

# Inspection report for Ash Tree Children's Centre

Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	367736
Inspection dates	4–5 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Joan Cawdron

Centre governance	Smawthorne Henry Moore Primary School governing body
Centre leader	Elaine Targett
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Smawthorne Henry Moore Primary School 133621
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Brambly Hedge Private Day Nursery 322070

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre, two representatives from the local authority, the Chair of the Governing Body and two further governors, the Chair of the Partnership Board and a number of partners, including health services. They also met with centre users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Ash Tree Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre designated in February 2007, based on the site of Smawthorne Henry Moore Primary School. It serves a former mining community that continues to experience relatively high levels of social and economic disadvantage with many families in receipt of benefits. It is ranked in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. It is located close to the town centre of Castleford, in the Wakefield Metropolitan District. The centre serves the geographical areas of Castleford and Glasshoughton and provides the full core offer. There is a high concentration of social-rented households in the area and a hostel for the homeless managed by the local authority. Within the reach of the centre there are significant issues surrounding unemployment, substance misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage although there are a small number of Traveller families and increasing numbers of European and Chinese communities.

The centre has a manager and there are strong links with the local authority for monitoring and supervision of the provision. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority, the governing body of the school and a partnership board that includes providers, members of the local community and parents. There is a range of health, social care, family support and education services operating from the centre with associated professionals and centre staff. There are links to other local primary schools including the on-site primary school.

Childcare is provided through twice weekly 'Stay and Play' and regular crèche sessions. Full day care provision is delivered by the Brambly Hedge Day Nursery which is located close to the Castleford town centre. It was inspected in November 2010. The inspection report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). Most children enter early years provision with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than expected for their age.

## 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**

<b>2</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>2</b>
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## Main findings

Ash Tree Children's Centre provides a warm, welcoming and safe environment for all its users. They value the work it does and recognise the positive impact it has on their lives. One parent described the views of many and said, 'Attending a group activity has helped me a lot, it has made me see that I am not on my own'. A key strength of the centre is the good leadership provided by the centre manager, the recently appointed headteacher of the link primary school and the local authority. As a result of this effective leadership, outcomes for users are good. Multi-agency partnerships are particularly strong and responsive to meeting the needs of families. The centre provides a good range of services that effectively raise the knowledge of parents and carers about healthy lifestyles and keeping their children safe. Parents and children benefit from this broad and varied range of services provided at the centre and throughout the district.

Support for breastfeeding mothers is inspiring through the highly effective peer mentoring programme. Through this support, and that provided by the midwives and health visitors, numbers of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding is improving. One mother commented how she now realised breast feeding was not unusual. The arrangements for referrals to Jobcentre Plus, to provide users with routes to employment, have improved, ensuring more effective use of time through better assessment of needs by the centre staff and the establishment of an

appointments system. Increasing numbers of parents and carers are encouraged to participate in adult learning through a range of courses offered by the centre and in the wider community. Many develop better skills and improve their knowledge in preparation for work or training. Some achieve qualifications which have enabled them to successfully gain employment. Support for teenage parents is very effective and delivered through dedicated services, such as confidence building sessions, babies' emotional and behavioural understanding as well as encouragement and support to stay in education where appropriate. These services are successfully delivered in partnership with another children's centre close by.

The centre is an inclusive setting and by providing for a wide range of users, promotes equality robustly. Particularly strong actions are taken to support vulnerable families and children as well as those who require support in times of acute need or crisis, through close multi-agency working and a highly effective parent support team. Increasing numbers of families from different nationalities are now attending the centre. Interpreters have been provided to support communication, however the centre does not yet provide key information translated into their first language for these families. The way in which the centre assesses the individual needs of children and their parents and carers is good. Wider aspects of equality and diversity are promoted through a range of displays and toys, and are included in the planning of sessions to engage users from all backgrounds This makes a significant contribution to ensuring outcomes for children and their families are good.

The centre has evaluated its activities robustly through listening and responding positively to what parents and carers say, whether informally or through written feedback as well as through the parents forum. Data provided by the local authority is good and allows the centre to plan for improvements to key services. However, information from some other agencies including the Primary Care Trust is insufficient for the centre to accurately judge the impact on the lives of families.

