

Inspection report for Batley East Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
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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	EY399384 Starjumps Ltd

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 one Early Years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, parents and representatives from the advisory board, partner organisations and local schools.

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

Information about the centre

Batley East Children's Centre is a phase one centre, designated in 2007. It is located on the site of Field Lane Junior, Infant and Nursery School in Batley, a former mill town in West Yorkshire. The centre works with Field Lane School as well as delivering outreach in partnership with other schools in the area. Most of the reach area is in the top 30% areas of deprivation, with one that falls in the 40% deprivation indicators. The centre manager is responsible for co-ordinating service delivery across the reach area. Services delivered by the centre and its partners include health services, family support, employment and training, signposting, targeted support for families whose circumstances make them vulnerable, and family learning.

There are 756 children aged under five years living in the area served by the centre. The vast majority of families in the area are from minority ethnic groups, mainly of Indian or Pakistani heritage. Worklessness in the area is high and the number of children living in families dependent on workless benefits is high. Infant mortality rates in the area served by the centre are higher than those found locally and nationally. Take-up rates for families eligible to claim the childcare element of Working Tax Credit are low, due to the tradition of family care in the area. When children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision, their skills and abilities are lower than those typical for their age, particularly their communication and language skills.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Batley East Children's Centre is very highly regarded by families and others in the community it serves. 'I don't know what we would do without SureStart in Field Lane, I know one thing for sure it would reduce the quality of life' is an example of how much the centre means to its users. The centre is bustling and busy, with activities and learning opportunities for users on offer every day. The centre manager is a passionate leader whose desire to improve the prospects of children and families in the area is reflected in the staff's commitment to their work. There is a deep understanding of the local community and the cultural barriers to families, in particular lone women, accessing services. There is excellent engagement with the centre by the community which is predominantly made up of families from minority ethnic groups. A very high level of trust in the centre has been built up. Consequently, Asian women now access sessions unaccompanied.

Governance arrangements are very strong and effective. Senior managers know the centre's strengths very well. There is rigorous analysis of information about the area served by the centre. This is skilfully used alongside local intelligence gathered from a broad range of sources such as schools, health workers and community groups, to provide an excellent range of services and activities that are extremely well-matched to local needs. Targets for the centre are devised using wider local authority plans with very specific targets linked to the reach area, such as prevention and education strategies to reduce the rate of infant mortality. Evaluation is used extremely well to review the centre's work and as a result services are developed to specifically meet community need. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding due to the positive impact of its work on outcomes for children and families and the exceptional overall leadership and management of the centre.

Highly-effective activity programmes have had a significant impact on the outcomes for families in the area, the large majority of which are outstanding. Healthy lifestyles have been a major focus of the centre's work alongside the learning and development of young children. This has effected strong and sustained improvement in children's skills and abilities when they enter the school and Early Years education and very strong improvement in the health outcomes for families across the reach area.

Excellent and very well-established partnerships are evident throughout the centre's service delivery. Clear and open lines of communication between the centre and health and social care partners are embedded and used without hesitation where there are concerns about a child or family. Referral processes have recently been standardised by the local authority. The centre uses the procedures well and is a key partner when families are involved in Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes. Parents have a good understanding of the centre's role in safeguarding children's welfare and their own responsibilities to keep children safe. However, information displayed around the centre to remind and inform adults of what to do if they are concerned about a child's welfare are all written in English and do not reflect languages spoken in the community. Families are confident to speak to staff in the centre knowing they will receive high-quality information or support that is relevant to their needs.

