

Inspection report for Dearne Community Children's Centre

Local authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	362465
Inspection dates	3-4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Tara Street

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Lyn Barron
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Billingley View, Bolton upon Dearne, Rotherham S63 8ES
Telephone number	01709 890303
Fax number	
Email address	lyn.barron@actionforchildren.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	NA
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Happy Kids at Heather Garth Action for Children Dearne Community 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 two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with a range of users including senior managers, centre staff, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners; health, education and children's social care professionals. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Dearne Community Children's Centre is a phase one, purpose-built centre on a large housing estate in Barnsley. The centre's main site is situated in Bolton on Dearne between two primary schools and its satellite base is on the High Street in Goldthorpe on the Goldthorpe Primary School site. The centre has been working towards providing the full core offer for children's centres in areas with the highest levels of deprivation since 2006. This includes a range of health, social care, family support and education services. Within the reach of the centre there are significant issues surrounding unemployment, youth crime and substance misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy. The predominant cultural group is White British. There are an increasing number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds. Levels of unemployment are high and many of the existing jobs are low paid. Housing is mostly social or private rental. Most children enter early education with knowledge and skills that are slightly below expectations for their age. There are links to local primary schools.

The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery at Dearne Community Children Centre is the responsibility of Action for Children. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority in conjunction with an advisory board that includes providers, delivery partners and members of the local community and users that attend the children's centre.

The centres full day care provision is delivered by Happy Kids at Heather Garth, which is based at Heather Garth Primary School. The centre also offers nursery education funded places, respite care and crèche facilities from its onsite childcare provision, Action for Children at Dearne Children’s Centre. Both settings were visited as part of this inspection. The Ofsted report for both settings from September 2010 judged the childcare provisions as good overall and was taken into account for this inspection. This 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Dearne Community Children’s Centre provides good support for children and families that has a positive impact on the lives of those who use the service. The overall effectiveness of the centre stems from the management team’s commitment and drive for improved outcomes for the children, families and community it serves. Staff’s knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of users and the personalised support, care and guidance towards meeting those needs are good.

The centre’s wide range of activities, opportunities and services are held within a welcoming, secure environment that promotes and values diversity and difference. Children’s learning and development are well supported through planned, purposeful sessions. The enjoyable, practical learning experiences support children’s development of key personal, social, language and communication skills. Parents and carers and extended families are equally well supported and relationships are firmly based on mutual respect and trust. ‘I’ve made friends and got lots of advice’ and ‘If I hadn’t come here things would have got worse’, are typical comments from centre users. The centre provides a good range of services that are effectively raising the knowledge of parents and carers about healthy lifestyles and keeping their children safe. However, opportunities to encourage fathers, male carers and other male relatives to engage in children centre activities are less well developed.

The duty to safeguard all children and adults is understood and acted upon by all staff. Procedures to safeguard the most vulnerable are particularly well focused and

the centre's child protection in action is strong. All support services are fully integrated, with centre staff and other key professionals forming an effective team around each child and family. Close liaison and collaborative working ensures there are no gaps in this ring of support. As a result, children's and vulnerable adults' safety and well-being are well assured.

The centre's engagement with a wide range of health professionals and the good links between these and the family support and outreach workers, are particularly effective in improving health and well-being outcomes for users. Carefully managed individualised support is having a notable impact for several groups: younger prospective parents; children with specific needs; those with child protection plans; and families that face considerable challenges.

Centre users and volunteers are confident in being accepted as part of 'the team' and feel their contributions are valid and valued. Recognition of particular talents and close working with the Enterprise Centre and Learning Net have set a good number of users on the route to becoming volunteers or to gain qualifications. However, current links with Jobcentre Plus to encourage and support parents and carers who wish to consider training and employment are limited. The advisory board that supports Action for Children and the local authority's governance of the centre is well represented by parents and carers and partners, fully supports the work of the centre and is keen to drive improvement. The centre evaluates its outcomes well through analysis of a good range of information from different users and this is used to identify particular strengths and areas for development. Currently, however, there is a lack of statistical data available from the local authority, and other valuable impact data are not transferred between the partner services and the centre. Consequently, the centre is, as yet, unable to set precise, measurable targets towards which they can focus their work and accurately record progress. Planning for the future is high on the agenda of managers and appropriate, achievable, long-term objectives have been identified.

