

Inspection report for Flatts and Eastborough Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	362479
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Wendy Ripley HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Ruth O'Connor
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY321640 Flatts Nursery School

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with senior managers and staff, the Chair of the Advisory Board, health care professionals, local authority representatives, family support workers and groups of parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation. The linked childcare provided by Flatts Nursery School is managed separately. The setting was last inspected in November 2007 when the quality and standards of care was judged to be good. The inspection report is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Information about the centre

Dewsbury has a transient and culturally diverse population. Almost 30% of the people living in the area are under 19 years of age. The area experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage. There are five super output areas of which two are within the 10% most deprived areas in England.

Flatts and Eastborough Children's Centre developed from a former Sure Start Local Programme serving communities in the Westtown, Eightlands and Crackenedge areas of Dewsbury since 2003. Between May 2005 and June 2009, outreach services in the local community were coordinated and delivered by a small team of staff working out of another children's centre. The centre has operated from a converted retail unit in Dewsbury town centre since June 2009. It achieved the full core offer in February 2010 and delivers a range of integrated services that includes health, family support, and early years advice and guidance.

The local authority has designated management of the centre to the charity Action for Children. The children's centre manager is responsible for managing the services provided by the centre. The Advisory Board, established in 2010 is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic management.

There are currently 750 children within the centre's reach area, 83% of whom live in one of the 30% most deprived wards in England. Approximately 30% of children aged 0-4 years are living in households dependent on workless benefits. Around 64% of the families who use the centre are of South Asian heritage. Most children enter early education with knowledge and skills that are significantly below levels expected 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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Flatts and Eastborough Children's Centre makes a good contribution to improving the lives of children and families in the local area. It provides outstanding care, guidance and support and promotes individualised purposeful learning very effectively. The support provided for young parents is excellent and attracts participants from the wider area as a result. Effective aspects include the impact of actions taken to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families and to improve their physical and emotional health. The centre is well led and managed. Given these strengths, and the strong teamwork underpinning services, the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

A high proportion of local families and children are engaged in the good range of services the centre provides. Activities are well attended by a wide range of users including fathers and those in the most challenging social and economic circumstances. This is because activities are effectively matched to local requirements, staff have developed long-standing relationships within the local community and they have a deep understanding of the needs of the families who live within it.

The centre's highly inclusive approach ensures it is well used by different groups in the local community. Staff and users are friendly and welcoming and the centre forms a tight-knit cohesive community. Diversity is celebrated and users from different ethnic groups are keen to learn from each other. Case study evidence and

conversations with parents show that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families receive very sensitive support that impacts positively on their lives. Parents hold the services and support they receive in high regard. Many new users arrive at the centre by way of a word of mouth recommendation such as : 'We absolutely love it...I don't know what I'd do without it and ...it has helped me develop routines and manage my child's behaviour better which has made us both happier'.

Strongly improving health outcomes from very low baselines are promoted through highly effective partnership working between the centre staff, midwives, health visitors, and family support services. Staff work closely with parents and carers to help them understand and adopt safe practices. The centre provides a safe environment for both adults and children, supported by robust safeguarding arrangements and risk assessments. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively when appropriate.

Activities, such as 'Time to Play and Learn', and 'Song, Rhyme and Story Time' as well as drop-in activities like 'Stay and Play' provided in the crèche, make a good contribution to children's development in their early years. Adults report that these sessions and the parenting skills courses have also given them confidence, reduced their isolation and enabled them to make friends. Adult users say they would like more opportunities to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills and participate in more adult learning at the centre. Centre leaders are aware of this but somewhat limited in how they can meet this need on-site as users would like because the accommodation is already being used to full capacity.

Information, advice and guidance available to users on a range of issues such as support for health and well-being issues, housing and benefits are of high quality. Access to services is facilitated by clear and effective signposting through the 'One Stop Shop'.

The switch from outreach provision to a delivery base in the centre of Dewsbury is relatively recent. Centre leaders have rightly focused their energies on matching provision to local need, securing the necessary resources and putting in place systems and procedures to underpin effective delivery. They moved at a cracking pace to achieve this and the rapid increase in the number of regular and repeat users stands as testimony to this. Centre leaders have consequently had very little time to reflect on the outcomes and impact of their actions for users or to set challenging targets for the future. As a result, while self-evaluation is broadly accurate and plans are appropriate, reliable and effective methods to review and measure the success of the centre's provision have yet to be embedded. Similarly, governance arrangements through the Advisory Board are in the early stages of development and users' feedback is not yet used strategically to inform decision making. Despite this, the overall ability of the centre to maintain its rapid improvement remains good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Involve users more effectively in shaping the provision by developing and extending the ways in which they are able to contribute to decision making, strategic planning and evaluation of provision.
- Develop systematic and accurate systems to record, measure and evaluate the full impact of the centre's work and set consistently challenging targets for improvement.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Evidence through case studies and discussions with partners and parents indicates the very positive impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and their physical health. This includes the work of health professionals, family support workers, the community nursery nurse and the child development service. All of the activities the centre provides are well attended and popular. Several parents spoke with conviction about how they have come to understand their own feelings as well as those of their child and feel much better equipped to cope with the demands of parenthood.