Adult learners engage extremely well with the learning opportunities that are on offer through the centre. Every opportunity is taken by the centre to promote progression and raise aspiration in adults. Adults respond very positively to this. The overwhelming majority of adults who start a course attends regularly and successfully completes it. Many adults have a desire to progress and continue their learning journey, with the result that a good proportion of them move on to other courses, training or into employment.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the safeguarding children information for parents who speak English as an additional language to make it more accessible in a range of languages spoken in the community.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Children make excellent progress in their skills and abilities. They are active and inquisitive and are supported by parents who have an ever-increasing understanding of the value of play in early learning and child development. There has been a 14% improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile score over the last three years. The development of children who have accessed services at the centre is improving at a more rapid rate than those who have not had contact with the centre. There has also been a sharp narrowing of the achievement gap between children who may have barriers to learning and their peers.

'I have made a considerable amount of changes in my family's diet'. Is the comment of a parent at the centre and this was heard often in discussions with parents. Parents use what they learn at the centre, such as how to understand food labels, to very good effect. They have changed cooking habits and reduced the salt, sugar and fat content in family diets.

The centre is a safe and secure environment that enables users to thrive. The child-friendly environment is used to support contact meetings for children in the care of the local authority. The centre's contact with families right from the ante-natal stage is used effectively to provide support and guidance at the earliest opportunity to prevent issues escalating. There has been a reduction over time in the number of children subject to a child protection plan and numbers are currently low. Families engage well with the CAF process.

Parents are heavily involved in the life of the centre. They are actively involved in service development at the centre through the family forum group and their evaluations of services they have used. Volunteering is an opportunity offered at the centre that is embraced and enjoyed by a committed group of parents. One commented that her work as a breastfeeding peer supporter was a 'good opportunity to help and giving support is wonderful'. Volunteering has been successfully used by users as a stepping stone to employment in the centre, local schools and with other employers. Many adults take advantage of the learning opportunities on offer. A very good proportion of adults has used the services of the Jobcentre Plus adviser, careers service and the financial advice service. There has been significant success in the number of adults who have entered employment and families who have improved their financial status through debt management or benefits advice.

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	1
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	1
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	2
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.	1

How good is the provision?

1

The children's centre building is a bright and welcoming place that is full of high-quality, carefully-planned and informative displays. A weekly 'One Stop Shop' has excellent support from all partners and is attended by the local police community support officer. While offering a wide range of advice and guidance opportunities this session is also used to deliver important messages relating to the centre's priorities, such as improving oral health, recognising and reporting domestic violence and improving car and road safety.

The centre building and accommodation in local schools is used extremely well to deliver a package of highly-relevant services. This has been achieved through very careful analysis of data and by listening to the community. Cultural barriers that might have prevented families accessing centre services have been overcome by the centre establishing excellent relationships with local schools and using their accommodation to deliver services across the reach area. As a consequence the number of families benefiting from the centre's work is high and increasing year on year.

Adult learning and development activities are many and varied. Services are of a very high quality and are securely linked to the centre's priorities and adults' needs. Adults are assessed prior to starting a course to identify any additional support they may need, such as literacy sessions or the support of an interpreter. Adults make excellent use of their increasing knowledge. They keenly share experiences, such as how they have used items made in a session about learning through play with their children and how they have adapted and extended the ideas. Opportunities for adults to progress are well-considered. For example, parents who accessed food safety courses that linked to health awareness were inspired to study at the next level and then progressed to cake-decorating classes after considering how they could use this as a business enterprise.

Every opportunity to share and give information is seized by the centre. For example, curriculum vitae writing workshops are incorporated into celebration events at the end of a course to help to inspire parents to look at what they can progress to. In times of crisis the centre is invaluable in offering both practical and nurturing care, guidance and support to families. This can be in the form of providing food, and nursery equipment at short notice or long-term parenting support that is instrumental in enabling families to continue to live together in the family home.

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	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre is firmly established in the community and is highly regarded by community leaders. Partnerships are extremely strong and are effective in enabling the centre to target its early intervention and prevention work to those who are most in need. Excellent use is made of local resources through funding activities jointly with school and voluntary organisations, such as the Tenants' and Residents' Association. The school readiness programme is an example of excellent targeted, collaborative working that has had a significant impact on the smooth transition of children who participated in it into school. Innovative thinking and careful planning to overcome staffing and accommodation matters have enhanced the centre's ability to deliver services to the community, for example by employing workers who speak Punjabi and using school buildings which are considered safe places for women to go to alone.

