

Inspection report for Lundwood and Monk Bretton Children's Centre

Local authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	365694
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Brian Padgett HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Susan Duke
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	N/a
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/a

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with staff from the centre and the local authority, parents and carers, representatives from health, schools, social services, the affiliated day nursery, the community, childminders and voluntary organisations. An inspector accompanied a family support worker on an outreach visit. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The centre serves the communities of Lundwood and Monk Bretton to the north east of Barnsley. Each community has mixed private and local authority housing and families that are both advantaged and disadvantaged, socially and economically. However, the balance is towards the disadvantaged, as around two-thirds of the families' circumstances place them within the 30% most disadvantaged within England. There are pockets of severe disadvantage. The population is almost entirely White British, with very few families from minority ethnic backgrounds. Children's communication and social skills are often low when they enter early years provisions.

The centre is a Phase 2 children's centre. It has no registered childcare and early years provision of its own. It has an affiliation with St Martin's Day Nursery close by. It is adjacent to a primary school, Littleworth Grange Learning Centre, and a secondary school, Priory School and Specialist Sports College. Also nearby is a large health and community complex, the Priory Centre. The centre has no base in Monk Bretton, where it mainly uses rooms belonging to the Methodist Church. The centre also has links with the primary school in Monk Bretton, St Helens Primary School. Although designated in February 2008, the centre actually began operating from its current premises in April 2009. Initially, it had no separate centre manager. However, in March 2011, it was allocated a centre manager who also leads and manages the nearby Buddies Children's Centre based at Burton Bank Primary School.

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 centre is judged satisfactory. It has had a slower than ideal start but is now improving more strongly.

Part of the reason why the centre had a slow start was because, for a year after it was set up, it had no fixed base. Also, there have been several changes in its leadership. More recently, there has been staff illness. As the number of staff is small, the absence of one or more makes a significant impact on the workload and plans of those left. Although the staff have coped remarkably well in covering for absent colleagues, there has been an inevitable delay in setting up some new activities for parents and carers.

The centre is successful in working with families and promoting partnerships in its day-to-day work. Links with the core partners of health, social care and early education are well established. There is equality of opportunity for all, although opportunities for the Lundwood community are rather better than those in Monk Bretton. Centre staff have forged productive links with a host of community groups from the voluntary sector and with childminders, significantly broadening the opportunities available for parents and carers for support and improvement.

Staff are highly regarded by the community and by other professionals, particularly the work of the family support workers. They provide outstanding care, guidance and support and are very effective in supporting families who are facing difficulties. They are strong advocates for parents and carers and coordinate the support of other agencies very well to achieve better outcomes for the families. Staff are active in promoting all the five ‘Every Child Matters’ outcomes across the communities. The centre provides a warm welcome for groups and good quality, secure accommodation. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Groups, such as the under 25s parents’ group, childminders and the breastfeeding group make good progress and their achievements are celebrated.

While the day-to-day work of the centre has been managed successfully despite staffing difficulties, there have been shortfalls in the more strategic aspects of managing partnerships. There has, for example, been little planning and review of the work of the centre with core partners. The centre cannot show evidence of the longer-term impact it makes. However, since the local authority deployed managers to work at the centre, there have been significant improvements to leadership and management. Staff are now well supervised. Development of the local authority's planning and overall monitoring systems have made a positive difference to this centre. Most recently, the local authority has taken the decision to link directly the management of a nearby centre to that of Lundwood and Monk Bretton through the appointment of a single centre manager. Although it is too early to evaluate the success of this step, it has been received positively and has the potential to solve some of the centre's longer-running issues, by pooling resources and providing for contingencies.

One clear weakness in the current governance of the centre, fully acknowledged, is the lack of a formal voice for parents and the community. There are sensible plans to develop a parents' group and make use of the established arrangements currently operating in the nearby centre for a single advisory board.

