

Inspection report for Cortonwood Children's Centre

Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	365770
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Liz Godman

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Brampton Cortonwood School
Centre leader	Sarah Aston
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Brampton Cortonwood Infant School Chapel Avenue Brampton Barnsley S73 0XH
Telephone number	01709 336340
Fax number	01226 344781
Email address	cortonwood.childrenscentre@rotherham.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Brampton Cortonwood Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY391228 Smarties Pre-school EY421382 Railway Children at Brampton 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 one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the local authority, with the headteacher of Brampton Cortonwood Infant School, who is also the centre leader, and with members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with parents and carers.

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

Information about the centre

Cortonwood Children's Centre received its designation as a phase two centre in February 2008 but opened for children and their families in April 2008. The centre provides family support, parental involvement and links with Jobcentre Plus, schools, health and other services. The centre is located on the same site as Brampton Cortonwood Infant School. This school was inspected in the same week as the children's centre. The school report can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The school's governing body is contracted by the local authority to govern the centre, in conjunction with an advisory board. The school's governing body is also responsible for the Smarties pre-school located on the same site. This setting provides early education and childcare for children's centre children and was judged to be good at its last Ofsted inspection in October 2009. A private provider runs a breakfast and after-school club, Railway Children, in the children's centre. This opened in autumn 2010, includes some places for children under five and is subject to separate inspection arrangements.

Most children enter early education with knowledge and skills that are below expectations for their age. The centre serves a community which experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of children who live in

households without paid employment or with low incomes is high, as is the number of families in receipt of benefits. The area has a mix of social, privately rented or privately owned housing. The majority of families are of White British heritage backgrounds, with a small number from other ethnic groups.

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

Cortonwood Children's Centre provides good services for young children and their families. The centre has made rapid progress in developing its provision and in improving outcomes in the time that it has been open. The centre is well led and managed and leaders and managers have a good knowledge of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Identified priorities for improvement have been tackled quickly and successfully. These factors give the centre good capacity for further improvement. However, the challenge provided by the advisory board to the centre's leaders and managers is less effective. For example, the role of the advisory board is underdeveloped in holding the centre to account for evaluating and assuring the quality of its services.

Many families are eager to take up the centre's help in improving their health. The health outcomes for young babies are improving particularly rapidly and the take-up of immunisation is very high. The centre has also been successful in helping mothers to give up smoking during pregnancy. More mothers are sustaining breastfeeding because of the strong peer support of the 'breast buddies'. Children in the centre's sessions enjoy the healthy snacks and are very eager to play outside. A strength in provision is the use of the outdoor environment to promote all aspects of children's learning and development. Staff take good care of children and families and the centre provides a very safe setting for all users. The promotion of adults' and children's safety is threaded through everything the centre does and clear guidance from the centre is helping to build children's and parents' understanding of how to stay safe.

There is a great sense of enjoyment in all the centre's sessions and some families who have previously been hard to engage enjoy coming to the centre, saying, 'We were only coming at first because we had to come, but we enjoy it now'. Excellent tracking systems, arising from the outstanding partnership with the pre-school and school give a very clear picture of children's good progress in the centre, in the Smarties pre-school and in the Early Years Foundation Stage in school. The centre promotes equality well and its support for young children is starting to close the achievement gap. Adult learners are also progressing well in literacy and numeracy skills as a result of programmes very closely matched to their assessed needs and provided at the centre in conjunction with a local college. The centre provides good opportunities for users and volunteers to make a positive contribution and some of these have proved highly effective. For example, volunteers very successfully run the 'breast buddies', adult education classes are led by a parent, and grandparents play a key role in the centre and on the advisory board. Parents are also happy to give their views informally. However, the centre has tried to establish a parents' forum with little success. It recognises the importance of finding alternative methods of gathering a wider range of parents' views regularly and systematically, in order to better engage all families in shaping the centre's priorities and activities. Similarly, the centre has identified as a priority for development, the greater involvement of families from the far end of its geographical reach area.

The centre knows the community it serves very well and its assessment of families' needs is outstanding. Excellent partnerships with other agencies, including health and social care also ensure early identification and support for those who are vulnerable and for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre uses this information well to work actively with its partners to develop a good range of targeted outreach services and activities to meet the needs of users. The centre is effective in helping families who face the greatest difficulties and in improving their economic stability and social well-being so that users say the staff, 'have been my rock'. For example, the centre's staff have helped with financial management and housing matters, where necessary, engaging other partners such as adult education and Jobcentre Plus in order to ensure that needs are met. This has improved children's well-being and stability as families have been able to stay in the area, when this might not have otherwise been possible.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the engagement of all parents and other users in the governance and day-to-day running of the centre by:
 - exploring ways for parents and other users to give their views more frequently and readily
 - enabling them to see that their views are important in shaping services to meet local needs
 - extending consultation with and developing activities for families at the far

end of the centre's geographical reach.

