

Inspection report for The Annie Smith Birkby Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	366335
Inspection dates	19 – 20 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Gillian Bishop HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Amy Ambler
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Halifax Old Road, Birkby, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD1 6EE
Telephone number	01484 223940
Fax number	Not Applicable
Email address	amy.ambler@kirklees.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Birkby Infant and Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY303703 BirkBees Daycare

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 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 one Early Years Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team; three representatives from the local authority; representatives from the advisory board and health services; frontline workers; representatives from local voluntary groups; representatives from local schools and day-care providers and parents and other users of the centre's facilities.

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

Information about the centre

The Annie Smith Birkby Children's Centre is located on the first floor of a shared building which is owned by the link childcare provider Birkbees Day Care. Access to the children's centre is via stairs or a lift. The proportion of children aged under four who are living in households where no one is working is higher than those found nationally. The centre serves a community that is ranked within the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. Two of the associated areas are in the 10% most deprived communities. Most children enter childcare and early education with a narrower range of skills and abilities than that expected for their age, particularly in their communication, language and literacy and social skills.

The children's centre gained full designation in 2006. Governance is through an advisory board with representatives from the children's centre, local elected councillors, school, local authority and partner agencies and the voluntary sector. A multi-agency team, which includes health visitors, midwife, outreach and family

support workers, Citizen Advice Bureau and Jobcentre Plus provide services from the children's centre and some are based on site. The children's centre catchment area is culturally diverse. The community is transient in nature due to the number of students attending Huddersfield University and living in the area. The population is predominantly South Asian with Kurdish, African, Libyan and East European residents within the Birkby area.

Children's centre activities include a One Stop Shop for health services, Stay and Play sessions, Infant massage, Music Start and Under Ones' Group. Services include benefit and career advice through Job Centre Plus and the Citizens Advice Bureau and a range of family and adult learning opportunities. The children's centre provides the full core offer including early years childcare provided by Birkbees Day Care. Stingers Out-of-School Club provides childcare for school-aged children on a before and after-school basis and during school holidays. These are privately run settings. The centre has established close links Birkby Infant and Nursery School.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The children's centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families. Outcomes for them are at least satisfactory. The centre provides a friendly and welcoming place for families to make new friends and access a good range of family and adult learning opportunities. Testimonies from parents confirm this, for example: 'I have learnt so much,' and, 'I help my friends with their children's behaviour now'. Secure safeguarding procedures exist, which staff, partners and parents all understand. A new locality safeguarding champion role is designed to ensure that staff maintain a good working knowledge of current procedures. Collaborative work with partners ensures prompt support for families in crisis or at risk, through effective use of the common assessment framework.

Evidence shows that educational outcomes for both children and adults are good given their starting points and in some cases, some cultural barriers to learning. Positive outcomes derive from examples of good quality care and learning

programmes and the systematic support and guidance from educational leaders across voluntary and private sector provision in the community. However, the centre is aware that more needs to be done to engage children and parents with special educational needs and/or disabilities and they have some action plans in place to address this. Collaboration with the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), Job Centre Plus and adult learning providers is generally secure. There is some evidence to show that centre users improve their economic well-being because of these contacts, however, there is a general lack of quantifiable data across learning outcomes in particular, preventing a sufficiently clear analysis of impact.

Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are key priorities for the centre and some effective steps have been taken to create an inclusive and positive environment regardless of gender, ethnicity and language. However, engagement levels are low and not extended widely enough to some minority groups living within this transient community. The centre is currently working well to address some pertinent health issues such as rising levels of obesity and services provided by health visitors and midwives are well used. Health trends are becoming more identifiable due to data provided by the local authority and the Primary Care Trust. However, this data and anecdotal information from health professionals are not systematically used to influence provision within health and maternal services.

The local authority work closely with centre leaders to ensure strategic priorities are identified within service delivery plans and annual monitoring is undertaken to evaluate impact of services. This process is generally robust and provides an objective view of the success and further improvements needed to secure better outcomes for families. However, service delivery plans still lack rigour and do not provide a clear measure for success. Furthermore, weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation systems across many services hinder the centre's ability to show outcomes to demonstrate the full impact of its work. An advisory board has been established, although it is in its infancy and not yet fully effective in holding the centre to account or engaging parents in formal governance arrangements.