A key strength of the centre is the good leadership provided by the centre manager and her management team in strong partnership with Action for Children and the local authority. Senior leaders work as a cohesive team and their particular strengths and those of the centre staff are utilised well to meet the centre's and users' needs. Staff are enthusiastic, committed and hard working in the pursuit of these shared goals. This shared vision of success and sound understanding of where to target resources are key to the centre's good track record in bringing about improvements in provision, outcomes, integrated leadership and services and in safeguarding users' well-being. This together confirms the centre's good capacity for future improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In collaboration with the local authority and partners, develop data transfer systems that will accurately support the centre's evaluation of its work and

- inform appropriate, measurable target-setting.
- Develop further links with Jobcentre Plus to encourage and support parents and carers who wish to consider training and employment.
- Provide more opportunities to encourage fathers, male carers and other male relatives to engage in children centre activities.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes from the work of the centre are good and an increasing number of users are benefitting from its services. The centre records an increased uptake of targeted activities, suggested by users and provided by health professionals, to promote health and emotional well-being. Midwives and health visitors are especially proactive in directing parents and carers and prospective parents towards the centre's services. Case studies and interviews about ante- and post-natal support, baby and toddler groups, and SPRING (the supporting parents raising children with individual needs group) verify their popularity, uptake and impact. La Leche classes and breast feeding and weaning support all contribute to an increasing percentage of breast-fed infants. Baby yoga and massage, 'One-Stop-Shop' services, 'Let's move and Make Music', 'Messy play', story and rhyme library sessions are the most popular sessions. Many children centre services are supported by the crèche facility, which is greatly valued by participating families. Parents and carers speak of their increased confidence in repeating these activities at home with their children.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are able to attend all sessions and relish the opportunity to socialise and learn through play with their friends. Users say that they feel safe and secure in the centre. They place a high level of trust in the staff and are confident that any worries, concerns or challenges will be allayed or appropriately addressed. The centre helps parents and carers to gain access to home safety advice and to obtain equipment such as stair gates and smoke alarms which they say has increased their awareness of safety both at home and when walking with their children in the community. At present, however, the centre has no statistical data from the local authority to measure the impact of this on reducing accidents in the home.

Children who are subject to child protection plans, looked after children and vulnerable families that face struggles every day are particularly well supported. Teams of centre staff, social care workers and health professionals form a triangle of effective support and protection. Tried and tested systems, including use of the common assessment framework and Action for Children's own 'Aspire' monitoring system, successfully record and monitor this support and ensure the safety and well-being of these most vulnerable children and adults. The centre is effectively empowering and enabling users to become independent and to take on responsibilities. 'It's helped me maintain calm and to support my kids more' and 'I sit at home every night and cry but when I come to the Pit-Stop group I can have a laugh' were two of the many positive comments from users. The centre actively encourages adults to volunteer in supporting activities, such as becoming breast

feeding support workers and allows them to take a leading role. The well-attended partnership board has a good complement of parents and carers and partners representing interests. It provides good support for the centre in all its work and towards identified areas for improvement.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides good quality services, care, guidance and support through its centre-based activities, family and outreach support and home visits. Constructive relationships with parents and carers help them to feel confident to seek advice and support. All staff who work for and with the centre are passionate about their roles and have a good level of expertise and professional knowledge to successfully help families improve their health, well-being and achievement.

Good multi-agency partnerships across partner agencies are increasingly making sure that the individual needs of children and their parents and carers, who are referred to the centre, are assessed quickly so that interventions and support can be targeted appropriately. Assessment of individual cases is robust and the Common Assessment Framework is successfully ensuring that teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need. Where a child protection plan is in place, the centre works effectively with social services and the child protection team. Parents and carers report that the timeliness and quality of individual support is good and available for as long as needed. Careful strategies are in place to ensure that parents and carers can build confidence, parenting skills, and be supported to independence, at a pace that is appropriate to them.

Families that have been, historically, difficult to engage with have been targeted by the knowledgeable and persistent staff and an increase in engagement of these groups is recorded. The centre is proactive in taking services out to groups who are hard to reach and who they know to be vulnerable. In times of crisis, families are

confident to turn to the centre for support. Comments such as, 'I can ask anything and they have made life a lot easier', accurately reflect the users belief in the centre. Lone parents, mums and dads, of any age, are comfortable about turning to the centre at times of crisis, confident that someone will point them in the right direction for the specific help that is needed.

The provision of services by health in the centre, such as the 'One-Stop-Shop' sessions, which include an infant and breast feeding group, smoking cessation, baby clinic and midwifery services have improved the number of families accessing services. Parents and carers highlight how valuable they have found this and cannot wait to attend.

The courses provided for adults, though the children's centre and its links with local adult learning providers, are valued and provide good quality learning and development in basic skills and child development. For example, the centre and its partner agencies offer courses on confidence building, adult numeracy and literacy, cookery, food hygiene, first aid, childcare, story sacks and the Webster Stratton parenting programme. Some parents and carers have progressed from entry level courses offered at the centre and its partner agencies, to a range of courses at local colleges and work-based learning providers. Users can see the relevance of training and attendance at sessions to improving outcomes in their lives. However, other opportunities to support parents and carers who wish to consider training and employment are less well developed due to limited input from Jobcentre Plus which impacts on the centre's ability to equip them for the world of work and improve their life chances.