- Extend the work of the advisory board so that it is increasingly involved in holding centre leaders and managers to account for developing the centre's evaluation and quality assurance processes.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Assessment sessions run by health visitors are busy and parents appreciate the advice available on weaning and car safety. 'Baby day' on Wednesdays is equally popular and parents enjoy meeting others and solving problems together. Babies and young children who may have special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified at a very early stage. This is helping to promote their physical and emotional health. Parents understand the benefits of active outdoor play and many join in with their children in the attractive outdoor environment. It is too early in the centre's development to judge the longer-term impact of its work on some health outcomes, for example, in relation to reducing childhood obesity and related conditions.

Staff work closely with other agencies to improve the safety of families. They provide support very quickly, sometimes before a new baby is born. They are committed to ensuring children are safe and protected, contributing well to Common Assessment Framework processes and child protection plans. Parents say their children's behaviour has improved, for example, following the 'positive parenting' programme. Many say, too, they are more confident in seeking help. Parents appreciate the centre's home safety checks and provision of safety equipment where this is appropriate. Children are learning to play cooperatively and safely, although occasionally a few need help with this. Similarly, parents check that their child's play is safe, although a few need prompts from centre staff to do so.

Records kept by the centre, the pre-school and the school show that children are making a good start in their personal, social and emotional development, particularly in their eagerness to follow routines and to explore and investigate. Their communication, language and literacy skills are also developing well. Consequently, children engage adults in conversation and give their views clearly. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores for children at the end of the Reception Year indicate that the skills of children who have been involved with the centre are more advanced than those of children who have not.

The adult literacy classes are provided by a parent at the request of other parents. Some advisory board members also attend the centre's sessions regularly with the young children in their care. These users are keen to engage in the centre's governance and feel a strong sense of ownership because the centre is, 'very warm and friendly and has a good ethos and resources'. However, some parents are more reluctant to be involved. The centre has identified increased involvement of families who live further away as a priority. Community voluntary organisations, for example,

the Salvation Army and the local miners' welfare association contribute well to improving families' economic and social well-being. Parents are happy to contribute their ideas informally and through the annual survey. This shows a very high level of satisfaction with the centre's activities.

Children and adults are improving their skills for the future. This is the result of the centre's work on developing children's social, communication and numeracy skills, so that they are prepared well for starting school. Adults' progress in literacy and numeracy skills is also helping them to make a start in preparing for employment and in reducing their dependency on benefits. 'I tried to get a job but they said I needed English and so I heard about this and come here', is a typical comment.

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

Very careful assessment ensures the courses for adults are matched closely to their prior attainment. These users are delighted with their progress and achievements in literacy and numeracy. Assessment is also used very well to develop programmes from session to session and the tracking of children's progress over time is excellent. As a result, the centre is constantly adjusting provision and developing flexible approaches to ensure that the needs of every child are met.

The centre's lead teacher provides an excellent example for other practitioners. Her vision and determination have been central to developing the effective and coherent approaches to promoting children's learning and development. This can be seen across the children's centre, the pre-school and the school. Many parents, grandparents and volunteers are eager to join in play and to promote children's development. Consequently, there are good opportunities for all parents to gain skills in supporting their child's learning and play at the centre and at home. However, despite the good models provided by many adults, a few show some reluctance to

join in with their children.

Family support staff's careful analysis of the needs of the families they work with indicates that many families are coping with complex situations. These include being a lone parent, living in a workless household or being in a family with disabled adults or children. Effective help for them has covered budgeting, parenting skills and home safety. Families from across the centre's reach use these services and family support has reduced the isolation of some users because, 'being in the centre means I am not stuck at home all day on my own'. Provision for all prospective parents and for those with young babies is popular and of good quality. The centre engages well with families with children with disabilities and with the small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. Saturday activities for grandfathers, fathers and children are well attended and are designed, in consultation with the fathers, to provide activities to interest both boys and girls. The centre has identified next steps to include the development of activities more readily accessible to families from the far end of the reach area.