Taking into account the satisfactory outcomes overall, the centre's overall effectiveness is also satisfactory. This, together with the leadership's determined focus on improvement, identifying and meeting needs indicates the centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve health outcomes for families within the community by:
 - involving stakeholders in this work and making better use of data to identify local health trends in Birkby to shape and develop pertinent health services more effectively
 - addressing key health priorities outlined in the Kirklees Children's and Young People's Plan and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

relating to smoking and maternal health.

- Widen the engagement of families, particularly those already identified as harder to reach by:
 - developing the range of outreach work undertaken within the community and by exploring the use of community venues with the local authority, advisory board and children's centre partners
 - developing robust systems to monitor and evaluate the quality of all services and impact on outcomes for users, particularly those related to family and adult learning
 - updating the children's centre service plan to set challenging targets against local and strategic priorities so progress towards these priorities can be effectively measured over time.
- Improve governance arrangements by:
 - engaging users in formal decision-making processes and the future planning of services by recruiting them to the advisory board
 - ensuring the advisory board plays a key role in the monitoring and evaluation of service provision to enable the governing body to support, challenge and hold the centre to account.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Outcomes for centre users are variable but satisfactory overall. Secure inter-agency partnerships and the concerted effort and commitment from staff are beginning to have a positive impact on the lives and aspirations of the families who use their services. 'It's a perfect place', and, 'I'm a better parent now', are typical comments from people who use the centre. Users who have attended parenting classes make confident assessments about their improved parenting skills because training has helped them to handle their children's behaviour more effectively. Well-behaved children using the stairs or the lift into the centre demonstrate the impact of this.

'I couldn't feel safer', and, 'I have no worries about coming here', reflect the sense that families feel safe and well cared for. Equally, community cohesion and the need for a better and safer area to live in are well promoted through links with the Community Ranger. Case studies and anecdotal evidence demonstrate the effectiveness of the family support and outreach work in ensuring families in domestic violence situations get help. This approach is replicated in the centre's good work with looked-after children and children in need or those subject to child protection plans, as swift intervention ensures they receive tailored packages of care. This and the purposeful use of the common assessment framework ensure timely intervention for those in need.

Activities such as Cook and Eat, Buggy Fit and outdoor activities in Norman Park have been successful in addressing high obesity levels, as current data indicate a steady reduction over the last two years. Parents describe how they run around with their children because they have more energy and they are particularly proud about

how their children are eating more fresh food. Parents receive lots of reassurance and advice about health and maternal matters because health visitors are always available at the weekly One Stop Shop. Equally, parents attending the Under Ones' Group say that information about weaning and home safety has enabled them to keep their babies healthy and safe.

Parents respond well to the sensitive support and guidance from staff because they have secure relationships with them and they understand that they have their best interests at heart. As a result, parents willingly engage with specialised support agencies such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) and alcohol support agencies. New parents receive adequate support with regard to breastfeeding as they benefit from comfortable and private places to feed and they are signposted to a local breastfeeding café. However, the centre staff do not have a clear picture about the number of parents who initiate breastfeeding, those who continue to do so or perhaps those who do so while continuing to smoke. This prevents the coordination of health and maternal services from having a bigger impact on users' health.

The extent to which children and adults enjoy and achieve is good. The priority given to developing children's independence and speaking and listening skills has begun to reap benefits since Early Years Foundation Stage profile points show a steady narrowing in the achievement gap in these areas. This, parents state, has significantly improved children's preparedness for the transition to school and their ability to support them in their learning. For example, parents describe how they now spend time talking and playing with their children at home because they know it is good for their social and language development.

Parents and carers appreciate the centre's work and recognise the positive impact it has on their lives. They contribute to the evaluation processes through parental satisfaction surveys and by recording their views about the success of the centre's work in the 'Happy and Grumpy' books. Some are involved in the Family Forum, providing them with an opportunity to shape and design services. For example, a recent suggestion includes setting up a DIY workshop for parents. However, parents, in general, are less clear about the role of the advisory board and representation from parents on the board is yet to be formally secured.

