

Inspection report for Pebbles Children's Centre

Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	368273
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Kath Beck

Centre governance	The governing body of The Willows School and Early Years Centre
Centre leader	Lindy Crocombe
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	The Willows School and Early Years Centre
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Acorn at The Willows EY416503

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 two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, senior leadership team, front line staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, and headteacher of the school. They also met with representatives from the range of services offered, the advisory board, the local authority, parents and carers using the services, the police and the local college. Inspectors visited outreach services at nearby schools and spoke to the manager of another children's centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Pebbles is a phase one children's centre that serves three estates, Fishermead, Springfield and Oldbrook, in the wards of Campbell Park and Woughton, Milton Keynes. It opened in The Willows School in 2004 as part of a local Sure Start programme and transferred to its current building in 2006. The local authority has delegated responsibility for the governance of the centre to the governing body of the school. An advisory body contributes to the centre's leadership and management. The centre provides the full core offer including childcare, family support, child and family health services and links with employment agencies. It is situated within the 10% most deprived areas in the country. The large majority of families come from diverse minority ethnic groups. Most are from Black African or Asian heritage. The population is transient. The area has a mix of housing types, including a significant number of three-storey flats. Many are rented and have several families living in them. Unemployment rates and the number of families on benefits are higher than the national average. The centre works closely with Springfield House, a residential unit for young mothers, Moorlands children's centre, and Oldbrook, Orchard, Penwith and Sheperdswell Primary schools, where it provides outreach services. It also works with the new private nursery on the site that admits children from the age of four months. Assessments indicate that development when they first start in the Nursery is lower than usually found.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Pebbles is an outstanding children’s centre. It welcomes, inspires and supports a high number of families, enabling them to celebrate and enjoy childhood, as well as grow as a community. One user said that without the centre, ‘I would never have got my life back on track, begun to see a secure future for me and my kids, or made so many friends from different cultures.’ All who are involved with Pebbles share its core aim of meeting the needs of every child and their family. This underpins the excellent care, guidance and support that the centre provides and gives users the skills to make a real difference to their lives. Equality and diversity are promoted strongly. Translators and signers ensure that everyone is fully included in all that the centre offers. Safeguarding of all users, while in the centre, at home or working in the community is at the heart of its work. Users expressed clear views that the centre is a safe haven for them in times of crisis.

Pebbles is very highly regarded and plays a central role in the community. Its exceptional practice is used as an exemplar for other centres within the local authority. Among many comments praising its success was, ‘I felt isolated with three young children at home, but after coming to the centre I became confident and the smile on my face came back.’ Information from family histories and testimonials shows that families, especially in times of significant difficulty, have received very good support from a wide range of services coordinated by the centre. Users rightly describe the support from the family workers based at the centre as exemplary. The number of users taking up the wide range of excellent activities and services has risen rapidly in the last four years. Even transient residents make the most of what it offers because they know it will make a difference to them.

Leadership and management are exceptionally strong. This is because at all levels, leaders and managers are very well trained and qualified. Their skills and expertise complement each other extremely well and are utilised to the full. They are innovative, especially with regard to the devolved budget, so that resources are deployed to best effect. The advisory board challenges the centre very effectively to ensure it maintains its high quality service. Parental and professional expertise within

the advisory board also enables the centre to signpost users to other services.

Communication systems among the staff, between the centre, its outreach provisions, the local authority, different services and other children's centres are very clear. These allow the high quality of service to continue during staff absences. They also allow for flexibility in the range of provision to ensure it meets precisely the needs of users across the reach area. Leaders and managers have high expectations that users will respond positively to the centre's provision and take responsibility for changes to their lives. Everyone is expected to treat fellow users and the resources within the centre with respect. Volunteers undergo training and have a mentor to enable them to gain skills in childcare or administration with a view to taking up future employment. Courses in raising confidence, parenting skills and literacy and numeracy are well attended as they are very practical and easily applied to day-to-day lives. The range of provision to enhance family relationships, children's play and communication skills also have high levels of attendance. Partnerships with parents, carers and all the services in the locality are valued highly. Their views are respected and acted on so that provision continues to meet needs.