Support for families in times of crisis is also good. However, despite the persistent efforts of centre staff, a small number of families remain reluctant to engage with the centre's activities. A wide range of information about health, employment and safety is readily available in the form of leaflets, posters and the electronic 'kiosk'. This, coupled with good personal support, is helping to improve families' progress across the Every Child Matters outcomes. Some families find it difficult to attend job centres elsewhere. As a result, following representation from the outreach worker, the Jobcentre Plus adviser has started to provide drop-ins at the children's centre. This is helping to remove barriers to learning and employment through personal contact and support.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Good governance arrangements ensure that the local authority, the school's governing body and the advisory board are supportive of the centre's work. The

school's headteacher, deputy headteacher and the centre's lead teacher work as a strong team in ensuring the centre is well led and managed. Clear lines of accountability and good supervision ensure that all the staff work as a close and highly effective team. Their good overview of the centre's work means they are flexible and adaptable in ensuring the provision of a good range of effective services. Leaders and managers are highly focused on developing a high quality provision and respond rapidly and flexibly to identified needs. However, more systematically researched and recorded findings from monitoring and evaluation are less evident and so cannot be used by the advisory board to track the centre's progress in making improvements and in planning the next steps.

The centre makes good use of its meticulously maintained accommodation and deploys staff well to ensure their expertise is used to good effect to meet the needs of all families. Good use is also made of resources and expertise in the wider community to promote learning and well-being. The centre gives good value for money. The centre seeks to ensure that its services are accessible to all groups and, consequently, no group is significantly under-represented in the centre's activities, although the centre recognises that it has work to do to engage users at the far end of its reach.

The centre's arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable adults and children are secure. All the necessary checks are made. There are clear protocols for working with other agencies. As a result, users and other agencies place a great deal of trust and confidence in the centre staff to handle situations sensitively but thoroughly. The positive climate in the centre means that families feel able to ask for help when needed. The centre has played a key role in reducing domestic violence and has helped individuals within families to escape from abusive situations and to become more independent.

Partner agencies and voluntary community groups share with the centre an excellent understanding of the community and its needs. The centre has forged outstanding partnerships which are proving central to tailoring services to meet needs and to improving outcomes for children and families. These exceptionally strong partnerships cover a wide range, including, for example, health and social care professionals, Jobcentre Plus and a local college. The outstanding partnership between the centre, the pre-school and the school has been instrumental in securing continuity and coherence so that staff and users see the provision as a highly integrated service, rather than as three separate settings.

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	2

community	
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	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	2

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 the Cortonwood Children's Centre on 8 and 9 February 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that your centre has come a long way since it opened and this is helping you to give your children a good start in life. The centre is well led and managed. All the staff have a good knowledge of what is going well and what could be improved and are keen to make sure that what they offer is right for you and your families. Where staff have identified something that could be better, they tackle it quickly to

make a difference and so the centre is well placed to continue to improve. We do think though that the advisory board can play a greater part in checking what is going well and that things are as good as they can be. We have asked the centre to take steps to make sure that this happens.

Many of you told us that you are keen to take up the centre's help in improving your families' health. We found that the centre is especially good in helping those of you with young babies to make sure they have a healthy start in life. The number of you who make sure your babies are immunised is very high. The centre has also helped pregnant women to give up smoking during pregnancy. We saw that many of you are keeping going with breastfeeding because of the good help from the 'breast buddies'. We also saw your children enjoying the healthy snacks and having a good time playing outside. It was good too to see some of you playing outside with your children as well and enjoying the attractive outdoor areas. We found that the staff take good care of you and your children and that the centre is a very safe place to be. In fact, the centre makes sure that safety is important in everything it does and this is helping to make sure that everyone knows how to stay safe.

We saw everyone having fun at the centre and some of you who were not keen to come at first told us that now you enjoy coming along every day. We were very impressed by the way that the centre tracks how well your children are doing and how well the centre, the Smarties pre-school and the infant school all work together to help your children learn as quickly as they can. The centre includes everyone well and is helping some young children who find learning more difficult to get off to a good start. Those of you doing the adult literacy and numeracy courses are also progressing well because the courses are matched closely to your needs. It was good too to see some of you getting involved and helping to make a difference. We know that the centre tried to set up a parents' forum but that not many of you were keen to get involved. The centre knows that it is important to have your views so that your centre can provide the things you want, so we have asked the centre to find other ways of getting your views and of getting more of you involved in planning activities. We have also asked the centre to make sure that the families who live further away from the centre also have a say in what is on offer.

The staff know the area very well and are excellent at working out what you need. We were also very impressed with the outstanding way that all the agencies, like health and social care work together to make sure that your needs are identified as soon as is possible. When you cannot get to the centre, the centre tries to see you at home. Some of you told us that the centre has helped you manage your money, improve your children's behaviour and make life safer and happier for you. It was good to hear how the centre's help with housing and difficult situations at home has helped some of you to stay in the area. It was good, too, to learn that the adult literacy and numeracy courses came about because some of you told the tutor that this is what you would like. Now that Jobcentre Plus are running drop-ins at the centre this will also help some of you on the road to brushing up the skills you need to get a job, which you told us you are keen to do.

Many thanks to all of you who spoke to us about your centre and for letting us join you in some of the activities. We wish you all the very best for the future.

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