Many parents have attended the Moneywise programme and received support and guidance from Jobcentre Plus and other related services. As a result, their economic stability has improved. In addition, parents are more willing to seek further education and employment because they feel more confident now they have completed English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and Parent Pals. However, outcomes for parents accessing accredited course such as paediatric first aid, basic skills in literacy or the take-up of introductory taster courses for Teaching Assistants and Health and Social Care are less clear.

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	3
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	3
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?

3

Activities and services are effectively targeted to meet the needs of families already accessing the centre, many of which reside in the most disadvantaged areas. Links with voluntary, private and leisure services have some success in extending their reach, although leaders recognise that the use of alternative venues provide one solution to engaging more families. For example, the Library Information Centre has proved a useful resource for adult courses but cultural barriers are preventing some parents accessing accredited training provided by Kirklees College. These issues have a negative impact on the retained engagement of some families.

More families are accessing learning and development activities promoted through the Child's Journey initiative. This is having a positive impact on parents' knowledge of child development, and how they can support their child's learning in the home. Parents are keen to join the newly established parent volunteer programme as they recognise the skills they can share. 'I can't wait to be a volunteer; I think I can help others with their English'. These comments are typical of the aspirations many of these parents now have. There is a wealth of training programmes such as STEPS (confidence building), family first aid and the Mind Exercise Nutrition Do (MEND) programme. However, the lack of refined evaluation is not enough to demonstrate the long-term benefits of these adult learning programmes.

Effective multi-agency working is beginning to identify and engage some families who are harder to reach. For example, young and lone parents regularly attend and systematic consultations with fathers have led to a brand new dads' group. Assessment of individual cases is becoming more secure due to Multi-Agency Support Team meetings which identify early interventions and which prevent difficulties escalating. For example, contacts made with alcohol-related services such as On Track and the Eden Team within the midwifery service has provided families at greatest risk with timely and effective support. However, the centre has yet to

identify a broader range of needs such as those associated with families in the community seeking asylum and Kurdish families.

Care, guidance and support for families are good. Sensitive outreach work enables parents to engage within the centre following a period of support in their homes. A 'hand-holding' strategy empowers parents to work towards social independence for example, by proceeding to book their own GP appointments or by learning to encounter local bus routes. The centre provides a good range of literature relating to sexual health, safety in the home and helpline notices are carefully positioned to ensure they can be viewed discreetly. Parents state, 'We trust the staff; we would tell them things we might not tell anybody else'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The leadership and management of the centre are sound, with the day-to-day leadership in the capable hands of an acting centre manager who has settled quickly into her post, while continuing to take the centre forward in its work. Following a period of staffing difficulties, increased stability within the centre has raised morale and led to a renewed sense of purpose and confidence within the team. Regular professional supervision ensures that staff receive the necessary support, guidance and challenge appropriate to the roles they undertake. This may be in the form of family case reviews and audit trails to ensure family support is concerted and effective.

The centre's statutory safeguarding responsibilities are well met due to secure recruitment and vetting procedures which ensure the suitability of those working and delivering services within the centre. Staff and centre partners are well versed with safeguarding policies and procedures and referral routes are swiftly initiated where children and vulnerable adults require protection and tailored support. Staff take appropriate steps to alert parents and carers about their safeguarding duties and this ensures their work is open, transparent and supportive.

Equality and tackling discrimination is central to the centre's work. Flexible crèche provision allows more users to attend courses and this is reflected strongly within

one parent's testimony that 'I couldn't go to any of the training if I didn't have the crèche'. In addition, centre staff are culturally sensitive to the needs of users and this is reflected in the women's only group, Mum's Fit. The community served by the centre is extremely culturally diverse so the centre ensures bilingual staff support parents where possible. As a result, the centre has been successful in engaging families from Asian communities in centre life.

Multi-agency partnerships are a strength of the centre, resulting in some well-matched provision for the children and families. Health professionals play a substantial role in the early registration of the reach population. However, leaders recognise the need to extend outreach work further into the community and some tentative plans have been identified to address this. Partner services are utilised well and this is evident in the number of people engaged with CAB and Job Centre Plus and the One Stop Shop. However, the effectiveness of partners' work on outcomes for users is not systematically evaluated.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. Leaders receive good levels of financial guidance enabling them to manage budgets appropriately. The centre is well resourced and in the main, fit for purpose. Rooms are successfully adapted to suit a range of services and activities, although they do not accommodate large-scale events. Therefore, alternative venues have to be found when demand for places exceeds the space available.