Parents talked enthusiastically about the 'Health Drop-in', 'Infant Massage' and 'Cook and Eat' sessions and a recent dental health day. The promotion of oral health remains a top priority as there are comparatively high rates of tooth decay among children. There is a high take-up of immunisation in the area. The proportion of obese children in the Reception Year in local schools has decreased and is lower than average. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging children to eat fruit when they are at the centre. Walks, treasure hunts and picnics in the local park help to make outdoor exercise fun in an area where there are few homes with gardens.

The centre is 'a friendly place to breastfeed in' and provides good support and advice for mums about breastfeeding and weaning. This has resulted in good breastfeeding initiation rates in the area and, though breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are low, they are beginning to show signs of improvement. The teenage conception rate in the Dewsbury area is high. The teenage pregnancy midwife helps ensure that an excellent range of preventative and supportive activities such as 'Birth and Beyond' and 'Stork Walks' are in place and delivered in ways that are appropriate and relevant for young people. Consequently, the 'Young Parents to Be' and 'Young Parents Group' are extremely well attended. Young parents from other areas as well as Flatts and Eastborough frequently drop in for a chat and often attend other sessions too because they are 'treated with respect and consideration by the other parents as well as the staff'.

The centre makes a good contribution to the safety and welfare of its users. Robust systems for security in the building ensure that parents and children remain safe when attending activities. As a result of the excellent relationships with centre staff, parents have the confidence to speak out about any issues that concern them at home, in the centre or the local community. The centre offers a range of activities aimed at raising parents' awareness of how to keep their children safe and provides effective links to home safety equipment schemes. All these activities help to prevent accidents in the home and help to ensure that the incidence of emergency hospital admissions and road traffic accidents in the area remain low. Exemplary personalised support ensures that even the harder to reach families are helped to access both targeted and universal services. Through the parenting programmes the centre provides, staff model behaviour and instil routines that help parents manage their own behaviour and that of their children, providing them with coping skills for times when they are most likely to feel under pressure.

While the centre does not have sufficient space to provide day care or outdoor play provision, children thoroughly enjoy the range of activities it does offer. 'Talking Families', 'Time for Two' and 'Play in the Town' for example, make a good contribution to children's development in their early years. Parents are actively encouraged to contribute to their children's learning at these sessions and to record their progress. They report that these sessions have also given them confidence, reduced their isolation and enabled them to make friends and feel part of a community.

Volunteers, many of whom are parents, regularly help with the centre's activities and enjoy their involvement. Some young mothers explained to inspectors their role as buddies for other young parents who are expecting a baby while others explained how they act as translators. Some volunteers talked proudly of how their confidence and belief in themselves, a result of the support from the children's centre, have enabled them to go on to further training and gain qualifications. For example, parents who initially accessed the centre for support, gained qualifications, and are now employed at the centre.

All of the activities offered are well attended. Opportunities for adult learning in the centre are proving increasingly popular. Parents say they would like more to be delivered on site. Information, advice and guidance available to users on a range of issues such as support for health and well-being issues, housing, benefits and accessing employment and training are of good quality. Jobcentre Plus participation and opportunities for further learning and employment are more limited. The proportion of parents who move into employment is very low. This is largely because there are very few job opportunities open to them in the area at present.

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	2
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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 users 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 users contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The care, guidance and support for families in difficulty or facing particular challenges are excellent. Highly skilled, dedicated and enthusiastic staff ensure there is always a warm welcome 'that just draws you in'. Staff act as good role models and work sensitively and effectively with parents and children ensuring families can benefit fully from the provision. Parents interviewed confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the centre's provision and were very clear about the benefits. There are many examples of how parents have been helped to develop their parenting skills, self-confidence and emotional well-being. Participation rates are high for the vast majority of activities. This is due to good outreach work, effective referrals from family support services, midwives and health visitors, informative leaflets and word of mouth.

Centre staff know the local community well and provide a good range of services to meet specific needs, particularly in relation to health. The inclusive and welcoming environment ensures that the different communities served by the centre all benefit from services. All ethnic groups are represented in the range of activities and users enjoy learning from each other. The centre engages particularly well with young parents.

The early notification of pregnancy enables services and activities to be signposted early through the midwifery and health visitor services ensuring that families can access those that are relevant. Centre staff have a thorough understanding of safeguarding and child protection issues so that referrals made to social care are appropriate. The needs of vulnerable children and their parents are assessed quickly and effectively using the Common Assessment Framework when necessary. Services work well together and result in timely multi-agency support when it is needed. Case studies and interviews with parents confirm that the provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. It is targeted sensitively and effectively and this ensures that families who have specialist needs receive the support they require.

Provision to help children learn and develop is good. The well-attended groups and drop-in sessions for parents, carers and children are enjoyed by children and adults alike. All make good gains in their learning. The qualified teacher provides very good support for early years staff in the centre and delivers some highly effective activities for them as well as for children and parents. The relationships with and support provided for other early years settings in the area are developing well given the short period of time the qualified teacher has been in post. There are very few childminders registered in the Flatts and Eastborough area. Support for them is provided through a Dewsbury-wide childminder network.

