

Inspection report for Adwick Children's Centre

Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	362423
Inspection dates	24 –25 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Rajinder Harrison

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Denise Lane
Date of previous inspection	Not inspected previously
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Oaks Childcare EY331152

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 three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, members of the advisory group, a range of providers, parents and carers, users, the Action for Children Group manager and the local authority officers linked to the centre. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at sessions in operation at the centre's sites. They also looked at relevant documentation including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Adwick Acorns Children's Centre is a Phase one centre designated in 2006 and is located in a former mining village to the north west of Doncaster. The purpose-built premises initially accommodated the family centre that opened in 2001. The centre is located in the Woodlands area of the village and it offers some outlying provision in the Carcroft area. The area served by the centre is socially mixed and highly populated. A high number of properties are council owned. Approximately a quarter of the area is in the lowest 10% of most deprived areas of the country. An above average proportion of families claim benefits as the incidence of worklessness is higher than the national average. A high proportion of families are of White British heritage but a small number represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A high proportion of children from the reach area enter school with skills below those expected for their age. Within the area the centre serves, there are significant issues surrounding unemployment, anti-social behaviour, crime and substance misuse, and low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The centre is one of seven children's centres that the local authority has commissioned Action for Children to run on its behalf. Governance arrangements are with the commissioned body and the advisory board which has representatives from a wide range of agencies, the local community and centre users. The centre manager has been in post for 10 weeks, having taken over at short notice. The centre offers a range of health, social care and family support services. Childcare is provided through Little Oaks Childcare based in Carcroft and regular crèche sessions held at the children's centre.

The Ofsted report for the Little Oaks Childcare from October 2010 report can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk

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

Adwick Acorns Children's Centre provides a warm, welcoming and safe environment for all its users. Safeguarding procedures are good. Children are eager to be there and have fun and adults appreciate the centre's support and value the positive impact this has on their lives. A typical view expressed by a user is 'The centre is the only place where I feel I am not being judged. I am treated with respect for what I am and I feel safe here.'

Centre staff promote an ethos of care and support. Those who use its services gain in confidence and self-esteem and take greater responsibility for themselves and their families. Regular users speak highly of how sensitively staff have helped them to improve their lives through well-planned activities and individual support and guidance. However, the range of activities and services do not always elicit sufficient interest and response, particularly from groups, for example, fathers, that are hard to reach. The take-up is low for some activities and little is provided in some parts of the reach area. Overall, the extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities is inadequate. While activities are evaluated through discussions with participants, not enough is done to gather the views of the wider community or to evaluate the longer-term effects of the provision. Therefore, the use of evaluation to plan further developments is limited. The multi-agency advisory group, Action for Children and the local authority support the work of the centre satisfactorily but have not challenged the staff enough to enhance outcomes for all the many diverse groups in the area.

Over the last year, the centre has not increased the number of users it reaches significantly. It is successful in supporting children in the early years and as a consequence, children progress well in their early years at school. Partnership with the nearby primary school is good but this is not as evident with all local schools. Young parents are supported well and effective partnership working with health visitors ensures good care for early childhood development. While referrals are followed up effectively, not enough is done to promote the centre's services to benefit more families. Those that discover its location thrive on the support it offers, but it is not signposted well enough for easy access for newcomers. In addition,

those that live in the Carcroft area consider it too far away from them to access readily.

The outcomes for users are satisfactory because provision is satisfactory. It is strongest when the centre uses the expertise of professionals, for example, health workers and early years staff to support children and families as they prepare for school. Not enough is done to identify users' needs or evaluate the impact of provision on helping the different groups within the community move towards independence and self-reliance. Staff have insufficient data to help them set targets for future provision.

The newly appointed centre manager conveys a strong sense of purpose and direction. All managers and staff form a highly committed team that is determined to improve provision and extend services to the wider community. The local authority and Action for Children are keen to support developments and monitor the outcomes for users. This provides the centre with satisfactory capacity to further improve outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Engage more closely with 'hard to reach' groups in order to encourage them to use the centre's services.
- Evaluate the longer-term impact of service provision on outcomes for children and their families, seek the views of the wider community and use this information to inform future planning.
- Improve access to the children's centre by:
 - displaying signposts that help centre users locate the premises more readily
 - raising the profile of the centre in the local and wider community.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The centre effectively addresses users' feelings of isolation and a number say 'I don't know what I would have done without all the help staff gave me through my depression, my children would have really suffered.' The activities and the individual support provide good opportunities for families to develop strong friendships and a sense of belonging. A typical view is that 'I have made really good friends here and we help each other. I can talk about problems without feeling looked down on. Everyone who works here listens to us. More people should come—it is a life saver'. Many users who take up the services the centre offers report that their confidence and self-esteem have improved as a result and that they feel they can tackle problems more easily. A number of the sessions the centre offers, for example, 'Musical Minis', are well attended and generate a lively atmosphere where adults and children feel safe and comfortable and have fun learning together. All those that attend work and play together harmoniously. However, occasionally attendance falls off and centre staff do not always know why.

