

Inspection report for The Meadow Children's Centre

Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	384164
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY355864 - Action For Children The Meadow Children's Centre

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.

Report Published: February 2012

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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 at the same time as 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 manager and staff, members of the advisory board, representatives of the local authority, and statutory and voluntary organisations working in partnership with the centre. They also held meetings and talked informally with parents and users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

The Meadow Children's Centre was designated as a phase one centre in 2007. Its reach area covers a large geographical area in north Sheffield, including Southey Green and Shirecliffe. The centre's premises are sited at the top of a steep hill that runs through the middle of the reach area. This two storey building was purpose-built for the centre and is linked by a shared reception area to Shirecliffe Community Centre. The centre is managed on behalf of Sheffield City Council by Action for Children. The centre manager also has management responsibility for a neighbouring children's centre and a number of the staff work across several children's centres in the city.

The centre has 1164 children under five years of age living in its reach area, with an increasing number of births annually. The community is becoming increasingly diverse with 23% of minority ethnic origin, from a range of different cultures. The vast majority of families in the reach area live in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The

proportion of children under five years old living in poverty is greater than the city average with 38.4% of families being dependant on workless benefits. The percentage of teenage and lone parents is also significantly higher than the city average.

The centre offers on-site health provision, information services, play and learning sessions and targeted support for families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The Early Years Foundation Stage is delivered across four settings in the reach area. When children enter early years provision many have skills, knowledge and abilities below those expected for their age. On-site childcare is provided by the centre's own nursery, Action for Children The Meadow Children's Centre Nursery, for up to 44 children; this nursery was separately inspected immediately prior to the children's centre and a report for this inspection can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk

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

The Meadow Children's Centre is an effective centre. It offers high quality provision which promotes good overall outcomes for children and families.

The centre is successfully establishing itself as a focal point where parents can access care, guidance and support of outstanding quality. The weekly 'One Stop Shop' is well attended because exceptional inter-agency working enables users to access health, employment and education services and advice with ease. One parent's comment was typical of others: 'All staff have been very helpful from pregnancy to present. I love that everything is under one roof.' The centre provides a warm and welcoming environment where diversity is celebrated well and users of all backgrounds are fully included in activities. Thoughtfully designed, inter-active displays attract children and adults to explore messages that imaginatively raise awareness of how to keep themselves safe and healthy.

The centre makes a good contribution to promoting the physical, mental and emotional health of users and all health outcomes are improving steadily. The peer-support network has been instrumental in encouraging mothers to persevere when finding breastfeeding

difficult. This has resulted in a 10% increase in the number of babies being breastfed at 6-8 weeks over the last year. Although this number is still comparatively low at 30%, there are positive indications that the inter-generational culture of bottle-feeding is diminishing.

The centre's nursery supports children's learning and development well. Children who need additional support are quickly identified through detailed monitoring of all children's progress and smooth transfer of information ensures they are well-supported when they start school. Provision for two-year-olds within vulnerable families is well-established and is making a noticeable difference to their personal, social and emotional development.

Mindful of the low skills level of many adults locally, the centre provides a clear pathway of progression for adult learning, in partnership with local agencies who offer a wide range of family learning and accredited-qualification courses. It is difficult to fully assess the impact of this work as the centre receives only anecdotal evidence from adult learning providers about the successes of users attending their courses. Users gain much enjoyment from participating in centre-led courses and are proud of their achievements. Learners on the 'Child Development' course reported: 'I feel proud of what I have done,' and 'I'm amazed I've learned so much.' However, little information about their learning is provided to help shape future services.

Former users speak passionately about how their experiences as volunteers and advisory board members set them on a learning journey, widening their experiences and leading to paid employment and higher education. Leaders and managers rightly acknowledge that this work has not been sustained over the last two years and now recognise it as a priority to establish a parents' group, recruit parents to the advisory board and initiate volunteering opportunities for local parents.

The small but highly effective staff team is led and managed by an enthusiastic and visionary manager. Strong collaborative working is facilitated by the co-location of the health team and the nursery staff. Case studies and 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. The advisory group, which is representative of the community, helps inform the centre's strong understanding of the reach area, its families and their needs which underpins its accurate self-evaluation and effective development planning.

The local authority is increasingly rigorous in monitoring the centre's work and recognises well the importance of setting its overall strategic direction in line with council priorities. Although the data provided is improving, some aspects do not relate clearly to the performance targets for centre and information about service users is not yet fully reliable.

