

Inspection report for Buttercup Children's Centre

Local authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	362451
Inspection dates	13-14 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Jane Hughes

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Miss Lisa Myatt
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Birkwood Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Buttercup 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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The inspectors held meetings with centre leadership and management, local authority representatives, staff, parents, partnership representatives and a member of the advisory board.

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

Information about the centre

Buttercup Children's Centre is co-located with Birkwood Primary School. The main entrance is a shared area with the school. The centre is a phase one centre and is managed by Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council. Designated in March 2006, it began delivering fully operational services in December 2008. The centre serves a community which is in one of the 30% most disadvantaged wards in the country, although it also covers less disadvantaged areas. Almost all families are of White British heritage. Over 27% of all children in the centre's reach area live in households dependent upon workless benefits. Local authority leadership and governance provides strategic management, direction and challenge to the centre. There is an advisory board which works across the 'well-being area' and incorporates two children's centres – Buttercup and also Milefield Children's Centre.

The centre provides a base for a range of services on site including health, family support, outreach, integrated childcare and early learning. Accommodation is limited to offices and small community and group rooms. Day care provision occupies a separate part of the accommodation. Increasingly, community venues are used for

delivery of some groups and activities in the locality. The local health centre provides a range of services which the centre's outreach worker attends, such as weekly antenatal and well baby clinics. The day care provision includes outdoor space which is accessible throughout the day. The children's centre also offers crèche provision within the day care facilities for parents accessing courses. When children first access the centre, most of them have skills generally well below expected levels, particularly their communication, language, literacy and social skills.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. The centre is a place of enjoyment and safety for increasing numbers of children and families.

Staff work well together and forge strong partnerships with other local agencies and organisations. This is a strength of their work. Good quality care, guidance and support, coupled with strong family support and outreach work, ensure that families really benefit from the time spent at the centre. Adult users typically comment, 'We cannot praise the centre enough.' Parents told inspectors that the centre, 'has been a lifeline and got us through a hard time'. Equally, parents confirm that staff have, 'gone above and beyond to help'.

There are clear lines of accountability between strategic partners. Governance is satisfactory but the advisory board is still developing and members are uncertain of their roles and responsibilities and do not always have the required information to make important decisions or check the work of the centre. There is not a representative cross section of members, particularly parents, and this weakens the parent voice. The local authority checks the work of the centre regularly and provides support and guidance to the centre manager. However, it does not disseminate a wide enough range of comparative data to aid staff to accurately assess the impact of their work when set against, for instance, national health indicators. Nor does it provide precise targets for the centre to help inform the centre's leadership as it evaluates the impact of its work.

Overall outcomes for users, provision and leadership and management are satisfactory and the centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. Children and families have regular opportunities to engage in activities which increase their understanding of how to live safely and healthily while establishing a stronger foundation for lifelong learning. Data show that children who attend the centre go on to achieve greater success in their Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes than their non-attending peers. Adult users also learn more about how to become effective and useful members of society as they grow in emotional and physical strength and increasingly contribute to the local community through paid employment. Very effective outreach and family support work enable adults to access 'first-steps learning' and to be better prepared for the world of work.

The centre manager and staff form a supportive team, committed to improving services and outcomes for users. Staff target individualised care, guidance and support well to ensure they meet the needs of all who contact them. This often involves outreach and family support workers in shouldering heavy workloads as they endeavour to complement overstretched local health services. As a result there is a tradition of very effective partnership work which is well sustained by staff and welcomed by other local professionals. Joint endeavours between learning networks and family support workers help to break down barriers to employment. Staff are held in high esteem by the increasing numbers of users who appreciate how much support is quickly available once their individual needs are known.

Robust measures to safeguard users ensure that personal security and safety are high priorities within and beyond the centre. There is appropriate work to ensure equal access to its services and to minimise any potential for discrimination. Even so, staff do not make contact with a sufficient proportion of disadvantaged users within the centre's reach.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - increasing the volume of data provided by the local authority with regard to services and outcomes
 - strengthening the way in which the local authority and the advisory board challenge the centre and hold it to account for its work
 - improving the effectiveness of self-evaluation through regular and rigorous analysis of data to inform impact and outcomes
 - increasing access to services by a wider range of the population within the reach area and, in particular, the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

- Secure effective accountability arrangements by:
 - developing the impact of the advisory board by ensuring that members

- understand their remit
- providing the advisory board with the information it requires to hold the centre to account
- increasing the contribution parents make to the governance of the centre and its future direction.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Children and families make the most of an appropriate range of activities such as 'Busy Feet' to develop new skills. Local dads enjoy working on the centre's allotment. They show children where vegetables come from and children enjoy investigating these. One little girl was amazed at how, 'the beetroot turned her hands pink'. Outcomes for families and children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are improving. Children are happy and engage well in activities at the centre, while adults confirm how much they benefit from links with the centre as they socialise and grow in confidence. Sessions such as 'Cook and Eat' are popular and encourage parents to cook healthy meals for their families. Children make strides in their communication, language and literacy skills in particular, as this is a key focus. A greater proportion now reaches average standards by the time they leave the co-located school's Early Years Foundation Stage. More adult users now access adult education classes through helpful brokering of services in the community by the neighbourhood learning network. Nevertheless, it is very difficult for the leadership of the centre to assess accurately and plan to best effect the most desirable courses for users; there is a dearth of comparative data from the local authority for staff to interrogate.

