

**Visit to Hunslet St Mary's Primary School and  
Hunslet Children's Centre  
Monday 9th February 2009**

**Attending:**

*Scrutiny Board Members*  
Cllr G Driver

*Scrutiny Support*  
Laura Nield

*Hunslet St Mary's Primary School and Hunslet Children's Centre*  
Mark Ford – Head Teacher  
Lesley Crampton – Children's Centre Manager

- Hunslet St Mary's Primary School and Hunslet Children's Centre are very closely linked, with one of the Children's Centre's two sites being situated alongside the school.
- Local primary schools were involved with the Children's Centre management in discussions from the time when the Centre was first proposed.
- Other staff were also encouraged to make links before any building work started.
- From the beginning, a decision was made to have one 'foundation stage unit'. This contains a mixture of Early Years and Primary school children, and the staff also come from both the Children's Centre and the school.
- The two organisations developed a 'shared vision' and there was a strong focus on developing good relationships between staff, with a sense of joint ownership.
- Staff worked together to merge different methods of teaching, to create a seamless transition from the Children's Centre to the school.
  
- Both the primary school and the Children's Centre have an excellent reputation locally, which has been enhanced by their joint working.
- They also have an equal relationship – they can negotiate on key issues and will both stand up for their own priorities.
- Good relationships at management level are seen as crucial to their success.
- In addition, both sides are convinced that joint working is the right thing to do, and this attitude has filtered down to all of the staff.
- Initially there was a certain amount of opposition from some governors and staff, but this has now been resolved.
  
- The relationships with other schools in the cluster were discussed.
- They were included in the early stages of planning, and initially it was intended to have 26 Early Years places at St Mary's and a further 26 at Low Road Primary. However, this did not happen.
- Low Road now have a separate nursery.
- Every year so far, the Children's Centre has filled all of its places and has had to turn children away.
- Parents are very keen to send their children to a Children's Centre rather than a sessional nursery due to the 'wrap-around-care' on offer.

- The number of places on offer to the youngest children are limited, as staff want to ensure that they will be able to offer these children continuous care all the way through to primary school. If more places were available at the second stage then more places could be offered to under 3's.
- At present, attending the Children's Centre does not give a child any priority when applying for a place at the primary school. As a result, some children are having to go to school elsewhere despite having been at the Children's Centre for years. If possible the school would like to change the admissions criteria to help avoid this problem.
- Some efforts have been made to work with other primary schools so that the children have a continuous experience. However, most would prefer to stay at St Mary's if possible.
- Governance arrangements at the Children's Centre consist of an advisory board, with representatives from school governors, teachers (from St Mary's and Low Road), parents, Health service representatives etc.
- However, the school governors at St Mary's have overall responsibility for the part of the Children's Centre which is on the same site.
- There is no demarcation between the two organisations in terms of budget. The two groups of staff share resources.
- Funding is decided each year by a complex formula, put together by Education Leeds. The Children's Centre effectively pays the school 'rent' for their use of the building. The formula may change next year as in the past the Children's Centre has been open for longer hours than the school, but from September onwards the school will have longer hours too, as part of the Extended Schools programme.
- There is no real clash between the different cultures of Early Years and Primary. Having all the Foundation Stage children together in one class helps to avoid this and all the staff also meet each week to discuss the curriculum and iron out any difficulties. This also benefits those children from more challenging families, as staff can discuss any concerns they may have.
- The class is taught by a Foundation Stage teacher, who has experience both of primary and early years. This also helps in bridging the gap between the two.
- All the work that the Foundation Stage class do is linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage principles.
- Partnerships with parents are also seen as very important.
- At this stage it is difficult to measure the long term impact on the children. However, over the past two years children in the Foundation Stage have scored highly in the 'Personal, social and emotional' category, which is seen as the key to later academic success.
- Anecdotally, staff also feel that the new arrangements have made safeguarding much easier as the links between different organisations and 'joined up working' are far more explicit.
- A lot of outreach work is run from the Children's Centre so families are accessing the school for health services and play sessions. This makes engaging with problem families much easier as the school is seen as a community hub and parents are involved from an early stage.

- Both organisations work hard to make the transition between Children's Centre and school as smooth as possible, and also to ease the transition from reception to year one. Children gradually become accustomed to the life of the school during reception and it is seen as a year long process.
- Staff are also trying to apply the same principles to those children leaving the primary school, and are trying to forge links with other schools in the area. However, it is not currently practical to have a similar, year-long transition process.
- Work is underway to create a network of nursery and reception staff in the wedge to share good practice.

## **SWOT Summary**

### **Strengths**

The organic integration of the Children's Centre with the Primary School particularly through curriculum, teaching and staffing, etc.

### **Weaknesses**

The loose/ limited ties with other schools serving the same community - Hunslet Carr, Low Road and St Josephs.

### **Opportunities**

Work which can be done on a shared basis with the area's dysfunctional families.

### **Threats**

The Children's Centre may not yet be seen as belonging to the local community (and therefore open to users from every part of the area and available to work with each local school).