

Inspection report for Cotmanhay Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cotmanhay Childcare EY 330270

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.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre coordinator, other staff, representatives of the advisory group, the parents' forum, partner services and local authority representatives, as well as talking to parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, including activities provided at the centre and in nearby community facilities, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Cotmanhay Children's Centre is a phase one centre located in the north-east of the Erewash locality in a suburb of Ilkeston. It works within a cluster with five other centres in Erewash. It has been fully operational since 30 March 2006. The area the centre serves is one of five lower super output areas in Ilkeston and is ranked as one of the 20% most deprived areas in England. A children's centre coordinator is responsible for the management of this centre and the West Hallam Children's Centre nearby, under the supervision of the Ilkeston multi-agency team manager. Staff and resources are shared between the two centres. A locality manager provides the strategic oversight to the locality. An advisory group provides advice and assistance to ensure the effective operation of the children's centre. It is made up of representatives from a wide range of groups and agencies. A parents' forum has been established which helps support the work of the advisory group. In 2011, the leadership structure and delivery of services for the locality went through a period of significant restructuring into multi-agency teams (MAT).

The centre was purpose built and is well positioned near local schools and shops at the centre of the community it serves. The centre shares a building with Cotmanhay Childcare run by the Primary Learning Alliance (PLA) from which it commissions day care and which is reported on separately. It has 1005 children under the age of five in its reach area. Families come to the centre to access a range of services that include health, family support, adult learning, early years provision, advice and guidance. The area covers 1.9 square miles. It is made up of largely public housing with a small amount of private rented and owner occupied homes. The centre also

provides outreach services in nearby health centres and other local community facilities such as Ilkeston Community Hospital, Charnos Family Support Centre and Ilkeston Library.

Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those expected for their age. The families who live in the reach area are mainly White British, although there is a very small proportion of Polish heritage. Levels of unemployment are higher than other areas in Derbyshire. Some 40% of the under five year population in Cotmanhay are living in workless or income deprived households. The proportion of mothers not ceasing smoking or sustaining breastfeeding is high, as are the proportions of children who are obese or overweight. Since May 2006, 1181 families from the locality have used the centre.

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

This is a good centre. It has some outstanding features. At the heart of the centre’s work is the exceptional quality of care, guidance and support provided for all its users in the extremely positive and welcoming environment created at the heart of the Cotmanhay community. Families fully appreciate the work of the centre and are quick to praise the positive impact it has on their lives. ‘I think this place is fantastic’ is how one parent summed up the centre. A typical view expressed by another user was that, ‘Staff give over and above – it doesn’t matter what time of day, there is no question of them not doing it. They go out of their way to help you’. Inspectors agree with this view. The services offered to families and their children are matched exceptionally well to the needs of children and families because staff get to know them well, form strong and trusting relationships and swiftly assess their needs. They then provide well targeted groups or individual bespoke support. Those who use the centre know that their views are listened to and they can influence greatly the centre’s work. Consequently, many get involved and they themselves actively promote the centre’s work to those new to their community. It is no surprise then that the registration rates and continued engagement of those most in need of support is extremely high.

Success is due in no small part to the excellent leadership of the children’s centre

manager. Supported by her able and committed staff team, she is extremely skilled in securing and coordinating a broad range of strong partnerships, the services of which are fully integrated but flexible. This is achieved while creatively making the very best use of resources across this and the other nearby children's centre. As a consequence, from low starting points, good outcomes are secured for families and their children, particularly those in the centre's identified target groups. They develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and safe through activities such as 'Bake and Take' and safety themes in child and family activities. Activities, such as those with parents to support babies' learning and development and 'Stay and Play', help to ensure that gaps, particularly for the lowest 20%, are closing by the time children leave the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, not enough information is collected by the centre about children's starting points and the rate at which they progress in each area of learning. Excellent opportunities are taken in activities for babies to help parents understand how they can play their part in quickening this progress. These opportunities are sometimes missed in other activities. A high number of adults participate in the vocational and non-vocational courses on offer. Many parents improve their skills for life and some go on to achieve formal qualifications and secure employment, often within the centre itself. Partnerships with such as The Credit Union and the Citizens' Advice Bureau help to ensure improved economic stability for many.

The advisory group and all staff work together seamlessly across the centre's services to ensure equality of access for all. Safeguarding requirements are met well. Evaluations of the centre's work are accurate and the correct areas for improvement are identified. Plans for improvement do not always include targets based on improved outcomes for users which are measurable or identify regular points at which leaders and the advisory group can check on their success. Nevertheless, strong provision and good and improving outcomes indicate the centre's good capacity to continue to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - improving the quality of information collected about children's starting points and the progress they make
 - improving parents' understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements.

