

Inspection report for Ash Green Children's Centre

Local authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	362430
Inspection dates	8-9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Priscilla McGuire

Centre governance	North Halifax Partnership Board
Centre leader	Tina Burke
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Ash Green Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY299998 Ash Green Children's Centre EY304978 Ash Green Children's Centre EY284294 Ash Green Children's Centre

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, managers at the centre, senior managers from the North Halifax Partnership, members of the school's governing body, school staff, staff from partner agencies, front line workers, local authority staff, parents and carers and children.

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

Information about the centre

Ash Green Children's Centre is a phase one centre in Halifax that delivers services on behalf of the North Halifax Partnership, a local non-profit organisation. Governance and strategic management of the centre are through Ash Green Primary School. The centre offers all elements of the core offer including registered day care provision for nought to 4 year olds, childminder network support and also offers targeted services. The centre operates from three sites based around Ash Green Community Primary School in the Mixenden area of Calderdale. It works in close partnership with four other children's centres within the north and east Halifax locality.

The centre was formerly a neighbourhood nursery and operates within a very disadvantaged area, which has experienced a decline in its textile and manufacturing industries. There are few amenities in the area and only one doctors' surgery. There is one bus route in the area which is the main means of transport for a significant number of centre users. The local population is mainly of White British heritage and the reach area is characterised by social housing and rural areas. Within the reach area 49% of children live in workless households and breastfeeding rates are low compared to wider local authority rates.

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

Ash Green is a good centre overall. Some aspects of the centre's work are outstanding. It is effective in meeting the needs of users and the local community and is an integral part of the lives of users. The penetration rate of the reach area is very high and outreach work to identify and engage non-users is very effective. Users find the centre welcoming and feel very valued. Health outcomes are excellent and both parents and carers and children have an outstanding understanding of what they can do to live healthy lives. Case studies exemplify the lifestyle changes many users have made to improve their health.

Safeguarding is a key priority of the centre and highly effective strategies are in place to ensure children and vulnerable families are well protected. A strong ethos of inclusion is promoted to ensure no child or family is excluded from the services offered by the centre because of disability, race, gender or any other potential barriers. A concerted effort is made to target non-users within the community which has led to an increase in the number of registered users. Diversity is celebrated and decisive action taken to challenge discriminatory behaviour.

Children and parents and carers enjoy attending the centre and make good progress in their personal, social and educational development. Data analysed by the school shows that children who attend the centre make a good transition into school and progress better than those who did not attend.

Partnership work is outstanding. Staff from partner agencies work very well with centre staff, and staff from within the North Halifax Partnership, to improve outcomes for families. The voice of users is highly valued and their views inform the operation of the centre through consultations, informal and formal feedback and through the Parents Forum. However, users are not well represented on the advisory board and this is an area for development which has been recognised by the centre. A review is being undertaken to identify how best the representation of users can be secured on the advisory board.

Support for users is very effective. Centre staff have an excellent knowledge of the local community, its needs and its characteristics. Assessment of user needs is very effective as is the matching of interventions and support to help meet those needs.

Leadership and management are good. The self-evaluation form (SEF) is used effectively as a working document which is regularly reviewed and updated. Objectives are set but some targets in action plans are unclear and not measurable. However, this has been recognised as an area for further improvement. Evaluations of all training programmes are used very well to promote improvement. However, tracking of individual progress of users on training programmes is an area for development.

Performance management is thorough and staff responsibilities at each level of service delivery are well defined. The use of data is effective in identifying strengths and areas for improvement in the service. This, together with thorough and regular action planning and positive outcomes for users, demonstrates the centre having a good capacity to bring about improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the role of the advisory board and secure the representation of parent users on the board.
- Ensure targets in action plans are specific and measurable.
- Develop systems to record the progress of individual users on training programmes.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Overall outcomes for centre users are good. Children enjoy outdoor play activities and eat healthy food. Parents and carers and children have an excellent understanding of what actions they can take to improve their health. Healthy eating is very well promoted and many parents and carers have benefited from learning how to cook healthy meals at home. 'I've learnt to shop better and everything I buy now is fresh food – I even make my own pies' said one parent who attended healthy cooking sessions at the centre. Children also have a very good understanding about health issues, such as oral hygiene and during discussions commented that 'too many sweets and crisps make your teeth fall out and make them black'. Staff promote good hygiene practice and children know to wash their hands before eating. Emotional health is also very well promoted. Parents value the counselling service that is offered at the centre. Counsellors have helped many parents to successfully deal with emotional problems and implement effective coping strategies in their lives.

