

# Inspection report for Birley Children's Centre

Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	362444
Inspection dates	14 – 15 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Jane Hughes

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Julie Harrison
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Birley Community Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY274166 Birley Community Nursery School 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre leaders and managers, local authority representatives, staff, parents and carers, partnership representatives, user groups and members of the advisory board.

They observed the centre's work including activities provided at the centre and in other nearby venues. They looked at a range of relevant documentation including data, policies and safeguarding arrangements.

## Information about the centre

The centre is situated in the Sheffield's South East Community Assembly Area. The population is predominantly of White British heritage. Almost all families speak English at home. The centre's reach area covers Birley, Hackenthorpe, Frechville and the Scowerdons estate. There are pockets of deprivation within affluent suburbs. Historically, the three large housing estates were among the 30% most disadvantaged areas. These communities are now part of extensive regeneration with demolition, re-housing schemes and extensive new building underway. The new housing reflects a mixed market for owner occupiers, housing association rental and

shared ownership. Almost 9% of children under five years of age live in households dependent on benefits.

The centre is a phase two children’s centre. It is co-located with Birley Community Nursery School. It shares reception and office space as well as administrative support. The centre comprises one community room which was recently built on to the end of the nursery school. This limited space is used to deliver core offer services. On-site day care is provided in the nursery school. The centre was designated in 2006. It provides a base for a range of services including health, family support and parental outreach, as well as early learning. Leadership arrangements have altered several times since its designation. The current children’s centre coordinator took up post in July 2010. She also has responsibility for two other children’s centres and shares her time between the three settings. The centre is based at one end of the reach area. Therefore, the centre plans to deliver some of its services in areas which are more accessible for the community. Baby clinics and ante- and post-natal clinics are provided in local health centres. There are close links with Rainbow Forge Primary School in nearby Hackenthorpe and also with other community groups. When children first access the centre, most have skills below expected levels for their age.

The centre is governed by the local authority. There is an advisory board which includes a range of health professionals, school and local authority representatives.

## 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**

4
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

4
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## Main findings

The overall effectiveness of Birley Children’s Centre is inadequate. Outcomes for users are poor because the centre’s provision is insufficiently targeted on those most in need. As a consequence too few families access the centre or the activities it organises. A dearth of current and historical data about all aspects of the centre’s work and impact contributes to weak, insufficiently detailed self-evaluation. The centre is unable to demonstrate how its services make a difference to the lives of families within its reach. There are no data to show that children who attend the centre go on to achieve greater success and well-being than their non-attending

peers by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The local authority and centre do not use target setting effectively to improve outcomes. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate.

Development planning by the new centre coordinator is at an early stage. The lack of data has been identified as a serious concern and a concerted effort has begun to gather more useful information. This process has been too slow, although the local authority asserts that it will soon be able to provide higher quality comparative data. A relatively small proportion of families regularly access the centre's activities and few are formally registered. These families enjoy supportive relationships with health visitors, midwives and breastfeeding support workers. This trend occurs predominantly where outreach work is developing in the community. During the inspection, parents expressed their appreciation for what the centre provides and declared that they feel comfortable there.

Users of the centre's services learn to lead healthier and safer lives and benefit from new skills. However, too few families make the most of the services on offer. There are only limited examples and incomplete records of adults gaining qualifications and/or employment to improve their economic stability and well-being. Although the centre does invite some feedback, few users make a regular contribution to decision-making and governance of the centre. In particular, there is no parent or carer involvement with the advisory board. Governance by the local authority is satisfactory overall with clear lines of accountability between strategic partners. There is an acceptance that more detailed information is required in order to increase the impact of governance on the centre's performance. The advisory board is developing its role and influence.

Staff work well together and establish secure working partnerships with other agencies such as health professionals, family support workers and parent engagement workers. This work supports healthy and safe outcomes for families but the centre has struggled to register users. There is now a new undertaking by health professionals to register users routinely to ensure that fewer, potentially vulnerable families, fall through the net. Strong safeguarding measures ensure that users' personal security and safety are prioritised within and beyond the centre. The centre promotes equality and diversity through inclusive practice and by developing activities to meet the needs of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve outcomes and provision by:
  - increasing the percentage of children and families, particularly those most disadvantaged or vulnerable, engaging in the centre's services
  - developing self-evaluation procedures which focus clearly on the impact of the centre and how it makes a difference.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:

- compiling and using a robust database from the information provided by the range of professionals and services contributing to the work of the centre
  - ensuring that targets are specific and measurable and focus on improving outcomes for users.
- Ensure that the local authority:
- provides timely, robust and accurate data about potential users in the locality and the take up and impact of services within the reach area
  - establish adequate representation of parents' and users' views on the advisory board.

## How good are outcomes for users?

4
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A regular, if small, proportion of children and families living within the reach area make the most of the limited range of activities on offer. Children settle well to activities and parents and carers generally provide positive feedback. They typically comment, 'The centre provides more opportunities to get out, socialise and feel better about ourselves.' Children and adults form positive relationships and grow in confidence. The centre is an orderly and happy place. The coordinator, staff and health professionals, whether based at the centre or out in the community, provide strong role models for children and adults. Users say the centre's provision is both rewarding and supportive. However, too few users, particularly those who are potentially more vulnerable, have an opportunity to make their views known.

Users believe the centre is a place of safety where they can access information on safe practices both in and out of the home. Case studies and anecdotal information from health professionals demonstrate, for example, how children who undergo Common Assessment Framework assessments benefit from the expertise of the professionals involved.