- Improve the effectiveness of governance and leadership by:
 - ensuring improvement plans include targets based on improved outcomes for users which are measurable and identify regular points at which leaders and the advisory group can check on their success.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Good outcomes are secured through a wide range of high quality services. Because partnerships with health services are well established and provision fully integrated with that of the centre, take-up is high from the start and well sustained. This includes ante-natal and post-natal support, breastfeeding support, and help for teenage parents and young pregnant girls. The numbers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding remain below those found nationally but this represents good progress from a low baseline. Reducing the proportion of children and adults who are obese remains a focus, with the promotion of healthy lifestyles consequently being woven throughout all provision. Parents are reluctant to participate in physical activity but the centre is creative in including it in popular activities such as 'Bake and Take', 'Merry Makers' and 'Magical Movers' so that before they know it, they are enjoying exercise. Similarly, the centre does all it can to reduce the high proportion of pregnant women smoking on delivery and adults continuing to smoke as parents. The centre has identified the need to further improve the emotional health of children and families. An initiative has been put in place in partnership with the Health Promotion Service. The impact of this has still to be measured.

A strength of the centre is its contribution to improving outcomes for adults and children with a disability or special educational needs. Compelling case studies demonstrate that children have been helped to make a strong transition into school, and adults either to play a meaningful role in the centre's work, improve their enjoyment of their family lives or access additional services swiftly because of the support facilitated by the centre. One parent movingly volunteered that, 'I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the children's centre'.

Feedback from users confirms that they have improved their awareness of how to keep their children safe. They confidently talk about the risks from harmful substances, fire and hazards around the home. The support they receive has helped many adults to be able to minimise the risk of harm or injury from others. Admissions to hospital have been reduced as have the number of road traffic accidents. The use of the Common Assessment Framework for recording and coordinating support programmes is consistent. Support for children with child protection plans and those who are looked after is good. Evidence confirms that the work of the centre reduces the need for child protection procedures. Records show that participation in such as 'Positive Play' and 'Positive Parents' results in significant improvements in children's behaviour and in adults' ability to manage the behaviour of their children and their family lives. Behaviour at the centre is outstanding.

Data available across the reach confirms that the achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores is improving. However, the centre does not currently collect information about children's starting points and the rate at which they progress in all areas of learning so that it can be sure for example, on which areas it needs to focus. The success that the centre has in building self-esteem and confidence is in no doubt. 'Ready for Nursery' sessions are highly successful in helping young children make the transition. Parents and school staff report unanimously a significant improvement in behaviour, social skills and engagement.

Parents and children have plentiful opportunities to enjoy learning together and also develop a love of stories and books. Staff provide strong support for early language development through a national [initiative to support children’s language acquisition](#). Adult learning opportunities are many and varied. Progression is monitored. At least 300 courses were delivered over the last year. These resulted in enhanced life skills, qualifications at level 1 and 2 in mathematics, English and information and communication technology, non-vocational and family learning courses in arts and crafts and languages to name but a few. Many parents successfully go on to become volunteers and several go into paid work, some in the centre itself. The number of workless households remains high but many are helped to be able to maximise and manage finances and achieve more economic stability.

Relationships are overwhelmingly positive between children, adults and staff. All are keen to attend as the centre ‘is like one big happy family’ as one volunteered. Many go on a journey from dependence to self-reliance and then ultimately are proud to give something back as volunteers, helping others and raising funds for the centre or developing the centre garden. The parents’ forum is well established and skills are developed highly effectively to enable meaningful participation in the advisory group. These skills have then been used by individuals to become school or local councillors or to set up a forum for parents and carers of children with disabilities.

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	2
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	1
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	2

How good is the provision?

1

Centre staff are relentless in their pursuit of the registration of target groups in their reach. They are so successful that registration is usually maintained at very close to 100%. Once registered, the vast majority remain engaged with services because the care, guidance and support they receive are of the highest quality and they appreciate quickly the improvements that the centre makes to their lives.

Centre workers are skilled in assessing families’ needs and ensuring that the right

package of support is put in place, either at the centre or through outreach. They record and monitor closely its effectiveness so that it can be modified if necessary but with the ultimate aim of users being able to manage their own circumstances. Activities are supplemented by vibrant displays and an array of accessible additional information. Every target group and associated aspect of provision has a 'children's centre champion' so that no-one is in any doubt about who has lead responsibility for facilitating the many groups and outreach or who to go to in times of crisis. Champions develop high levels of expertise because training and resources are well focused and partnerships have continuity and are well embedded. For example, there is a champion for families who have a disability who facilitates an additional needs support group. Staff are trained to support local and national initiatives which has a vigorous impact on target groups.