Good quality information and practical advice are provided to families, for example, to improve their parenting skills so that they can support their children's learning more effectively. Parents and carers develop a good understanding of early years education by watching how staff interact with their children and adopting this practice at home. 'My child loves messy time – he has so much fun.' A range of good quality family learning activities, such as the 'Musical Minis' and 'Movie Club', extend children's experiences and promote family relationships effectively. Users report that health providers are helpful in providing information and signposting families to further services to improve their lives. Centre staff work closely with health workers to enable families to access services and support them in between times. The breastfeeding group has seen considerable success in encouraging mums to persevere, because they recognise the health benefits for their babies. Those that attend regularly see the group both as an educational facility and a social event where friendships are forged. Playschemes are popular with children, parents and carers, and they ensure children's well-being during prolonged school holidays. Children with disabilities are supported well and specialists work with centre staff to ensure positive outcomes for parents and children. The Young Parents group, with the occasional dad attending, promotes effective parenting skills and encourages healthy lifestyles through 'cook and eat' sessions and buggy walks. The 'food co-op' encourages parents to select healthy options, but resources restrict higher take-up. Evidence of the impact of the centre's work on a reduction in smoking in the area or on obesity levels is limited, because the centre has no current information against which to measure these outcomes.

Staff ensure that users are safe and resources, such as home safety packs, aid safety at home. Access to a good behaviour and anger management course has helped parents to secure better relationships, behaviour and home safety for their children. It shows them how to reduce stress and distress and ease flashpoints when problems arise at home. Relationships between staff and families are very trusting, with a high level of mutual respect for all. This allows staff to identify any safety concerns quickly and sensitively and intervene appropriately before a crisis occurs.

Children that attend the centre have good learning opportunities that impact positively on their academic and personal development. Children explore painting and sand play and develop their creative skills. Children attending the Young Parents group try new foods, learn to socialise and develop independence by trying to dress themselves. Parents and carers are shown how they can help their children learn and record their success through notes and photographs. Childminders meet at the centre regularly to share good practice and to give children quality time to make new friends and socialise. However, the extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal social development is satisfactory overall because the outcomes for adults are not as strong as for children. Opportunities for adults to undertake basic skills courses in order to promote their economic well-being are limited. While the centre effectively signposts adults to educational provision through other providers, it is not clear how many users take up courses and training to improve their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills, and to thus improve their prospects to secure their long-term economic well-being.

Behaviour in both settings is good. Staff successfully promote a sense of belonging and mutual respect between staff and users. As a result, all parties enjoy being there. Play sessions engage parents and carers by involving them effectively in supporting newcomers when they first start. While users provide feedback regarding provision, there is no parents' forum where under-represented groups, for example, fathers and minority ethnic groups, can influence service development further.

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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

A wide range of providers including social services and housing associations use the centre as a base to meet with parents, carers and children and to conduct confidential interviews. Outreach provision is effective. Staff follow up referrals promptly and liaise with other agencies as necessary. Home visits with target families are given high priority and outcomes following these visits are monitored well. Partnerships with social care are good. As a consequence, staff coordinate with care workers to support families in crisis effectively. Those who require multi-agency interventions are followed up sensitively. When emergencies arise, centre staff are quick to respond and flexible in meeting individual needs. This personalised support is a strength and users appreciate its value. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to follow up the non-attendance of some more vulnerable users.

Families where members' disability limits their capacity to access the centre, receive additional support, often involving childcare, so that individual needs are identified early and met appropriately. Parents wanting childcare are signposted to the centre's partner provision at Little Oaks. Some parents and carers would like this provision to be closer to the centre so that they can access centre activities more readily. Others feel that the centre should provide more play sessions for families in the mornings and that they would benefit from more adult learning sessions in the local vicinity as travel further afield is a barrier. While the local community has few families of minority ethnic origin, staff signpost appropriate services, for example, welfare benefits and, if appropriate, courses in English as an additional language. While outreach is generally effective, the centre does not always reach all groups

successfully. One or two users indicated that while they had benefited considerably from individual counselling arranged at the centre, a regular counsellor presence would benefit those that wanted to access support informally.

Sessions and courses are of good quality and informative. For example, the 'Breast Start' and the crèche facilities provide stimulating opportunities for parents and children to enjoy quality time together. Babies and toddlers explore in a safe, nurturing environment, parents receive useful advice and support from professionals and a volunteer and have valuable time to share experiences with each other.

Children are well prepared for school through the effective provision for the early years. Close partnership with the adjacent primary school allows staff to support children as they move into school and activities, such as 'Rising Stars,' reflect how the centre is working hard to raise aspirations in children and their families. The speech therapy service identifies early any children who need support in their speaking and listening. Here, for example, in 'Playtime' sessions, assessments focus on children's needs effectively and ensure that activities are interesting and fun.

