staff.

The number of children with child protection plans has halved and most families require intense support for relatively short periods. This is as a result of extensive joint-working and very effective use of the Common Assessment Framework as an early intervention tool. A parent reported that: 'The centre supported me and my family to manage difficult times and helped me to become a more confident parent.'

Users enjoy sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Baby Club' to play and have fun with their children. They develop confidence through building social networks and enhance their parenting skills. Crèches facilitate attendance at courses and individual support sessions. As

a result of attending carefully-structured programmes designed by the Children and Parent Service, users feel much more positive about themselves and their children. Some progress to literacy, numeracy, and information technology courses but it is not clear how many learners participate and the one visited by inspectors had low retention.

Children in the nursery and playgroup were observed to be confident, independent learners who made choices and managed risks very well. The nursery successfully supports placements for disabled children with complex needs that enable careful assessment to create well-designed support packages and assist inclusion in mainstream education. Early identification of developmental delay results in timely support from professionals such as speech and language therapists and provision of a funded nursery place. Effective observation and tracking of children who attend the nursery and playgroup are well established and support smooth transition arrangements both on entry and when moving to school. This does not extend to all children in the reach area who attend other settings or centre activity sessions.

Jobcentre Plus involvement in the centre is underdeveloped. The centre is aware that support for job-seekers needs to be improved and is considering alternative solutions. A few users have very successfully been encouraged to gain childcare qualifications as volunteers and subsequently are employed in the playgroup. Users gain helpful advice in seeking improvements to their housing situation and applying for benefits.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	3

How good is the provision?

2

Most families in the reach area are registered with the centre and the majority accesses services regularly. In a recent survey, nine out of ten users stated that the centre had made a difference to their lives and eight out of ten felt it had made a difference to their children's lives. Procedures to assess families' needs when they first engage with the centre are robust. Families who need more intensive support because they are facing difficulties have received good quality support from a range of agencies. One parent said: 'It has helped my

family to stay together.’ Another user highlighted how her confidence had been improved: ‘The parenting course has been really useful. It made me realise I am not the only one who struggles and needs help.’

Good role-modelling by nursery staff and key messages delivered by visitors to the ‘Baby Club’ help users to keep their children safe and healthy. For example, they establish good hygiene routines, understand the importance of sun protection and encourage children to regularly brush their teeth. Although fathers prefer to access regular, programmed activities rather than gender-specific provision, the ‘Dad’s trip’ to a discovery museum showed them how much fun this type of activity can be. Attendance at courses is rewarded with certificates and children’s achievements at nursery and playgroup are celebrated in their learning journeys. However, some centre activities are not planned using the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and do not maximise parents’ and carers’ understanding of children’s development to extend their learning at home.

Teenage parents use the centre, mainly to access health services, but are otherwise well provided with specialist city-wide services. Representation on the advisory body from Gingerbread, an organisation supporting lone parents, ensures their needs are comprehensively highlighted and addressed. Working parents value greatly the high quality, flexible day-care provision at the centre.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements are secure with clear lines of accountability now in place and understood by all levels of senior management. Local managers’ supervision of staff is regular and supportive as they are self-reflective and creative in approach. User evaluations are gathered regularly and effectively reviewed by the advisory body to inform service delivery.

The centre offers good value for money. Good resource-sharing and innovative solutions minimise the effect of reducing budgets. The main premises are extremely well used for courses and meetings as the centre is recognised as a safe place for those in vulnerable circumstances. Sustainability themes are well incorporated throughout the centre’s work.

The inclusion of all children and families is central to the centre’s vision. Staff respect and value all users of the centre regardless of their background or status. Adaptations, such as

provision of materials in appropriate-sized fonts, ensure the centre is fully accessible for those with additional needs. For users with limited understanding of English, the centre very effectively draws on the skills of multilingual staff and users to act as translators.

All staff, partner agencies and users have a sound understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and are clear about the procedures for raising child-protection concerns. The vast majority of those involved in the centre have attended training relevant to their role. Health and safety are given high priority, with risk assessments and evacuation practices conducted on a regular basis. Safer-recruitment procedures are appropriately implemented, including obtaining a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, to ensure all staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children prior to starting work.

Users are empowered to extend the users' voice beyond the centre very effectively. The Family Forum actively engages in organising events such as the 'Winter Festival.' These days assist families greatly as they are low-cost, include fun activities for all the family and provide access to a wide range of useful agencies and information. Users have good representation on the local school's governing body which is mutually beneficial for families, the school and the centre.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

Information from the Ofsted inspection of the centre's nursery conducted immediately prior to the centre inspection was used to inform judgements. Ofsted reports relating to other settings and schools in the reach area were scrutinised to provide additional contextual information.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Old Moat Sure Start Children's Centre on 7–8 December 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We were pleased to spend time at the centre looking at its work and talking to some of you who were in the centre during the inspection. We also spoke with the staff and other professionals who work with you. We found that staff work very effectively together with a wide range of other agencies to find out about those of you who might be in difficulties. This helps them act quickly to assess well with you what will make the most difference for you to help you cope and make things better for you and your family. The courses and support sessions, such as the ones run by the Children and Parents Service (CAPS), are particularly useful in helping you to feel better about yourselves and become better parents. Many of you said how positive you feel about your lives now.

The centre is good at helping families to keep safe. Some of you have attended courses to improve your understanding of how to keep your children safe at home and we were impressed that you use this knowledge to raise concerns with the staff if you are worried about any aspect of safety in the centre. The advisory group are quick to deal with these concerns as safeguarding you and your children is a high priority for them. You have also been encouraged to develop healthier lifestyles for your families. More babies are now breastfed and you have learned to cook more nutritious meals through attending sessions such as 'Yummy mums and dads'. The staff have also helped a number of you to give up smoking so you now have a smoke-free home which will improve the health of all the family.

The centre is successful in providing a welcoming place for all parents and carers. There is lots of useful information available in the centre and staff are well-trained to provide you with advice about how to keep your children safe and healthy and access benefits you might not have been aware of. We learned how much fathers had enjoyed the trip to the discovery museum. It was good to see that some of you have been enthused to volunteer to support the centre as you want to give something back for all the help you have received.

The work of the Family Forum is making a positive impact on the life of the community through raising concerns for you and helping to organise events such as the 'Winter Festival' which many of you appreciated as a low-cost event with fun activities for all the family. Those of you who work told us how much you appreciate the flexibility and high quality of provision at the centre's nursery.

Many of you will be aware of the changes that have been happening as a result of the local authority reviews. This has meant that senior leaders have not supported the centre leader and advisory body as much as they should in checking that it is making a difference for you in all aspects of your life. Senior leaders agreed that they needed to improve how they worked with the centre and have now sorted this out but it has meant that the centre has not always looked in detail at the information it has to check how well services are supporting you and your children. We have asked the local authority and the centre to improve this. We have also asked the centre to find ways of developing your understanding of how children learn and develop through their play so you can help them more at home. This is because your children are not making as much progress as children in other parts of the country when they are assessed at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Although some users have gained qualifications and now work in the playgroup, there are only a few of you who have been so successful. It was also really good to hear that those of you who have been learning English have achieved so well. However, we were not sure how many of you attend the courses available to you in literacy and numeracy and, in particular, how many of you complete the courses, as the centre does not routinely collect this information and use it to plan future courses. We have asked the centre to work with you to help you identify how you can gain skills, experience and qualifications to support you when you are ready to seek employment.

Thank you very much for your welcome and for taking the time to talk with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and sharing your experiences. We wish you every success in the future.

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