Based on the high quality leadership and management, strong partnership working and good use of the available data, there is good capacity for the centre to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase opportunities for parents to make a positive contribution to the centre through volunteering and participation in decision-making groups.
- Strengthen self-evaluation by:
 - working with the local authority to ensure data provided to the centre is relevant and reliable
 - seeking more focused feedback from partner agencies and individual users to demonstrate more clearly the impact the centre has on adult learning.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

All partners share a good understanding of the need to improve health outcomes. Take up of universal services such as baby clinic and immunisation are good. Smoking cessation is actively encouraged and supported by all staff. Although the number of mothers who smoke when they have their baby is still high, there has been a 12% reduction over the last year. Prospective mothers, fathers and grandparents are prepared well for their new roles through good take-up of the highly informative 'Parentcraft' sessions. Fresh fruit and water at snack time has widened children's dietary tastes; and the 'Cook and Eat' sessions, have helped users produce nutritional, low-cost meals. These initiatives are helping to reduce levels of obesity and dental decay in children at the end of Reception Year so that they are much closer to the national average. Users shared how the sensory room and use of baby massage techniques help them de-stress and relax with their children, promoting their emotional well-being.

Parents feel safe and confident when using the centre and its services as staff have built trusting relationships with them and high regard is given to the security of the premises and minimising risks. Families who are experiencing a range of difficulties, such as domestic violence, are very well supported by the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework procedures. No child under five has had a child protection plan that has lasted for a period of two years. Inter-agency procedures for tracking 'missing' under fives are particularly robust as families are highly transient, moving in and out of the area. First aid courses and sessions devoted to road and fire safety have helped reduce emergency hospital admissions as a result of unintentional or deliberate injury to below those in the rest of the city.

Almost all three-year-olds access their free early education entitlement. These early quality experiences provide a solid foundation for learning and from low starting points the majority of children now reach a good level of development when they are assessed at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Although the centre has no reliable data regarding how well it specifically 'narrows the achievement gap', a detailed analysis of achievement and

progress scores evidenced that no group of children is falling behind the others and children whose first language is not English are making particularly good progress. Smooth transition to school is enhanced through the use of 'Treasure Boxes' which contain important items to share with the child's next teacher. This provides a positive and familiar link from one stage of their education to the next.

Through joining in creative and expressive activity sessions, such as 'Make and Take' and 'Movers and Shakers', parents gain an increased understanding of their children's development which encourages them to extend the learning at home. Parenting courses have given users confidence to set boundaries and establish routines to manage their children's behaviour more effectively. Childminders are effectively improving their practice by accessing joint-training opportunities. For many courses, however, users' feedback focuses solely on enjoyment rather than learning.

There is a high incidence of anti-social behaviour and petty crime in the reach area. Staff effectively support centre users to respect each other through the setting of clear codes of conduct and establishing firm boundaries for expected behaviour. As a result, children behave well and build positive relationships with other children and adults. Centre staff value parents' views which are sought regularly following activities and courses. However, they have not effectively sustained parental involvement as decision-makers on the advisory board or parents' forum following initial successes. Volunteers actively contribute to the work of the centre but none currently are parents from the reach area.

The centre is extremely responsive to families' needs when they are in extreme difficulties. Financial support to purchase household goods, helps to prevent eviction, and the provision of food parcels all have a material impact on families' lives. Effective local partnerships with community projects, together with support from Action for Children's corporate sponsors, ensure families get the practical help they need regarding debt management, benefits and employment advice. A positive outcome of users' increased confidence and ability to take control in managing their family's finances has been the noticeable reduction of referrals relating to mental health concerns. The centre's nursery provides high quality and accessible childcare which effectively supports parents who work and those studying at college and university.

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	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.	2
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How good is the provision?

2

The well-qualified and experienced family support team very efficiently support families who have a range of complex needs. As a partner in the multi-agency support team (MAST) the centre has highly effective procedures for assessing the needs of individual families, including looked after children, using all the available information from a wide range of agencies. An outcomes-based approach to this work demonstrates the centre's outstanding impact in assisting families with a wide range of parenting concerns. Excellent practical support for individual families from the family support workers has been extremely successful in helping to identify and address issues such as domestic violence and mental health concerns. This enhances the quality of family life and keeps children safe. As a result of exceptionally well tailored support, the majority of families are helped to move from individual support into groups operating at the centre, reducing their social isolation and establishing peer support.

A specialist midwife provides excellent support for pregnant teenagers at the centre, enabling their needs to be assessed before their baby is born. Young mothers still in full-time education are successfully encouraged to continue their studies and to maintain their social networks. Provision for children who need additional support is good with individual support in the home from the Inclusion Outreach Worker. Sessions such as 'Toddler Talk' provide parents with practical strategies to improve their children's communication skills, designed by specialists from the speech and language team. Fathers engage well in centre activities and welcome additional male-focused events, such as the Football Tournament, which provided what one father described as 'a good day out for me and the children and gave my wife a break.'