Nonetheless, outcomes for families and children within the reach area are inadequate because too few benefit from the centre's work. The most disadvantaged groups engage least well with the centre's work. Sessions such as breastfeeding support and baby massage are popular and encourage some parents, often the more self-motivated, to adopt healthier options for their families. Some planned activities do not run due to lack of interest or difficulties in finding time slots to match both potential participants and service providers. Opportunities for adult learning are limited but family learning activities such as 'Count Me In' provide well-structured sessions for them to develop skills together. Where family learning does take place, parents engage well and enjoy the activities. They say they feel that they 'have gained in confidence to interact and engage with their children'.

Local authority data show a generally improving trend in children's outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, the lack of any substantial assessment or tracking information makes it impossible to link this overall positive picture to any specific intervention by the centre.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>4</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>4</b>
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The centre comprises one recently built community room joined to the end of the nursery building. Available space is limited and inflexible, although there is a small kitchen area which is used for the preparation of healthy drinks and snacks. Children are unable to learn and play outdoors as there is no outdoor dedicated learning space. The small range of resources kept in the room is not easily accessible to children visiting the centre. Lack of space and limited staff restrict the support that can be realistically offered. However, more services are developing off site, within the wider community, to overcome some of these limitations. The centre's resources remain underused.

Health professionals, trained in the Common Assessment Framework, make regular referrals. Families approach staff confidently and identify the centre as a place of safety. Service providers liaise well so that concerns are passed on to centre staff. This liaison enables continuous support for children and families. Nevertheless, the centre's reach is insufficiently extended. Leaders are aware that current outreach work does not ensure appropriate care, guidance and support for all groups, particularly the most disadvantaged. The weak provision overall links directly to the lack of firm available data to inform the assessment of users' needs. This in turn limits how well the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment among users.

The centre is a venue where user groups, such as childminders, choose to meet. They find this a useful facility and the frequency of their meetings has recently increased from monthly to fortnightly. Group members are able to draw on the expertise of centre staff, but they prefer to bring their own craft resources to extend children's creative skills rather than use the centre's.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>4</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**4**

The centre's new coordinator is committed to extending services and providing the best life chances for local children and their families. The initial focus has been to establish and cement stronger worker relationships between different agencies and service providers. Initial feedback from these parties confirms that she has been successful and that a creditable amount has been achieved in a relatively short period of time. However, much remains to be done to ensure the centre compiles its own data and also receives data and specific, measurable targets from the local authority. New local authority systems promise more detailed and accurate data management. The lack of ambitious targets fails to drive improvement in terms of services provided and outcomes for users. As a result, barriers in the community still exist and potential users slip through the net rather than becoming registered centre users. Taking all this into account, the centre provides inadequate value for money.

The centre runs smoothly from day to day. Administrators provide a warm welcome to users. Performance management reviews are held regularly. Local authority governance provides clear pathways in term of accountability and decision making. The role of the advisory board is still gathering momentum. Parents and carers do not make regular contributions to the advisory board's deliberations nor is there an established parents' and carers' forum. However, this is partly due to parents' and carers' reluctance to contribute. Their views are sought at the end of courses but it is not clear from available information how their opinions shape future provision. A significant minority of users do not complete courses they start.

Clear safeguarding policies and procedures ensure that safety and security are a high priority. Suitably trained staff adopt recommended good practice. There is close attention to the needs of children. The centre promotes equality and tackles discrimination satisfactorily, celebrating diversity and establishing inclusive practices. Activities such as 'Ready Steady Go' support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and help them and their families to join in centre activities.

Partnerships are secure and there is evidence of still increasing collaboration

between the centre and health professionals. Links with Jobcentre Plus and citizens' advice are promoted but there is little evidence to show the impact of these services on users' skills or well-being. Health visitors and midwives regularly put parents in touch with other professionals and support services.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>4</b>

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

The co-located Birley Nursery school was inspected separately on 14-15 December 2010. This provision was judged to be good. The day care provision delivered by Birley Nursery school was also inspected as part of that single inspection event and was judged to be good. The full report relating to these two provisions can be found on the Ofsted website.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



## Summary for centre users

Birley Children's Centre was inspected on 14 and 15 December 2010. It was judged to be inadequate overall.

Although the centre provides some enjoyable activities and helpful support for local children and families, it is not meeting the needs of a large enough proportion of the most vulnerable families and children who live in the area. This is its key purpose. Children and families who regularly attend activities are learning to stay healthy and safe. For example, breastfeeding support is welcomed by families, although the proportion of mothers who continue to breastfeed fluctuates considerably.

Previous changes to leadership and the organisation of the centre mean that the centre is not as far along with its development as originally planned. However, since July 2010, the new centre coordinator has begun the process of gathering information about how well the centre is doing in order to assess how to improve the services it provides for you and the outcomes you and your children achieve. Those of you we met or spoke to told us how you appreciate the caring staff who support you at the centre and out in the community. Almost all of you clearly value the guidance and support you receive and we read examples of how the centre is helping to change some lives for the better. This caring approach by all the adults is apparent in good safeguarding procedures that help you and your families to live and learn more safely.

We found that the centre establishes sound partnerships with a range of outside agencies and health professionals. This is particularly important as you know that the centre has limited space in which to offer activities and support services. Increasingly, services are provided within the community and you told us that you value this development.

In order for the centre to become effective, we would like some key elements of its work to improve. We have asked it to improve outcomes for you and your families by providing activities and services that better meet your needs. We also want the quality of leadership and management to improve its evaluation of its work. We have also asked the local authority to provide clearer targets to the centre and to make more data available to the coordinator. In addition, parents and carers need to make a contribution to the advisory board which helps to decide priorities and direction for your centre.

It was a pleasure to meet some of you during the inspection and to talk to others of you on the telephone. Many of you are strong supporters of the centre. We hope that you, your children and many more local parents and carers will continue to enjoy the services available in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).