The centre provides good value for money. Its highly effective leadership and knowledge of the needs of the area through dialogue with users in the community give it good capacity to improve further. Safeguarding is good and meets all legal requirements.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Further develop the effectiveness of self evaluation by ensuring all partners provide information and data to evidence their impact on outcomes for users, particularly those relating to health issues.
- Develop resources in a range of appropriate languages to support families from

the increasing numbers of different nationalities now attending the centre.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2

Evidence through case studies and discussions with partners and parents, all reflect the very positive impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and physical health across the centre's reach area. This way of working ensures that the majority of local families are benefiting from the activities offered. For example, parents noticed improved 'bonding' and relationships with their babies through the baby massage group and a better understanding of the impact of exercise on their health through healthy walks in groups around the area. Specialist services, such as speech and language therapy and support for parents with children with autism, are providing families in the area with the skills to support their children more effectively. A parent commented how his child was '...now more settled and beginning to socialise' following support from groups operating from the centre. There is an improving take-up of sessions on cookery focussed on healthy eating. These activities are helping the centre work towards reducing the number of children under the age of five who are obese. However, centre staff recognise that there is more to do and are currently developing new approaches.

Outcomes for potentially vulnerable families, including those with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are on child protection plans, and looked after children are particularly good. Many parents felt isolated before they were supported by the centre and the consequences of support have been life transforming for many, improving their mental health as they make friends, become more relaxed and support their children more effectively.

Good procedures ensure that children are very safe. Parents also say that they feel safe in the centre and they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Work with health visitors, the local fire service, and the police is helping to successfully raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. Parent support workers undertake safety visits to homes and the centre has a scheme offering low cost safety equipment for purchase. Highly effective support for families in times of acute crisis is helping to reduce the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan.

The centre provides many opportunities for children to make a positive contribution as well as accessing learning and development to improve their behaviour and communication skills. Children behave well in the centre and are happy to engage and move around with other children in a range of activities. The percentage of children who achieve good scores across the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved significantly over the last three years. Good case study evidence was provided of exemplary practice in supporting individual adults in learning and enjoyment. The centre has a clear understanding of the connection between engagement and enjoyment of both parents and children. Centre users are good

advocates of its benefits. They routinely communicate their positive experiences of the support and help they and their children receive by word of mouth and this effectively encourages others to participate. Some users are now more able to contribute formally in the decision making process through membership of the partnership board and the parents' forum.

Users benefit from the robust arrangements made by the centre to provide access to local learning centres and the nearby college. They are effectively signposted to relevant information and guidance that is tailored to their needs and circumstances. Training to increase employability skills is available with evidence of good and increasing uptake rates on courses, such as security working, child care, health and hygiene, basic skills and computer skills. Many parents have progressed from confidence building programmes to courses at the local college. One parent who started volunteering at the centre to gain experience has now gained full time work and she commented that this was a significant achievement for her to be the only person in her family who is working.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

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

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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Staff thoroughly understand users' needs because of sensitive personal contact and good use of local information, such as that provided by local schools regarding families moving in and out of the area. Assessment of individual cases is robust and the common assessment framework is used successfully ensuring teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families when needs are identified. Increasing numbers of people are being supported through the expertise provided by the children's centre. For example, outreach support to families is provided by support workers who play a key role in helping families with children with special educational needs, those whose safety may be at risk as a result of domestic violence and those who for a variety of reasons feel isolated.

Many interventions are child-centred with learning and development provided through a range of activities, such as baby massage, stay and play, messy play, phonics and toddler fun group. Staff have a strong focus on supporting families in the best interests of the children. Planning for delivery of activities and services is effective and those who are in the areas of highest deprivation are prioritised. These activities offer many opportunities for support to be provided to help parents understand the importance of play and how to plan this. Children's individual needs are well catered for and support staff ensure those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included in activities. All staff are supported by the children's centre teacher to enhance their skills, and recording tools have been developed to record, track and monitor the development of the children. These are used well by staff and parents to ensure all children make appropriate gains in their learning.

Good quality programmes to improve children's behaviour are successfully delivered in partnership across the children's centres in the local area. Parents participate enthusiastically in these programmes. They describe how they have helped improve family relationships and their children's sleeping patterns. Childminder groups are supported with professional updating sessions, particularly directed towards safeguarding as well as guidance on activities that support learning and development for children. The centre has developed its provision to meet the needs of families from a range of different groups, such as Traveller families and those from other nationalities by providing information on safety issues in the home and access to health services. Other parents and carers who had suffered through ill health have now improved in health, confidence and self-esteem through the programmes offered at the centre.