Users understand the relevance of training and attendance at sessions in improving their lives. While not all are ready to take up formal education courses, a significant number attend various childcare and parenting courses, and engage in activities that help them support their children's learning and development. While take-up overall is satisfactory, attendance is sometimes too infrequent to ensure that good habits are sustained long term particularly with regard to healthy lifestyles and effective parenting. The centre recognises it needs to attract and retain more users.

The centre assesses and reviews users' needs satisfactorily but does not do enough to consult users and providers as to where to target service development. Signposting and referral to services and courses are satisfactory, but little is done to assess uptake, impact and long-term benefits for users, other than for early years provision.

The quality of care, guidance and support for users and their children is good overall. Support for users' well-being is a high priority. Families report that their lives are better for having had the help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives. Centre staff have had to respond swiftly on occasions but have done so in a professional and sensitive manner. This has resulted in positive outcomes that effectively support community cohesion. However, the centre has yet to consistently follow up non-attenders or to check on their well-being.

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	3
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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Staff are supervised well and effectively supported to improve their practice, through sound performance management procedures and professional development opportunities. Users who attend activities are encouraged to express their views regarding provision and this influences changes. However, not enough is done to elicit the needs of the wider community, especially the hard-to-reach groups, or to involve representatives of users in strategic planning.

The centre's development plan ensures key work is covered satisfactorily. However, without data regarding the community profile or any needs analysis, target-setting lacks focus and the centre has no way of measuring long-term benefits for users. Leaders regularly review the centre's progress regarding early years' provision, but this analysis does not yet extend to other services provided.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. Everyone who attends is integrated well, every referral is followed up promptly and every affordable support given to vulnerable families. Any family experiencing particular hardship, for example, with respect to debt, receives support to help them to cope with legal issues and to plan spending more effectively. However, the centre recognises that it needs to do more to serve families who live in the Carcroft area.

The new centre manager has had a significant impact on boosting staff morale and forging partnership, for example, with the adjacent primary school. Action is now being taken to modify activities, to gather the data required to develop provision and to increase participation of all groups but these actions are too recent to have had significant impact on the wider community or on groups that are hard to reach. The advisory body, the local authority and Action for Children who all manage and govern the centre's work agree that raising the profile of the centre's work is a priority and that they need to challenge the centre manager and other service providers more. The advisory body has had a very productive meeting to outline roles and responsibilities. Leaders ensure a variety of users and service providers make use of the facilities, but an absence of signposts makes it difficult to locate for first-time users. Also, at times when the centre is busy, the accommodation is increasingly stretched, particularly, for example, in 'Breast Start' sessions, where mums like to spend time forging friendships and sharing news about their babies' growth and development. All the safeguarding and child protection procedures are robust and all centre staff implement stringent checks to secure the safety of children and their families. The centre offers satisfactory 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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is	3

integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	
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 statutory duties	3
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	4
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
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 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 Adwick Acorns Children's Centre on 24 and 25 November 2010. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and the staff that work there. Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak with us, we are very grateful. Following this visit, we have judged that while aspects of the centre's work are good, overall it provides satisfactory support to you and your families.

The centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are helping you to improve your lives. You appreciate the positive approach of all staff and were eager to explain how the centre has transformed the lives of some families successfully. It was particularly good to hear that you regard the centre as a safe and welcoming place to be, and where you make good friends. The number of families that the centre works with is satisfactory. Staff recognise that they should try to involve more people in the centre's provision, particularly the many families that live in the Carcroft area.

The centre provides effective support for your children, so that they get a good start in life. 'Playtime', 'Musical Minis' and the Young Parents group are popular and provide good opportunities for carers, parents and children to play and learn

together. As a result, your families have benefited through improved relationships and a better understanding how to stay safe, fit and healthy. Some parents also benefit from various parenting sessions. The centre works well with some of its partners from social care, early years' education and the health service to seek to offer the best service possible. However, not enough is being done to work with the many families who do not access these opportunities or who stop attending activities or courses after a short time.

The centre manager inspires confidence among staff, users and service providers. The local authority and the advisory board maintain a satisfactory overview of the centre's work. Centre staff are supported by these groups to ensure they strive to improve outcomes for all families by increasing participation. However, currently, the centre does not have enough information to help it judge how well its services are meeting the needs of the community or to plan more sharply to meet those needs.

We have made the following recommendations to help improve the centre.

- Increase the involvement of hard-to-reach groups in the centre's work.
- Judge how well the services benefit children and their families, seek the views of the wider community and use the findings to inform future planning.
- Improve access to the children's centre by:
 - displaying signposts that help centre users locate the premises more readily
 - raising the profile of the centre in the local and wider community.

We wish you every success for the future.

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