Through its integrated way of working with the nursery, school and outreach provisions, the centre tracks the impact of its work on outcomes for children over time. Results of assessments at the age of five show that the implementation of the project 'Every Child a Talker' and the centre's wide range of play activities is contributing significantly to the rise in the number of children reaching the national average in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. Records of children's progress from the time they start in the centre through to the end of the Reception Year show exceptional progress.

The centre's comprehensive understanding of the community in which it is situated is used really well to programme services. Systems to collect the information to check the impact of its current initiatives to reduce the levels of unemployment and reduce the number of children who are obese have been implemented. Leaders and managers have yet to collate this information in a statistical form that will help them to demonstrate easily the impact of initiatives in the short, medium and longer term and within the wider community. The centre has dynamic leadership and management. Planning for the future is innovative and sets out clear targets for improvement to benefit the community. Self-evaluation processes are robust. These factors, combined with extremely strong teamwork, show the centre has an outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the use of statistical data to show the impact of initiatives in meeting the needs of the community in the short, medium and longer term.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

High quality provision enables users to acquire physically, mentally and emotionally healthy lifestyles. Courses to promote healthy lifestyles are bringing about changes to the eating habits of many families. Following attendance at a recent course, one parent said that the family now eats brown bread, no longer snacks between meals, and knows how to eat well on a budget. Parents and carers bring healthy snacks to the centre when children are attending longer sessions. They enjoy cooking with their children, suggesting recipes they wish to cook while on the course and trying new foods. Many parents and carers recently took part in a promotion to prevent dental decay. Activities such as 'Jump and Jive' and 'Line Dancing' promote physical activity in a fun way.

To promote good levels of mental health, courses such as 'Baby Massage', 'Messy Play' and 'Stay and Play' sessions contribute to promoting the rich bond between parent and child. Anxieties are eased through Relate counselling, meetings with the Citizen's Advice Bureau, domestic violence and housing advisors, family drop in sessions, confidence building courses and home visits. These services provide the guidance needed for users to make informed decisions. Parents and carers say that on occasions they arrive at the centre feeling very upset. As a result of the advice they receive, they leave feeling confident that they can deal with their problems. All the activities provided, including family trips to places of interest, such as Southend or the forest, reduce the sense of isolation. Users are directed to services where they can access advice to stop smoking and reduce reliance on drugs and alcohol. Staff consistently follow up the referrals and offer additional support to enable users to turn their lives around.

The safety and well-being of users and their families is at the heart of the centre's work. One parent or carer wrote, 'Health and safety are paramount to Pebbles, which makes me feel safe and secure at all times.' Sessions on keeping safe in the home, fire protection and being safe in the community make children and their parents and carers fully aware of how to keep out of harm's way. Staff know each family, their individual circumstances and needs really well and tailor the support accordingly. Early identification of concerns and intervention by the centre's family support workers, along with other agencies, play an important part in the reduction of harm to children. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively because of trusting relationships between parents and carers, and close cooperation between the centre, community and health services. Courses and advice about managing children's behaviour gives parents and carers new skills and these, too, enhance children's safety.

The centre is very welcoming. Users comment in their evaluations that they are always greeted with a smile and that they are valued. Children behave very well. They really enjoy the captivating and enjoyable activities provided for them in 'Stay

and Play' sessions, 'Mucky Pups'. Stories and singing during 'Chirpy Chatterers' help children to develop their communication skills. These activities provide a secure foundation for learning so that, from their starting points, children are achieving very well at the end of the Reception Year. Parents and carers appreciate these opportunities to learn from the excellent role models of staff, and enhance their parenting skills. Regular training and support is provided for childminders. This helps them to plan and enhance their practice. They share their knowledge and experience with toddler groups and this, too, contributes significantly to the outstanding outcomes achieved.

The views of parents and carers successfully influence decision making in the centre. Through their representation on the advisory board, they play an effective part in deciding and supporting the centre's development. It was the advisory board that suggested the provision of a temporary building when a building project was cancelled. Ideas and suggestions, often provided informally, bring about changes to the content and timing of courses and events. Parents and carers run 'Growing Friends', a group to organise social and fund-raising events. This ensures the centre continues to meet the needs and interests of the community.