Children and adults form positive relationships and so the centre is an orderly and happy place. Professionals, for example from social services, work on site with families to ensure positive outcomes for children. For instance, supervised contact sessions allow families to spend valuable time together while establishing positive relationships and firmer foundations for family life. At the same time, families access a range of services in relation to breastfeeding, postnatal depression, behaviour management, debt and domestic violence. These support increased stability in terms of users' future economic well-being.

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	3
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

Centre staff know children and their families well and so meet their individual needs effectively through good quality care, guidance and support. There is close attention to child protection and all staff are trained in the common assessment framework. Families approach staff with confidence and recognise the centre as a place of safety which imbues them with hope for the future. The good range of services supports users' emotional as well as physical well-being. Parents comment that, 'Outreach and family support workers are always there for you.' Nonetheless, the centre's reach is not sufficiently extended, particularly in the areas of greatest disadvantage. This is a current focus for the leadership and links directly to the lack of firm data available to aid assessment. Lack of space, previous staffing shortages, particularly in outreach work, and a limited staff team combine to restrict the support that staff can realistically offer. More community-based services are developing to overcome some of these restrictions.

The centre provides appropriate support for user groups such as childminders. They are helped to deliver quality provision for children through centre supplied information leaflets on the six areas of learning. Planning is on display in the centre so childminders can link this to children's development records and can provide purposeful learning outside the centre. Improving outcomes for school age children who have accessed the centre's services provide clear evidence of its burgeoning influence on users' learning and future potential.

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 centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The senior leadership team is committed to extending services and providing the

very best life chances for local children and their families. Regular parent evaluations and consultations help the leadership to gauge if they are meeting needs appropriately. More work remains to be done to ensure the centre has access to complete data sets, which the local authority does not currently supply. The decision to place an outreach worker in the local health centre on clinic days is paying dividends as more new families now access the centre. This is breaking down barriers in the community. There is a keen understanding among staff that in this area of high deprivation, there is strong need for potential users to meet one-to-one with staff as they lack confidence to go along to a group on their own. Co-location ensures that transition arrangements are particularly effective and help children to settle well in school.

The centre runs smoothly day-to-day and financial resources are carefully managed. The centre's leadership has a good view of individual outcomes but its evaluation of overall impact and a crystal clear analysis of the 'bigger picture' are lacking. Governance is supportive but the role of the advisory board is still gathering momentum. Parental contributions are at an early stage, members are still unsure of their remit and they do not have access to sufficient information to hold the centre robustly to account for its work. There are regular performance management arrangements and supervisions in place for staff who feel valued and able to develop their own professional expertise through training opportunities. Taking all this into account, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures ensure that safety and security are a priority. Staff adopt recommended good practice in all areas. The centre is flexible in aiming to complement the work of local health professionals and this ensures that users access the most relevant services. The centre promotes equality and tackles discrimination satisfactorily. For instance, the most recent data for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage shows that the gap is narrowing between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers.

Partnerships continue to develop well with effective collaboration between the centre and health professionals. In the past, health professionals delivered services such as baby massage from the centre. Current finances preclude these same levels of support but the centre now runs baby massage and baby yoga itself. The neighbourhood learning network coordinator brokered courses on 'Toddler Taming' and linked these to oracy work, which is another priority for the centre. There are clear links to debt counselling, financial management and citizens' advice. Six 'learning champions' are already identified who enthuse about learning and encourage others to attend.

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	3
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understood	
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its 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	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

The co-located Birkwood Primary School's Early Years Foundation Stage was inspected during its section 5 inspection on 11-12 October 2010. This provision was judged to be good. The registered childcare provision run by Buttercup Children's Centre was inspected on 14 October 2010 and was judged to be outstanding. The full reports 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. 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 Buttercup Children's Centre on 13 and 14 October 2010. We judged the centre to be satisfactory overall.

It was a pleasure to meet many of you during the inspection and to read your evaluations of the services on offer.

The range of services at your centre is satisfactory and growing. Previous staff shortages in some areas mean that the centre is not as far along with its development as originally planned. However, since April 2010, there has been permanent outreach work taking place. As a result provision has moved on faster and now more users come into the centre.

Many of you told us about the very caring staff. You clearly appreciate the strong guidance and support on offer and you gave examples of how the centre has helped to change lives for the better. This caring approach by all the adults working in the centre is reflected in the good safeguarding procedures that help local children and families to live and learn safely.

The centre establishes good quality partnership work with a range of outside agencies. Increasingly, services are provided within the community and health partners value this aspect of the centre's support. For example, the centre's outreach worker now attends health clinics regularly and so meets new parents. This is proving to be a successful way of encouraging more users to experience the centre's activities.

We met a variety of users during the inspection and they are all strong supporters of the centre and its work. Our thanks go to everyone who shared their views. These helped us to appreciate how important the centre is to many of you. It clearly makes a difference to the lives of local families, although we would like some elements of the centre's work to improve. We have asked the centre to improve further the quality of its leadership and management, mainly through improving its self-evaluation and how it uses data to check how well it is doing and how best it can reach more families who are most in need. We want the local authority to provide more challenge to the centre and to give more data to the leadership. We have asked that the advisory board becomes more challenging and that it has all the information it needs to make good decisions on your behalf. There is also a lack of parental contribution to the advisory board.

On behalf of the inspection team, I send you our warmest wishes and hope that families throughout the Cudworth area will continue to benefit from the services available to you for many years to come.

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