Adults and children feel very safe at the centre. Security arrangements are very robust and rigorous. Appropriate checks are carried out on visitors to all sites.

Children know the procedures to follow if they do not feel safe. Data shows that the number of children on child protection plans has reduced over time. Effective multi-agency working ensures the centre receives regular information about families with children on child protection plans. These families receive intensive support and are very well supported to enable their children to be removed from these plans. The Common Assessment Framework is used to help identify the most appropriate level of intervention for a family. Staff have an excellent understanding of the needs of their users and make appropriate and sensitive responses to ensure both parents and their children are safe. The overall strategy to move users from targeted to universal services is very effective.

Case studies demonstrate the progress users have made in making informed choices to improve the lives, safety and well being of their children. When asked during a consultation about the difference the lack of a centre would make to their lives comments such as this were typical of many users: 'We have been to many courses and events in our children's centre – without them both my baby and myself would not have had the emotional and social support which has been vital to us both.'

Centre users make good progress in their personal and social development. Data collected and analysed by Ash Green Primary School demonstrates that children who were registered with the centre outperform children who did not attend. The progress and achievement of some parents is exceptional. For example, one parent has progressed from being a centre user to being the Chair of North Halifax Partnership Board that is commissioned by the local authority to deliver children's centre services throughout the north and east Halifax area.

Children behave well at the centre and parents and carers have observed the positive impact their participation in centre activities has had on their behaviour. For example, one parent said 'My daughter has learnt how to sit at the table to eat and finish her meals - before I had to chase her around the room with a spoon.' Children's behaviour at home has improved as a result of interventions and support from centre staff working with or without other agencies. There are good opportunities for children to play and have fun at the centre and parents greatly value the opportunities their children have to interact with other children and develop their social skills.

User engagement with centre staff is excellent. Consultation, evaluations and feedback from activities are systematically collected and used to improve the quality of centre services and activities. Users have the opportunity to influence centre activities at an operational level. However, the representation of users at governance level on the advisory board is low. This has been recognised and a review is being undertaken to address this issue.

Many families have benefited well from the training that is offered at the centre and across the locality served by other centres within the area served by the North

Halifax Partnership. Through education, training and volunteering organised by the centre, the economic stability and independence of a significant number of users have improved significantly. Many users have developed skills and achieved qualifications that have greatly enhanced their personal development or facilitated their progression to sustainable employment.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
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?

2

Provision is good. The integrated approach to delivering services in partnership with the school is very effective and offers users a holistic package of good quality services, activities and support. The school and the children's centre are at the heart of the community and school and centre staff have an excellent knowledge of the local community and its needs.

Assessment of individual needs is effective with an emphasis on the whole family and not just those who are registered as centre users. Staff make well informed judgements about whether families need low level or intensive support. Multi-agency work with partners from the local authority, housing or other agencies is used effectively to identify the most appropriate intervention for a family. Users recognise and value the partnership approach used by the centre to deliver services.

Accommodation across all three sites of the centre is spacious with good opportunities for children to enjoy outdoor activities. Outreach work to engage non-users is highly effective and regularly reviewed. The centre has been successful in registering 98% of the users that could be registered with the centre. 'Door knocking' in the community and postcode analysis have been used with success, to identify non-users and to market and promote centre services to them.

A locality wide training strategy based on consultation, review of provision and needs analysis has been instrumental in helping the centre staff organise good quality

training courses and activities which users enjoy. Activities and courses meet the needs of users and the local community and include a volunteering training programme, arts and crafts activities, 'Messy Saturdays', a Food Safety course at level 2, baby massage and cookery courses. The counselling service is highly recommended and well used. One parent wrote this about her experience as a centre user 'I see Sure Start not just as a place to access services, but as a place to actively seek, discover and improve my abilities, strengths and skills, not only for myself but for my family and our future.' Overall arrangements for the quality assurance of training and activities delivered are robust. Training providers attend an induction session and training and activities are regularly evaluated. However, systems for tracking the individual progress of users who enrol on training programmes have yet to be implemented.

Care of users and their families is excellent. Users receive very good support to overcome a wide range of personal and social problems such as domestic violence, substance abuse, welfare problems and other issues. Advice and guidance is also very good with effective signposting to other agencies as appropriate. Support is tailored to meet the needs of individual users either through home visits from family support workers or through users participating in services delivered at the centre. 'We were listened to and offered understanding and support' was a comment from one user about the centre. 'With the support of the centre, I have managed to sort my life out and get it back on track' was a comment from another user.