Skills that will stand adults in good stead for the future are developed through courses such as confidence building and volunteering. 'Crafty Cards' promotes strongly numeracy skills in a practical way. Those attending say that this course has had a significant impact on their confidence in dealing with arithmetic in their daily lives. Volunteers enjoy working with their mentors and value the skills they are developing as a foundation for future work. The centre has been unable to secure the services of Jobcentre Plus. To overcome this, it has engaged with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Milton Keynes Council. Their advice means families can access the benefits to which they are entitled and learn how to apply for 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	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

High quality provision for users' welfare, health and social needs stems from the centre's robust assessment procedures. Senior staff draw on the comprehensive information available to them about the area, research projects that identify specific cultural and social needs, surveys, local authority priorities and the views of users to plan an attractive and effective programme. Consequently, the programme is aimed at raising the aspirations of the community. It takes particular account of cultural needs and enables fathers and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to participate fully. Through its own evaluation, the centre has identified priorities to reduce employment and obesity, as well as to close the gap in the achievement of the lowest performing 20% of children in the Reception Year and their peers. Initial indicators show that the centre's provision is highly successful, but the data with regard to employment and obesity are not sufficient to show how this compares in the short, medium and longer term.

All activities are planned meticulously with clear outcomes linked to the national indicators. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation identifies where needs are not being met. Services are then changed and tailored to meet requirements. Where services cannot be provided, such as Jobcentre Plus, other arrangements are made to provide the necessary support. In some cases, sessions are provided for identified families by invitation to boost confidence or to provide in-depth support. Many children live in small flats. For this reason, the centre provides excellent trips out and activities that cannot be undertaken easily in the home.

The centre's extensive links with other professionals and trusting relationships with parents and carers ensure that assessments, especially those carried out under the Common Assessment Framework, are thorough and well informed. Regular meetings with representatives from a range of services and the centre, as well as between the centre's family support workers, ensure that support is personalised and is meeting individual needs. In this way, the centre and multi-agency teams are enhancing the safety and emotional well-being for children and young mothers, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Ceremonies that celebrate adult achievements, where certificates are presented by the Mayor, are valued highly by users as they boost their confidence and encourage them to want to learn more. One parent said, 'I can't get enough of courses.' Free crèche facilities support training, education and volunteer opportunities. These have resulted in users seeking further qualifications to work in childcare to enhance their economic viability. The centre's involvement with teenage mothers includes enhancing their relationship with their children. The initiative to help the young mothers record their child's progress in a book was very successful. The young mothers also enjoy activities in the centre. One said, 'Pebbles is great. Having staff available during the "Under Ones Group" for support is great. The session is a chance for me to socialise and for my child to interact with other children.'

The centre provides an extensive range of organised activities, including specific

sessions for users with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and drop-in services that users can book or attend at any time. Some, such as use of the sensory room, are accessed by arrangement. Cookery and healthy lifestyle courses take place in a nearby school as it has the appropriate facilities. Family support workers can often be found on the playgrounds of the schools when parents and carers are leaving or collecting their children. This means advice to sustain the most vulnerable groups is easily available and new users are attracted to the centre.

The impact of the programmes is monitored carefully and the centre is clear about the impact of its provision in the short term. Children’s records, case studies, reviews of courses, and responses to ‘Question of the week’ give a very clear picture about outstanding outcomes for parents, carers and children.

High quality care, guidance and support offered to parents, carers and children are truly valued by everyone using the centre. Outcomes are high as the support is devised to meet specific individual needs. All the activities that users attend, alone or with their children, provide high quality information, advice and guidance. The individual guidance provided by the family support workers is having a significant, positive impact on many families over time.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1
How effective are the leadership and management?	1

The arrangements for governance and accountability are understood very well by senior leaders and managers. Very strong links between the governing body, advisory board, local authority and senior leaders mean that ambitions for the success of the centre are high. These strong links, together with robust self-evaluation procedures, contribute effectively to development plans, service provision and long-term strategic planning, especially with regard to sustainability.

Morale in the centre is high. Members of the senior team lead different aspects of provision, such as family support or learning and development. Regular, sharply focused meetings enable all staff to be kept up-to-date, reflect on practice and share

ideas to improve the centre to benefit the community. Family support workers and the children's centre teacher lead courses as well as use their expertise in the community and outreach centres. This ensures highly effective collaborative working and monitoring of the quality of integrated provision.