Courses provided for adults are well attended and provide good quality learning and development in parenting and childcare. Fathers make considerable gains in the Dads group. There are fewer opportunities for adults to develop literacy and numeracy skills and centre users indicate that they would like more courses to progress their own learning. While the engagement of Jobcentre Plus in the centre is limited, parents told inspectors that the quality of advice and information about jobs and benefits they receive through the One Stop Shop are helpful.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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?

2

Since the centre moved to the town centre in June 2009, reach and retention rates for users have increased at an impressive rate and are now high. This is due to the excellent relationships staff had already built up through outreach work, their dedication, drive and dogged determination to do their very best for their local community. Leadership and management at all levels are effective in promoting good quality multi-agency support for the most vulnerable and good quality universal services. Approaches to promoting equality and celebrating diversity are good.

The centre manager is highly respected by professionals and parents. She ensures the smooth day-to-day running of the centre and effectively manages the performance of centre staff. Other professionals have a good understanding of the various line management accountabilities and work together respectfully and effectively. Professional supervision is regular and systematic and has a positive impact on improving the quality of services currently offered.

Good safeguarding arrangements are supported by clear lines of communication and effective collaboration between agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. All checks and vetting processes comply with current requirements. Training in safeguarding and child protection procedures is up to date and of good quality.

The strong partnerships, supported by good communication and teamwork, mean that staff feel able to contribute their ideas and share best practice. They share leaders' ambitions for the community and are keen to expand their work. Effective performance management arrangements through Action for Children maintain close supervision of the centre's work. The local authority communicates effectively with the centre and makes a good contribution to centre activities through the development of good early years practice such as 'All About Me' and 'the Child's Journey' for instance. All partners have a clear understanding of the aspects of work that could be developed further to extend the reach and range of activities.

Self-evaluation has some strengths and is broadly accurate. Development plans are appropriate and updated regularly. However, because of the relatively short period of time the centre has been in operation and the rapid growth in the number of users, centre leaders have had little opportunity to rigorously evaluate the impact of their actions so far or to set challenging targets for the future. The work of the Advisory Board in this respect is also underdeveloped for the same reasons. Resources, including personnel, are effectively targeted and managed very well to ensure services meet the needs of the community and the most vulnerable benefit, securing 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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been	2

commissioned to provide	
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	2

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

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspection of Flatts Nursery School has been taken into account to a limited extent when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in the report.

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 Flatts and Eastborough Children's Centre on 2 and 3 February 2011. During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents, visited a number of activities and talked with you, centre staff and others that work with you. We have judged that the centre provides good support for you and your families.

The friendly staff team always provide a listening ear for you and are passionate about creating an extremely warm and welcoming place. The staff place the utmost importance on you, the parents, and your families. As a result, you use the centre regularly and feel at home to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. Many of you think of the staff as 'part of your family' others consider them to be 'your guardian angels'.

You are encouraged to act as volunteers for instance as buddies for other teenage mums or using your language skills to interpret for other parents. Your views are sought regularly. The centre staff are working hard to encourage even more parents and their children to access services and activities and you can help them by continuing to tell people about all the good things the centre has to offer.

Health visitors are extremely good at telling you about activities at the centre. Once you get there, staff from a range of services are extremely good at working closely with you to find out exactly what help and support you and your family need

and making sure this is provided. The staff are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy, for example, through 'Infant Massage', 'Dental Health Day' 'Stork Walks' and the 'Birth and Beyond' group. They provide you with access to safety equipment and advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your home to keep your children safe.

You told us the centre has helped you gain more confidence and self-esteem and develop closer and more effective relationships with your children. This was very evident when we visited you. You also told us that the centre has provided opportunities to form friendships and support one another and that this has helped you feel less isolated. We could see how much you enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the very positive impact these are having on you and your families.

The centre has some good resources that excite and interest your children and help them to develop new skills and learn through their play. Knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff also help you to support your child's learning and development at the centre and at home. For example, though the parenting programmes.

You told us that you enjoy the learning opportunities provided by the centre. The courses and events focusing on aspects such as cooking, health and safety, and parenting skills are very well attended. Some of you told us that you would appreciate more opportunities for adult learning and to improve your literacy and numeracy skills within the centre. We have asked the centre leaders to look into this possibility even though as you know, there is not really enough space at the centre to provide all the things you and the staff would like to do.

The centre manager provides good leadership and is well supported by a caring and hard working staff team. They have good capacity to make further improvements and ensure outcomes for you continue to improve. To develop the work of the centre further we have asked the centre's leaders to strengthen systems to evaluate how successful their work with you has been so that they can plan future actions more effectively and celebrate and share successes with you. We have also asked them to improve how they use your feedback and involve you more in the decision-making process.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We are very grateful for your help. It was a privilege to meet you and to hear your views. We wish each of you every happiness and every success for the future.

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