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

Leadership and management are good and excellent in some aspects. The shared vision and strategy to improve the lives of the local community is at the core of all the centre's activities. The integration and shared use of facilities, accommodation and some staffing resources with the primary school is also a strength. Responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear and well understood by staff. Action planning and regular evaluation of the service is a key part of the role of all managers. They regularly use data provided by the local authority to review performance and to ensure the centre continues to meet the needs of users and the wider community. Evaluation of centre services and activities is systematic and used

effectively to shape provision.

Engagement with users is outstanding. Surveys, consultation and evaluations are systematically used to inform the annual self-evaluation form (SEF) and to inform quarterly updates to the SEF and action plans. Levels of user satisfaction with the centre are very high and their comments demonstrate that the centre is an essential part of their lives. Key objectives are regularly set as part of the action planning process. Although some measureable targets have been set, this remains an area for further development. Overall, governance is effective and the centre is held accountable by the school's governing body, the partnership board and the local authority. However, the advisory board is yet to establish its authority and in spite of efforts from centre staff, representation from parents and carers on the board remains low.

Working relationships between the centre staff and those from partner agencies are excellent. The work with partners ensures that a cohesive and well integrated package of services and support meets the needs of users and the wider community. In an area characterised by worklessness, the partnership work with Jobcentre Plus is a very positive feature of the centre's arrangements. Users who have not previously worked or who were seeking employment have been made aware of training and education opportunities that have helped them to become more 'work ready' and in some cases, progress to employment.

The SEF is a working and shared document that clearly links to the overall business plan for the children's centres in the area. Input from all stakeholders informs the SEF and leads to improvements. Monitoring of user participation in events and activities and use of accommodation is rigorously monitored by the centre manager and actions taken to ensure value for money is secured. The manager has also been successful in generating income for the centre.

Safeguarding and safe recruitment of staff are key priorities. Recruitment procedures are rigorous, robust and very effective. Staff have received appropriate safeguarding training and role model good practice. Posters and displays in the centre's three sites reinforce safeguarding messages and ensure users know what to do if they feel their safety or that of their children is compromised. A member of staff takes lead responsibility for promoting and reviewing safeguarding practice. Regular meetings of safeguarding 'leads' within the partnership are also used to share information and ensure consistency in practice. Case studies demonstrate that staff take swift and appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are identified. Centre staff also work well with the social worker based at the school to respond to any safeguarding issues.

Inclusive practice and equality and diversity are very well promoted and practised. Hard to reach groups are constantly targeted and work to engage more fathers in centre activities has been successful in increasing the number of males who are registered as users. Activities and support to engage parents of disabled children are also effective in promoting their inclusion and meeting their needs. The centre works

effectively with the primary school to organise activities that celebrate diversity. Evidence shows that discrimination is successfully challenged and that the centre is instrumental in promoting equality in the local community.

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	2
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	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	1

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

None.

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 Ash Green Children's Centre on the 8-9 December 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and evaluation documents and also talked to some of you and to some of the staff who provide services and support at the centre. We also looked at some of the comments you made in your evaluations.

It is clear from what we have read and from what you told us, that Ash Green Children's Centre is a big part of community life in Mixenden. You and your children clearly benefit from the activities and support offered by the centre. You also enjoy attending the centre. The centre manager and her team are fully committed to doing their very best for you and work very well with the primary school and with other organisations to offer activities, support, events and training.

The centre is very good at encouraging parents and children to live healthier lives and we know that many of you have already made changes to the meals you cook at a home as a result of what you've learned about healthy eating.

We also found that the support and general guidance available at the centre is excellent. We know that many of you really like the counselling service and highly recommend it. We were also impressed with the way centre staff try very hard to make sure that parents and their children feel welcome at the centre, irrespective of their background, gender, race or disability.

You told us that you and your children feel very safe at the centre. We were very impressed with the safeguarding practice and particularly impressed with the way children could describe what to do if, for example, there was a fire or if any other problems arose that could affect their safety. We saw safeguarding in action with the routine checks on visitors and the rigorous security arrangements at all sites.

Ash Green Children's Centre is well managed. Planning of activities and services is good but we think it could be better if more specific targets for improvement were set. We also like the way all training and activities are evaluated and that your opinions are highly valued. However, we believe that the experience parents have on training programmes could be even better if their individual progress whilst enrolled on a training programme is monitored.

From our observations and analysis of documents, we know that the centre really values your input to consultations and surveys. We also know that some of you have attended Parents Forum meetings. However, we think that your input at a higher level could be better and that as parents you need to be represented on the advisory board. The centre is already exploring how parents can become more involved in the advisory board.

We would like to thank all of you who made the effort to come into the centre to speak to us. We really appreciate hearing your views and 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.