Strong teamwork, excellent relationships and the determination to make the centre a safe, vibrant, welcoming place where everyone, including the local community, work in partnership are bringing about high quality outcomes. Through appraisal and performance management meetings, staff are held accountable for the success of the centre. Procedures for safeguarding are robust. All staff and volunteers have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check. They are trained appropriately in child protection procedures. The centre makes clear the responsibilities of both the staff and users where child abuse is suspected. Relationships with a wide range of community services and professionals are exceptionally well coordinated. They enable early intervention to secure the safety of children. Family support workers, the police and local groups work effectively with the centre to reduce domestic violence. Risk assessments are thorough and local authority guidance, especially with regard to safer recruitment, is followed closely. There are clear policies and support procedures for staff working out in the community so that they, too, are kept safe.

The parish, local councils and the college give the centre an extensive range of information to decide key priorities with regard to provision. The information prevents the duplication of courses, such as English for speakers of other languages, that are available nearby. Users' views are sought regularly. Rigorous evaluation of services by the centre, its partners and local authority influence provision. They enable the centre to decide key priorities for development in the locality. Systems have been established recently to track the progress of ambitious targets for improvement.

In the past four years, the centre has extended its provision significantly. Financial resources are managed and monitored very efficiently. Rooms are multi-purpose, enabling flexible use of the building, and are easily accessible to those with disabilities. Staff skills in the on-site school and centre are interchangeable. The centre provides excellent value for money.

Outreach services in local schools and the residential home for young mothers ensure that families that are harder to reach can access the centre's provision. The use of sign language and translations by multilingual staff enable all users to play a full part in the centre and communicate clearly. Families and children with special educational needs are supported sensitively and have access to specific resources. Local events, such as the Market Place, summer fairs and cultural celebrations enhance community cohesion. They also enable the wider community to appreciate and engage in the services available within 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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	1

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

None

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 Pebbles Children's Centre on 2–3 March 2001. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you for your help and contribution to the inspection. Those of you we spoke to told us that you do not know what you would have done without the centre as it has made such a difference to your lives. You said it has put the smile back on your face. You mentioned that Pebbles is very highly thought of and plays a central role in your community. You told us, and we agree, that the centre always welcomes you, whatever your background, and that you trust the staff there to help you. We were impressed that the centre has inspired you to take courses, to become confident and to gain new skills that you now use as a volunteer or help you at work. You also told us you have made many friends from different cultures and feel a lot less isolated.

Pebbles provides you with high quality care, guidance and support. The staff know that your needs and those of your children are of the highest importance and do their very best to assist you. The excellent family support workers and the centre's links to many other support groups are giving you the knowledge, skills and information you need to overcome the challenges you are facing. The centre is very skilled at enabling you to develop ways to improve your parenting skills and enjoy spending time with your children. It is also helping you to obtain the advice and guidance you need to ensure that you receive the benefits to which you are entitled or to find work. The health services and various courses are helping you to improve your mathematics skills and your families to be healthy. The centre takes considerable care to ensure that you and your children are safeguarded and that the centre is a safe place to be. We know that you really enjoy going to the centre as the wide range of courses, activities and events that the centre provides are very popular.

The senior staff at the centre, the headteacher of the school, the governing body and advisory board, together with the local authority, lead and manage the centre extremely well. They listen carefully to your views to make sure that the provision meets your needs. Translators and signers ensure that your voice is heard. The staff in the centre and the different services keep in close contact with one another. This ensures that if a member of staff is away for any reason, someone is there who can still advise you. It also makes sure the provision continues to meet your needs.

We noticed that everyone we met responded really well to the high expectations staff have of you. You, too, treat all the staff and your new-found friends with a great deal of respect. Many of you are enjoying learning mathematics skills through origami and making cards. As the centre works closely with the nursery and schools nearby, it knows that your children get a very good start to school life. Often, they make good or excellent progress in their personal development and communication skills.

The centre knows its community well. It is working to help you back into work and reduce the number of children who are obese. The centre is collecting information to show how well it is doing but it does not yet have the statistical data to show this to everyone who needs it.

We have asked the centre to:

- Extend the use of arithmetical data to show how well the centre is improving the needs of members of the community over time.

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