There is a keen insight into the demography of the area and a determined effort has been made to ensure the staff team reflects the community where almost all families are from minority ethnic groups. This has provided positive role models to local families and made the centre more accessible to those who speak English as an additional language. Inclusion of all families is central to the centre's ethos and it has registered and engaged with the very large majority of families in the area, including most of the families in its priority target groups. Staff review attendance at the centre and target families who have not accessed services recently by making home visits or telephone calls to re-establish contact. In a community where childcare is traditionally a female role, a steady increase in the number of male carers engaging with the centre is a reflection of the effort the centre puts into making contact with those whose circumstances might make them harder to reach. The centre gives outstanding value for money.

The centre manager is very well-supported by local authority leaders in her work to create a highly successful centre that is very strongly improving outcomes for children and families. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and well-understood by all. The very active advisory board is competently chaired by a parent. The advisory board is well-informed and actively challenges the leadership team on service delivery and impact. Parents are keen to contribute to the development of the centre through their evaluation of services and the well-planned and focused Family Forum.

Systems to ensure the suitability of all those who work with families are robust and the centre follows current policy. Safeguarding is a high priority for the centre and is a standing item on all meeting agendas and in activity and session reviews. Information about domestic violence has been translated into languages used in the community to make it more accessible, but the same process has not been followed with the information for parents on what to do if they are worried about the welfare of a child. This presents a possible barrier to immediate information for those who speak English as an additional language. Staff access local authority safeguarding training that is relevant to their role. They also benefit from the safeguarding champion's support to enhance their knowledge.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	1
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	1
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

The findings from the linked day care provider Starjumps Ltd EY399384 2010 inspection relating to children's progress contributed to the judgements made at this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Batley East Children's Centre on 29 February and 1 March 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

When we were inspecting the centre many of you wanted to take the opportunity to speak with us. This demonstrated to us the very high regard that you have for the centre. Without exception you told us how much you value and benefit from the centre's work.

The centre manager is very well supported by the local authority to make the centre the outstanding place that it is. The centre uses the information it has about your local area and the families who live in it extremely well to plan and deliver an excellent range of activities. The number of families who take up the opportunities on offer is very high and this includes those whose circumstances might make them harder to reach. We know that you have different opportunities to tell the centre what you would like to do and that you take time to give feedback at the end of a course and some time after you have finished a course. We found that children in the area are making very good progress in their learning and development and those who have been to activities at the centre are doing even better. We saw how enthusiastic and committed adults who use the centre are to learn and develop. We were very pleased to see how many people progress on to other courses and that a good proportion of adults are looking to get a job or indeed have found a job.

The centre has excellent relationships with its partners, such as the local schools, health care professionals and voluntary organisations. This has helped it to make sure that the services it delivers are just right for you and your families and they are being offered in places that you can get to and feel safe in.

The work that the centre does with families whose circumstances mean that they may be vulnerable is good. They make sure that the guidance and support given is appropriate and they work well with other agencies that might be involved with a family to make sure everyone is doing all they can to help. We found that the quality of the work the centre does with you and your families is excellent and that you are confident to speak to centre staff if you have a concern or need support. We saw that much of the information in the centre is

translated into languages spoken in your community. We have asked the centre to make sure the information telling you what to do if you are concerned about a child's welfare is also translated to make it easier for you to act immediately, if you need to.

We were pleased to find that health outcomes for children in the area are improving well. We know that you are using the things you learn at the centre about healthy diets to change what you buy and how you cook your food and this has had pleasing results for your children and for you.

The staff have worked hard to make the centre a warm and welcoming place for everyone who lives in the community. Staff are able to support those of you who speak English as an additional language to help you to use the services on offer as fully as possible.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time in your centre and we wish you and your families the very best for the future.

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