Assessment is used effectively to record children's progress and inform teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The nursery and day care providers receive good support from the qualified teacher and benefit from close links with local schools, which they value. The centre actively offers ongoing opportunities to support childminders in organising a network group and in assessing children's learning and development but at the moment there is very little take up. As a result, the centre effectively promotes the learning and personal development of children. Parents and carers also attest to the positive impact of stay and play sessions on their own learning and enjoyment. Their close, affirming relationships with their babies and children are obvious for all to see. However, opportunities to encourage fathers, male carers and other male relatives to engage in children centre activities, and try out new activities with their children, are less well developed.

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	2

meet the needs of users and the wider community	
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?

2

The centre manager and senior leadership team provide good leadership with high expectations for the community firmly at the heart of the centre's work. The advisory board and staff share their aspirations and are motivated and proactive in taking services out to the hard to reach and vulnerable. The recently established advisory board has very good representation from partner agencies and parents and carers. They have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development and of ways in which they might extend their challenge role. Together with centre leaders, they set ambitious targets based on good self-evaluation. This leads to good quality action planning which is supported by clear partnership working. Evaluation of the impact of the work with individual families takes place within team and multi-agency meetings, case studies and through regular supervision of staff. There are, however, concerns about the availability and transfer of key data that would allow the centre to work more effectively towards clearly defined, measurable targets. Despite this, the manager has a good understanding of the priorities and needs of the centre and the community it serves, and a particularly good knowledge of the impact of services. Resources are used well to provide a welcoming environment. Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support to families. This ensures good value for money.

All staff undergo a wide range of relevant and extended training focusing on the learning, welfare and safeguarding of children, their families and vulnerable adults. Staff confidence, therefore, allows for continual improvements to be made based on the immediate needs of the users, best practice, new initiatives and creative thinking. This is reflected in the range of activities, learning experiences and opportunities on offer throughout each week.

Staff are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that users may encounter. Checks have been made on all adults who work as part of the centre and all required systems and procedures are in place to safeguard the users' wellbeing.

Equality and diversity are promoted successfully. All services are well designed to engage users from the range of backgrounds in the local area, including the promotion of inclusive practice for children with special education needs and/or disabilities. The manager, advisory board and partner agencies have a reflective approach to working and continually look for new ways to reach into the local community and include groups of users effectively, although some are still developing. The centre strives at all times to promote and celebrate the increasing

diversity within the community through themed activities, celebrations and a range of positive resources.

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	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	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	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	2

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

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspections of Happy Kids at Heather Garth and Action for Children at Dearne Community Children's Centre were taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children.

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 Dearne Community Children's Centre on 3 and 4 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall. During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with you. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities provided through the centre. You told us that staff are friendly, hard working and give you very good support. We agree with you. We found the centre to be welcoming to all families and buzzing with activity and children's happy laughter. The staff have a high level of expertise and offer good practical and emotional support to families who need it.

The centre is working well with a range of partners and providers such as social care, health services and education. We found that services work well together as a team to provide help and support to families where a child has special educational needs and/or disabilities. It provides good support for children to make sure they get a good start in life. Adults are guided well so they can realise their potential. Some adults now work as volunteers in the centre and its partner agencies and attendance at courses has resulted in some receiving formal qualifications and work. However, because links with Jobcentre Plus are less well developed than those with other adult learning agencies some opportunities for some of you to access training and employment advice are limited.

The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is seen in the wide variety of activities on offer. Sessions and workshops related to keeping fit through the Dearne Community Walkers group, Sure Steps to Nursery, parent and toddler drop in sessions and practical activities are examples of effective support. Sessions aimed at encouraging more fathers, male carers and other male relatives to engage in children centre activities, use its resources and have valuable one-to-one time with their children are less well developed. The centre also does well in offering guidance about how you can play with your children at home. For example, they have produced 'Baby Let's Sing' CD's and a range of home learning packs for loan which offer resources and activity cards with suggested activities for you to take part in with your children.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre. This reflects the good work it does to promote safety, welfare and good safeguarding arrangements. Children are well behaved and confidently explore the learning environment. You play an important role too. We were impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and with your children.

The people in charge of running the centre are doing a very good job. The manager has worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. She makes sure that everyone who works with the Dearne Community Children's Centre share this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a real difference to your lives. The manager is well supported by Action for Children and by the local authority

and the advisory board. However, the ability of the centre to understand properly how well it is doing in improving the lives of you and your families could be improved. This is because the centre does not yet have systems in place to monitor the impact that all activities it provides have on your lives. The local authority, advisory board and manager are aware of this and an action plan is already in place. We know the centre staff are good at asking you to tell them how you have found all the activities and services which you go to, through questionnaires, evaluations and the parents forum group. We hope that this is something you will continue to play a part in, making sure the services offered meet your individual needs and requirements.

Thank you very much for your welcome and your open, honest discussions with the inspection team. These helped us immensely in building up a clear and accurate picture of your centre's work and the difference you feel it has made to your lives.

We wish you and your families all the very best for the future.

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