

Inspection report for Central Children's Centre

Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	383649
Inspection dates	09 - 10 November 2011
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Centre leader	Mrs Sue Carpenter
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leaders, parents and representatives from the local authority, partners and members of the advisory board.

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

Information about the centre

Central Children's Centre is situated close to Doncaster town centre. It is surrounded by housing and located in a purpose-built two-storey building next to Stirling Primary School. A dual carriageway runs through the reach area. An outreach venue, jointly run with Balby Children's Centre and Balby Primary School opened in June 2011. This Phase 1 Children's Centre was designated to provide services to meet the full core purpose of children's centres in 2006. The local authority is responsible for governance of the centre. A recent re-structure of local authority children's services has increased significantly the staffing at the centre. The large majority of housing served by the centre is rented accommodation, both local authority and private landlord owned. Services delivered by the children's centre team and partners include family support; child and family health services; adult and family learning; employment signposting; and targeted support for vulnerable families.

The centre serves an area in the top 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Unemployment in the area is high and the very large majority of children aged under five years are living in families dependent on workless benefits. The population of the reach area served by the centre is mainly from minority ethnic backgrounds including a number of asylum seekers. A number of different languages are spoken by families in the community. Children in the centre's reach area enter early years provision with knowledge, skills and abilities that are lower than those typical for their age.

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

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

4

Main findings

Despite some positive features, such as the adult and child play sessions, the centre is not effective in identifying and meeting the needs of the majority of families from target groups, for example, young parents and asylum seekers. Too few families from target groups use the centre. Children and families who do use the centre report that they are gaining confidence and improving their family relationships. Some families demonstrate that they are developing their understanding of healthy lifestyles and a very small minority have improved their understanding of keeping children safe. However, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate the centre's impact on health outcomes or reducing the risk of injury for children in the area.

The centre does not use available data well enough to ensure its services reach the children and families most in need. Information from families and partner agencies is not gathered effectively to inform plans for future service delivery. There are no effective systems to record who uses the centre's services. Take up of adult learning opportunities, such as literacy and numeracy courses, is good and those who complete courses gain accredited qualifications; some move onto further training and into employment. However, less than half of those who start a course complete it.

Universal groups such as Stay and Play and Jelly Beans are well attended. Families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable engage well with individual support packages delivered by centre staff and partner agencies. Parents find the staff at the centre, and the outreach venue, welcoming. They are happy and confident to approach staff and appreciate the support they receive. Much good work has been done to engage families from minority ethnic groups and to provide translation services to those who speak English as an additional language. The Ladies Cultural Group is popular with women from the local Muslim community. They enjoy activities such as physical exercise in a safe, culturally acceptable environment. The centre cannot, however, provide evidence that it is reaching and engaging effectively with all of its target groups to enable them to access centre services. In

particular, it is unable to identify the number of asylum seekers who form one of their target groups.

The centre's self-evaluation and planning are weak. Plans for future services focus too much on tasks rather than clear, quantifiable targets, against which the centre's performance can be measured. The centre recognises that its self-evaluation was over-positive. Although the centre is willing, it lacks the capacity to improve without support.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of the centre by:
 - making better use of available data to identify and target those who are not using the centre
 - setting challenging and relevant targets to drive improvement in all outcomes for children and families in the reach area particularly those from target groups
 - improving systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the centre's work
 - working with partners to gain relevant information about the impact of the work they do with children and families in the reach area.

- Fully identify and increase the number of families from target groups who engage with the centre.

- Ensure that the system to record and monitor Criminal Record Bureau disclosure checks, and related training for staff and volunteers, is reliable and up to date.

How good are outcomes for families?

4

Despite positive outcomes for some families using the centre, overall outcomes are inadequate. Some adults report improved self-confidence and two parents have recently taken on a joint role as chairs of the advisory board. The advisory board meetings inform the development of services at the centre. Parents see positive improvements in their children's behaviour and development. Children who attend activity sessions with their parents behave well and users demonstrate that they have respect for each other's cultures.

Families talk about how they have a better understanding of what a healthy diet is and some have achieved significant weight loss. Some families use the health services offered at the centre. Baby clinics are busy and highly thought of. However, a large proportion of families with young children do not engage with health services well enough. Key indicators relating to the centre's success in improving health outcomes for families are poor. For example, take up of primary immunisation is low; obesity levels in children at the end of Reception Year are high; and the number of babies still being breastfed at six to eight

weeks old is low. There is a similar picture in outcomes to improve children’s safety across the reach area. Attendance rates at accident and emergency units by children under five years old have increased significantly and are very high. The work done by the centre to address and improve these outcomes is not focused, sustained or monitored well enough to have sufficient impact. The Common Assessment Framework is used well to assess family need and put in place time-limited, individualised packages of support.

The centre, together with a local school, has improved the development rate of children’s skills and knowledge. The sustained focus on children’s communication, language and literacy skills and their personal, social and emotional skills in all sessions has had positive results, with at least one local school finding that children are better prepared for school, but this is not the case for all. Adults who complete courses, accredited and non-accredited, are rightly proud of their achievements but too few complete them. Some adults have progressed to further learning or training such as in voluntary services or to move into a career such as nursing.