Outcomes for the more vulnerable families are good. Improved outcomes for children and families across the community due to improved partnership working are harder to see. At present, most indicators across the 'Every Child Matters' agenda remain stubbornly low. However, there are signs that the attainment of pupils in primary school Reception classes is beginning to improve as a result of effective joint working and that the gap in attainment between the most disadvantaged and the rest is reducing.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Establish the means by which parents, carers and the community can contribute to the development and future direction of the centre, including to an advisory board.
- Ensure that absences of key staff do not reduce the effectiveness of the centre by introducing appropriate contingency arrangements.
- Improve the offer of services for the Monk Bretton community to match that for Lundwood.
- Improve planning for the future by the greater involvement of key partners in the centre's evaluation and planning process.
- In conjunction with the local authority, develop the means to track the impact of partnership working on the progress and well-being of families and children in the communities over time.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Outcomes for families facing difficult circumstances are good. As one such parent told an inspector 'The staff have made life better for my children'. Parents and carers in crisis are significantly safer and healthier because of the intervention of the family support workers, who work very effectively to support, for example, those suffering domestic violence or substance abuse. Family support workers have substantial caseloads and discharge these effectively, enabling many vulnerable families to be supported within the community.

Outcomes for the community at large are satisfactory. There are major programmes to improve community health and raise attainment of children entering school, in which the centre is fully involved. Poor speech, language and communication skills and delayed social development are major issues for the nought to fives. Concerted efforts by partnerships are beginning to have a positive impact for younger children who gain from early experience in day nurseries and projects to improve speech. Although promising, these gains have yet to be embedded. The centre makes a clear contribution to the achievement and enjoyment of children. It provides activities that are aligned to the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage. These help parents and carers gain a better understanding of child development, develop good parenting skills and help children make a smooth transition to school.

Some of the activities, such as those to promote healthy eating and exercise, are provided at the centre, directly supervised by centre staff. However, the centre is also effective at arranging for parents and carers to attend other venues that have better facilities, or offer courses the centre staff cannot provide, such as those for children and parents with disabilities. These venues include voluntary sector providers, health centres and schools.

Generally, parents and carers rarely move into employment through the work of the centre but they achieve success at a range of levels, including gaining entry to college courses. A few parents and carers are taking the first steps towards becoming volunteers. Parents and carers are also more knowledgeable about benefits and sources of financial help available to them. Parents and carers who use the services at the centre are regularly asked for their views on activities and their success. However, there are no arrangements to give them a formal voice in developing the centre's activities or representing the community on a proper advisory group with all the centre's professional partners. Despite promising plans for the future, this is at present an unsatisfactory position to be in.

These are the grades for 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	4
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?

2

Centre staff have excellent relationships with parents and carers, front-line staff in health, social care and education, and with many partners. Family support workers have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the community. Their work was highly praised by all who talked to inspectors. Parents and carers count on the support of staff and value the guidance and support they receive. Family support workers have the confidence of the community, despite the general recognition that, traditionally, it is hard to engage. So well have staff covered for each other during recent absences that some partners were not aware of any reduction in services. Staff have had significant success with identifying, assessing and providing for the needs of families facing difficult circumstances. Also, services at the centre are most used by parents and carers who have the greatest needs. The staff use the Common Assessment Framework effectively, often acting as lead professional in meetings. For parents and carers, they are the thread that runs through the various procedures, such as 'Team around the Child', acting successfully as advocates for parents and carers.

Although successful with many groups within the centre, such as childminders and the young parents group, the range of activities is currently limited. The centre's resources are not fully used to promote learning and development. Limited provision is particularly marked for activities provided for the Monk Bretton community. However, the centre makes up this shortfall to some extent by effective 'signposting', where parents and carers are directed to where activities are provided, such as on the extensive Priory Campus or in the affiliated day nursery. The absence of a professional with education expertise among the staff has no negative impact on provision. Staff have a sound awareness of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They have good relationships with the affiliated provider of early education and the adjacent primary school. They also support the involvement of early years consultants from the local authority.

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	3

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Until recently, the centre was managed as one of a number of children's centres. This did not prove effective. The centre serves an area of considerable need and its small team of staff require good support to be able to make the maximum impact. The local authority recognised this and arrangements for leadership and management at all levels are now securely in place. However, the impact on the community in improved outcomes has yet to be seen. In the meantime, staff confidence has improved because of clearer direction, accountability and better supervision.

The centre has significant strengths. For example, procedures to ensure safeguarding are good. The centre is very secure. All staff are well trained and some are trained to the highest levels. Moreover it provides a welcoming environment and privacy for vulnerable parents and carers. Staff respect and value all users of the centre regardless of their background or status and there is no tolerance for discrimination. It offers equality of opportunity for centre users, although the Monk Bretton community is not as well served as that from Lundwood, especially through links with primary schools. A further strength is the quality and range of partnerships developed by the centre. This is of particular relevance because, by virtue of its nature as a Phase 2 centre, most of the activities are provided by other agencies. The partnership with health is particularly well-integrated.