Young parent champions, who work closely with health partners, facilitate monthly drop-ins, parenting courses and signpost to training opportunities. It is ensured that those who need help to promote their emotional well-being receive specialist support and courses including 'Positive Parenting' and 'Positive Play'. School partners are particularly appreciative of such sessions which continue through the school holidays and provide much needed continuity for children and parents. Provision to help children learn is strong though more could be done to help parents develop their understanding of how young children learn best and the part that they can play in this and to monitor more closely the progress that children make. Good quality childcare is commissioned from the co-located service.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Accountability arrangements and service delivery have recently been restructured into multi-agency teams. Despite this period of reorganisation and the uncertainty of some behind the scenes, the shared ambition for continued success and improvement has continued. Centre users have seen no change to the quality of provision, despite staffing and financial challenges. Relationships are strong and partnerships between all key agencies remain fully integrated, highly positive and well managed. Consequently, outcomes for all groups are good and achievement gaps are closing.

The centre leader, supported by centre workers, other staff and volunteers, demonstrates exceptional drive and determination to do the best for the Cotmanhay

community. These high expectations and vision are shared and supported well by the advisory group and the parents' forum. Staff are held accountable for their performance and supported to improve. An army of volunteers and existing users are the eyes and ears of the centre throughout the reach and are great advocates for the centre's work. They help to ensure that registration and engagement remain high and have significant involvement and influence in shaping the centre's services. One local elected representative volunteered that 'Cotmanhay without its children's centre would be a lesser place'. There is a renewed focus on monitoring and evaluation and quality assurance at the strategic level, including a new data system which the centre leader supplements. These systems ensure a clear view of strengths and areas for development, and make sure that services are well focused on those most in need. There is not currently a mechanism to enable the centre leader to collect and analyse more detailed information about how well children in the reach area are progressing through the Early Years Foundation Stage. Improvement planning is not always clear enough about what improvements will look like for target groups and how they will be checked for success along the way.

Resources are maximised across this and the nearby centre, ensuring outstanding value for money. Staff make the most of every inch of space in the extremely well-maintained building. The centre is highly inclusive and demonstrates its commitment to equal opportunities well. Displays and resources demonstrate the celebration of a rich variety of cultures and faiths. Festivals are celebrated and differences valued. Courses are in place to help Polish speakers integrate and settle and information and signage are in dual languages. The environment is adapted both indoors and outdoors in response to users' needs to ensure accessibility and make sure that everyone is included. The timing of activities and other support is flexible and sensitive.

Safeguarding is a high priority. The centre works together extremely well with other agencies to discharge its duties. Safe recruitment procedures are adhered to and the necessary training and checks for child protection are made. Common Assessment Framework procedures are robust. All staff are rigorous in adhering to daily routines and users are clear about what is expected. Risk assessments meet requirements.

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 secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
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	1

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

Inspectors considered the inspection judgments for Cotmanhay Childcare which was judged to be good at its most recent inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cotmanhay Children's Centre on 23–24 May 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Under the careful guidance of the centre manager and other senior leaders, centre staff provide excellent care, guidance and support for all of you who use the centre. Those of you who talked to us could not speak highly enough of the centre’s work. Most importantly you said the centre helps improve your lives, particularly for those of you who are facing difficult challenges. One parent said, ‘In times of crisis they have always helped me’. The centre staff have drive and ambition; they meet regularly to discuss the centre’s work and plan for improvement. All staff place the utmost importance on you and your families and always provide a listening ear for you. They are passionate about creating a friendly and welcoming environment where you feel at home and able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you told us that you value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly. We agree with you that relationships with staff are exceptionally positive. We were also impressed with how many of you become volunteers, join the parents’ forum and the advisory group and go on to help others facing similar circumstances to the ones which you have been helped to overcome.

The centre offers an excellent range of services and activities for families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy and safe. The children’s behaviour at the centre is outstanding and you and your children are safe there. Staff are helping you to

keep yourselves and your children healthy by encouraging new mothers to breastfeed and promoting healthy eating through cookery classes.

The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Stay and Play', 'Positive Play' and 'Baby PEEP'. We could see how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked staff to do even more to help you understand how your children are learning through the Early Years Foundation Stage and for centre leaders and partners to support the centre coordinator in collecting information about how well they are doing. We have asked the advisory group to make sure that when they plan for improvements, they set clear targets that they can measure and put in place checks to see how things are progressing along the way.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us a great deal during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families the best for the future. The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.