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	4
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	4
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	3
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?

3

The centre provides a welcoming environment. A wide range of information about services and activities for families with young children is freely available in displays around the centre. Feedback on services and the centre’s response to it is widely displayed. Information relating to support for those suffering from domestic violence is not accessible to all and is not always sensitively displayed.

The building is well resourced with good quality equipment. Services and activities are broadly matched to limited individual needs rather than the community’s needs, but they are appreciated by those who use them. A few services are of good quality and are devised to meet a clearly identified need. Purposeful learning is at the heart of all sessions, particularly for children, however, this is not always the case for adults. A ‘Transition Group’ for children about to start school was delivered in partnership with one school. The need was identified

as a result of sharing and analysing information about children’s and parents’ readiness for the start of school life. First aid for parents and their children was provided at the request of families who had accessed home and road safety training. Although these initiatives were well planned and delivered in a thoughtful and innovative way, they were accessed by too few families for them to have a significant impact.

Care, guidance and support offered to users are adequate and, for those families receiving individual support packages from the family support workers, it is good. Some groups, such as young parents, receive well developed support to help them with financial matters. The majority of users with economic support needs are signposted to relevant agencies such as Jobcentre Plus.

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	3
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.	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

The centre’s governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood by all staff. Monthly local authority reviews of spending and budget allocation provide sound financial monitoring of the centre’s expenditure. The centre’s provision is monitored and reviewed against the local authority delivery plan. The local authority has recognised that some aspects of the leadership and management of the centre are weak. They are working with the centre to address the weaknesses but it is too early to judge the impact of this support. Managers’ supervision of staff is effective and supportive particularly in respect of work with vulnerable families.

The centre is effective in its work with families who find themselves in need of targeted support. Work with partners is strengthening, particularly in identifying individual family needs. Record keeping and monitoring of cases where there are concerns about a child’s welfare is good. However, systems relating to how Criminal Record Bureau disclosure checks for staff and safeguarding training are recorded and monitored are less robust. This leaves the centre manager without a clear overview of the centre’s statutory duties to ensure staff and volunteers are suitably vetted and trained.

The centre effectively celebrates the diversity of the local community by using resources which reflect the different faiths, cultures and backgrounds. Individual groups established to meet the needs of specific users are popular and successful. A very wide range of languages is spoken by families in the reach area and appropriate translation services are available. Although for a user who speaks or reads little or no English, there is limited written material on display to inform them about available services. Careful consideration has been given to

the design of the centre so that all users can physically gain full access. The centre provides an adequate level of service for the families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities that are known to them.

The centre delivers sufficient services to meet the needs of a small number of families who use the centre. However, there is insufficient analysis of any data relating to either target families in the area or outcomes for families in the local community. Self-evaluation is weak, with no clear overarching evaluation and action plan to set clear and ambitious targets to improve outcomes for families in the area. The centre cannot adequately evidence its assertion that a large proportion of the local population is transient, with many asylum seekers; nor can it demonstrate any impact the transient community is having on its efforts to improve outcomes for children and families in the area. As a consequence, it is difficult for the advisory board to identify the centre’s priorities or to challenge its performance and effectiveness. The centre is currently providing inadequate value for money because it has failed to improve outcomes for children and families.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	4
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	4
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	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	3
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.	3

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Central Children's Centre on 9 and 10 November 2011. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to talk to us in meetings and during activities. We found this very useful and enjoyable. We also spent time reading some of the comments you make when you have been on a course or used an activity such as Jelly Beans. We learned that you really appreciate the centre's work. We were pleased to hear that many of you feel more confident about your role as a parent since using the centre.

Staff at the centre work well with you when you need support and guidance. The centre has lots of information available for you to take away and if you do not read or speak English they have found ways of translating the information for you. Unfortunately, this service is not promoted well.

We found that the centre provides a good enough range of activities to meet its service delivery agreement with the local authority. However, the centre does not review the effectiveness of the activities. This means that it does not know whether the activities are making a difference to your families' lives and those of other families in the area. Information provided for the centre shows that health outcomes for children in the area are not improving rapidly enough. In addition, the number of children who attend accident and emergency units is high and increasing. We have asked the centre to improve how well it records its effectiveness. We have also asked the centre to get better at recording who uses the centre in order better work with families who really need their help and support.

Children in your area are doing better when they get to the end of Reception Year in school. We know that the centre has worked hard with some local schools to make this difference. We found that families who are in need of support work well with centre staff and this work makes a positive difference to their lives. The managers make sure staff who work with you

and your children are suitable to do so and that they have the right amount of training to help them in their work. However, the centre's records are not good enough for the manager to be certain that everything is in place and up to date. We also know that staff encourage you to use the adult learning classes on offer at the centre and in other venues. A good number of you take up these opportunities but too many do not finish courses.

We found that the centre is monitored adequately and that the staff receive good levels of support to do their work. However, managers do not use well enough all of the available information. We have asked the local authority to support the managers in improving the centre's records of the work they do, who they do it with and how effective it is.

Thank you to all the users we met and for your input into the inspection. It really was appreciated and we wish you all the best for the future and for the future of your centre.

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