The major resource the centre has is its staff. They are proving very effective and resilient. The building is currently under-used with an occupancy rate by user groups that is too low. At present, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Until recently, the centre's evaluation of its work was weak. It is now adequate. There remain procedures that are not yet in place, such as regular conversations with its main providers over future plans and the lack of formal representation by the community. However, in all respects, plans of good quality are in place to drive improvement. Further, a promising start has been made to put the centre on a more secure footing with the appointment of a centre manager and the close linking with a nearby established Phase 1 centre under the same leadership.

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 integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider	3

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	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 Ofsted reports on local providers and schools were scrutinised to provide contextual information about the area in which the centre is situated.

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 Lundwood and Monk Bretton Children's Centre on 30 and 31 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The small team at the centre is doing some things very well. Staff provide a very warm welcome for parents, carers and children in a pleasant, secure environment. All the professionals and members of the community who spoke to us praised the work of the staff, especially the family support workers. They have people's trust and confidence and make really positive differences to the lives of many families in the area, especially those facing difficulties. Overall, the care, support and guidance for

these families are outstanding. The more pressing the needs of children, parents and carers, the more the staff team rise to the challenge.

There have been difficulties associated with the small size of the centre team and the nature of the area served. When staff are off ill it is very difficult for those left to cover all of the absent person's work and, sometimes, promising projects for families are delayed. The staff are very good at adapting to sudden changes. However, we thought there ought to be better contingency arrangements. We also felt that the Monk Bretton community was not quite as well served as that in Lundwood and have asked the centre to improve these two things. Most of Monk Bretton is a significant distance away from the centre and not on a convenient bus route. The centre uses other venues in Monk Bretton, such as the rooms belonging to the Methodist Church, but links with the primary school here are not as good as those with the schools serving Lundwood, which are much closer to the centre.

The centre staff work well with the major children's services of education, health and social care. There are particularly strong links with midwives and health visitors and the centre's involvement is making a positive difference to some of the major indicators of health, such as in promoting breastfeeding. Family support workers often act as the lead professional in joined up action, linking well with all those involved and making sure the family is fully included. There are excellent relations with St Martin's Day Nursery. Good joint working with Littleworth Grange Learning Centre, the local primary school, and a range of partners is beginning to tackle the poor language and delayed social and emotional development of many children entering the school. The gap in attainment between the more needy children and others is being reduced.

Since last year, the centre has had more input from area managers and coordinators. The local authority, which is responsible for children's centres, recognised that staff and outcomes would likely benefit from greater stability in leadership. There had been too many changes. This strategy is working. The staff work more efficiently because they are better managed. For the longer-term, the local authority is extending the role of the centre manager of the Buddies Children Centre on Burton Road to include that for Lundwood and Monk Bretton. This approach makes sense. The combined resources of both centres can be deployed more efficiently. This should ensure that gaps in provision that sometimes arise when there is absence within a smaller staff do not occur. However, these plans have only just been implemented and it is too early to judge whether this approach works in practice.

The new arrangements are also intended to resolve a weakness in the current governance of the centre. The centre runs smoothly and efficiently and the local authority has a clear overview of how well it is doing. However, there is little representation from parents and the community in the centre's decision-making arrangements. The centre is fully aware of this. It had made a start to encourage parents and carers to become involved but the new link with Buddies has come at a good time, since Buddies already has established community representation on its advisory board. The plan is for the Lundwood and Monk Bretton centre to share the advisory board with Buddies, to which it would contribute. As this arrangement is not

yet in place, we have kept the involvement of parents and carers as one of their recommendations. We have also asked the centre to make sure that it involves all its partners in planning and checking how it is making a positive difference for the children and families who use it.

Many of the aspects judged in the inspection fell into the 'satisfactory' category. However, we want you to know that there is a strong element of improvement in many of these aspects. After a few wobbles in the first two years since opening, this children's centre is getting better.

The inspectors would like to thank all those, including parents and carers, to whom we spoke during the inspection.

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