Governance arrangements are stable with regular attendance from partners at advisory board meetings. However, board members frequently change, inhibiting the Board's ability to monitor, evaluate and challenge progress within the business plan objectives. In addition, parental representation is not yet in place limiting their ability to influence the future development of the centre at a strategic level. The local authority provides firm levels of support and challenge through the annual conversation. As a result, action plans to address some significant weaknesses have been concerted and effective in raising the quality of provision and improving many aspects of service delivery. However, the service plan has few measurable targets against its priorities and the monitoring and evaluation of services, in general, is inconsistent. Consequently, this makes evaluation of the impact of the plan difficult.

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 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	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its	3

statutory duties	
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 commissioned to provide	2
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	3

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

The inspection reports for all affiliated settings were taken into account during the course of this inspection.

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 Birkby Children's Centre on 19 and 20 January 2011 and we judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Those of you we spoke to said the centre provides a friendly and happy place where you and your children can make new friends. All parents agreed that staff work hard to make you feel welcome and they listen to your ideas about how some activities could be better. You also told us that you always feel safe in the centre because the building is secure and you trust the staff who work with you. We agree with this because we found that staff have appropriate vetting checks before they are able to support you. We also found that staff work well with other agencies when trying to help families at risk of danger or in crisis. As a result, parents have been able to make some positive changes in their lives.

You told us that the centre helps you to 'feel fresh and happy' and you described how your children are excited about going to the centre. That is wonderful to hear. We found that the centre staff are helping you to improve your lifestyles through Buggy Fit, Mum Fit and advice about healthy cooking and eating. As a result, many of you said you are feeling much fitter and that your children now eat lots of fruit

and vegetables. However, we know that the centre does not always use information well to plan services for some health services such as breastfeeding or smoking cessation because they do not know if you want it or need it. They must do more to assess your needs and match them to services.

We spoke with many of you when we visited the One Stop Shop, Stay and Play and Family Forum and we thank you for your comments about how much you enjoy coming to the centre and how, in some cases, it has helped you and your children improve your English language. During these activities, we could see how well your children are doing in their learning and how parents are being helped to support their children's development by joining activities such as Music Start and the Child's Journey activities with exciting play with treasure baskets. However, lots of children and families in the community are missing out because they do not come to the centre or they have come and stopped because it's too far from home or the activities are not suitable for them. Therefore, we have asked the centre to find out more about these people, then provide the activities and services they may need, and in places which suit them.

You told us that you have been helped to manage your finances better through the Moneywise programme and we know that some of you have visited Citizen Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus and career advice sessions. You also told us about the wide variety of training courses, which you have attended such as English for Speakers of Other Languages classes (ESOL) classes, first aid, Parent Pals and the Mind Exercise Nutrition Do (MEND) programme. In some cases, this has helped some of you to apply for jobs or other training courses. However, we are not sure how many people this applies to or what difference it has made to your lives because the centre does not collect all the relevant information about this.

We know the centre has taken some steps to ask you about the services and activities you want and we are pleased to see that this has led to a weekly Dads' Group. We also know that many of you are keen to join the new volunteer programme because you want to help others with their English or help to welcome new parents to the centre. However, more needs to be done to make sure some of you join the advisory board and play an active role in making decisions about the centre's work because you know what the community needs most.

We know the centre have some useful plans, which will help them to develop new services over time. However, the plans do not show how leaders will monitor these or how they will know if they have been successful. We think the centre works very well with other agencies such as health visitors, colleges and Jobcentre Plus. Some of these agencies share some useful information, which helps the centre to plan new services for the future. However, leaders do not always know if services have made a difference to your lives. Therefore, we have asked the acting head of centre, the local authority, advisory board and all the other agencies who work with them to give the centre better information so they can see how successful their services are. This will help the centre to see how well it is doing, so that it can further improve the

effectiveness of its work and demonstrate the difference the services have made to your lives.

We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you at the children's centre and we thank you for helping us with our work.

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