Play sessions are well-planned and promote purposeful learning for children and adults. Safety and hygiene routines, new vocabulary, counting skills and an understanding of scientific principles are expertly brought together by nursery staff as the children make scrambled eggs in the microwave. Shared outings for nursery children and those attending the toddler group widen their horizons and provide useful opportunities for staff to model good quality communication and positive behaviour management skills to parents. 'Fun with Letters and Sounds' and 'Talking Together' courses to support parents with their children's communication were prioritised in response to an identified need to develop language and literacy skills. An achievement board prominently celebrates users' successes in completing training.

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	2

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1
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How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership of the centre is securely focused on driving improvement and maintaining high expectations for users and the wider community. The centre leader provides inspiration and determination and the senior leadership team provides efficient day-to-day management and professional supervision. Staff, leaders and partners routinely reflect on their practice and provision to secure continuous improvement. Self-evaluation provides the centre with a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development and is used to inform planning. The centre's development plan sets out priorities and challenging targets, how these will be achieved and by when. However, targets are not consistently informed by relevant and reliable data.

The inclusion of all children and families is central to the centre's vision. Staff work diligently to understand better the diversity of the reach area and break down barriers to access. This has resulted in the centre successfully engaging with many of its most vulnerable and hard-to-reach families, including those from minority ethnic groups.

Safeguarding is given a high priority and staff are well-trained at the appropriate level for their role. All required safeguarding checks are completed when recruiting staff. Comprehensive policies, robust procedures and thorough risk assessments further assure users' safety.

An effective range of strategies is used to actively seek the views of families. The centre uses this knowledge well to continually shape services to meet families' needs, especially those of target groups. Consequently, the annual consultation shows a high level of user satisfaction and parents eagerly make suggestions on the 'You Said, We Did' board, such as requesting provision of designated parent and child spaces in the car park.

The centre manager's deployment of her staff team, management of resources and robust analysis of available data ensures that families' needs are well met and outcomes are good overall. Thus, demonstrating the centre provides good value for money.

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	2
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	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	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 inspection of the centre's designated childcare provision, Action for Children The Meadow Children's Centre Nursery, which was inspected immediately prior to this inspection, was used to inform judgements. The Ofsted reports on local schools were scrutinised to provide contextual information.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Meadow Children's Centre on 8 and 9 February 2012. 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 were impressed by the outstanding quality of the care, guidance and support you receive, particularly through attending the 'One Stop Shop'. We heard how it makes life easier for you to have all the health, advice and information services available at the same time, especially for those of you who have to walk up the hill to reach the centre! The nursery helps your children to learn and develop well because of the excellent provision it offers. We thought the staff had been very innovative in creating the displays which encouraged you to use the activities and read the information to learn more about how to keep you and your children safe and healthy. The centre is successful in providing a welcoming place for all parents.

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. This helps to keep you and your children safe and we know that you feel safe when you use the centre and its services because everyone said so in the user consultation.

The centre is good at helping you to develop healthy lifestyles. More babies are now breastfed for longer and we agreed with you that the breastfeeding support network was a major factor in helping you to continue when you found this difficult. Some of you have learned to cook more nutritious meals through attending sessions such as 'Cook and Eat' and some of you told us how your children will now eat fruit and drink water after trying these at the toddler session. All these activities are having a positive effect on reducing the number of children who are obese and have dental decay at the age of six years. 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.

Your children make good progress when they go to school because they have been well prepared through attending early years provision at one of the four nurseries in the area. Staff work together to understand better any additional help your children need so that they can ensure it is provided for them. Some of you have attended courses to help your children to develop their language and communication skills, and those children who need some extra support with their communication benefit from the 'Toddler Talk' sessions.

The centre is also good at supporting those of you who find it difficult to manage your family finances. For those in crisis, the centre can provide very practical help in accessing grants to buy furniture and household goods. Other families need help in how to budget and to find out what benefits are available, and the centre works well with other agencies to make sure you have all the information you need.

Many of you are proud of what you have learned on the courses, such as 'Child Development' and 'Positive Parenting', as these have helped you to understand your children better and to manage their behaviour more easily.

The centre staff team is only small but it works very effectively under the enthusiastic centre leader who is very clear about what the priorities for the centre are. This information is gained from a range of partner agencies and helps the team to understand better what will make the most difference for you and your children.

There are a few areas where we think the centre can improve. We have asked the centre to provide more opportunities for you to be involved in decision-making and to volunteer to support the centre. This is because some adults who had used the centre a few years ago told us how valuable these experiences had been in helping them to build up their confidence and gain jobs or go on to further study.

The local authority is providing good support to the centre and has improved the information it provides to help the centre to assess how well it is making a difference for you. However, there is still room for improvement in the quality of this information and we have asked the centre to work with the local authority to ensure it provides them with the information they need.

We have also asked the staff to work more closely with the agencies who provide training for you and to share your successes better with the centre. You have a part to play in this too by telling the centre what benefit you have gained from the courses you attend, although it is evident from your feedback that you really enjoy the courses. It will help the centre to plan new courses more effectively if they know more clearly how you learn and what type of courses you need.

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.