The paediatrician based at the centre supports families well and offers two clinics each week. Quick and effective access to child and adolescent mental health workers, speech and language therapists, behavioural and emotional specialists is also provided through this service. Communication across these disciplines is facilitated by the centre staff. In particular, the services of the paediatrician are singularly significant ensuring that families are offered specialist health support in an accessible relaxed and welcoming environment. Follow-on support that may be required can be quickly organised whether it is through support from the centre staff or that provided by the school staff.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>

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

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>2</b>
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Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. There are explicit links between the strategic and business plans and service provision. The appointment of a new headteacher and governing body in the link school is having a motivational impact on the staff team. The centre works constructively with the local authority, the partnership board and the parents' forum. Delivery is effectively managed through strong centre management and is targeted towards those in need. Safeguarding for staff, children and parents are a high priority supported by clear procedures and reporting systems for child protection issues, which are fully understood and effective. Safeguarding training for staff is regularly updated and exceeds the minimum requirements. Partnership working is highly effective and includes many partners from statutory services, those in the voluntary and community sector and charitable organisations. Good open, and often face-to-face communication with a range of service providers, ensures actions can be taken quickly to provide support or intervention for individuals and families when needed. Very effective team work empowers staff and ensures that all children, parents and carers, regardless of differences and backgrounds, achieve well and have the same access to a good range of experiences.

Senior leaders set the tone, communicate high expectations and values and are determined to ensure that the centre is effective in improving the lives of all users. It adopts a range of methods to identify the effectiveness of the provision. The partnership board and parents' forum make effective contributions to the centre's development plan setting out the main priorities for action. However, the centre is inhibited in its ability to fully analyse performance in some aspects of its provision through lack of quantitative data and information from some of its partners in the health services.

Staff are supported through one to one supervision meetings, annual appraisals and daily contact with the centre manager and headteacher of the school. They are included in weekly school staff meetings, training events, and all social activities. The centre manager is a positive leader who manages the multi-disciplinary staff team in a professional manner, leading by example, and establishes good working relationships with all those who can provide a service. Inspectors observed a vibrant and strong team spirit within the centre, which creates a happy environment in which parents and children enjoy attending and are achieving well.

Resources are used effectively to encourage learning and development. There is a



wide range of high quality play equipment, toys and books. Three additional rooms have been allocated to the centre by the school to provide more space for activities, including one room where indoor large play equipment can be used in the event of poor weather conditions and one to provide staff with additional office and storage as well as for counselling. These resources provide a wider range of play activities and a quiet space when parents feel anxious. The centre provides good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	2
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	2
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	2
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	2
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	2
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	2
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	2
<b>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</b>	2

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

Smawthorne Henry Moore Primary School was inspected concurrently with this inspection and some inspection judgements bore close similarities with this report. Capacity to improve, leadership and management provided by the governing body and safeguarding for children were good.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected Ash Tree Children's Centre on 4 and 5 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and with professionals.

Thank you for making us feel welcome and for talking to us about your children's centre. Your views were very helpful to the inspection. Many of you told us that the staff are friendly, welcoming and supportive. We agree.

The main job of a children's centre is to bring all the services for children and families to work together in your best interests. Ash Tree Children's Centre does this well. By working constructively with partners, such as health professionals, Little Angels, Home Start and Jobcentre Plus, you are provided with a range of support and courses to ensure there are good opportunities to learn how to lead a healthy life and to be more confident.

One of you reflected the views of a number when she said, 'The children's centre has made me a better parent to my children.' Some of you told us that taking part in the centre's activities has given you the opportunity to make new friends and learn new skills. Particularly helpful has been the support provided through programmes on how to manage your children's behaviour and first aid. Increasing numbers of mothers have been breastfeeding and have valued the support of other mothers in helping them to maintain this. Children who use the centre make good progress in their learning and development.

We saw how much you and your children enjoy the activities in the centre, especially those opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. We found that the work of the children's centre teacher is making a great difference to your children's communication and language skills, especially their knowledge of letters and sounds. We were pleased to see how additional support in these activities ensured everyone was included. To further support those families whose knowledge of English is limited, we have asked the centre to provide supporting material in other languages.

The people in charge of the running the centre are doing a really good job. The children's centre manager works extremely hard to make sure that everything the centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. She makes sure that everyone who works with Ash Tree Children's Centre shares this strong commitment. We heard many examples from you about how they are all making a real difference to your lives. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is seen in the high quality of the individual support that is provided

and the range of activities that can be accessed either in the centre or in other local provision.

The governing body, partnership board and senior leaders are committed to making a difference to your lives and the families in the local area. The parents' forum has been particularly successful in the past in generating ideas and the centre would welcome more parents and carers to be involved more formally in the planning for improvements. The centre uses a variety of information on the impact of the wide range of services provided, but there is a lack of good information on progress from the health authority. We have asked the centre to make sure that they receive this information so that the centre's development plan has targets which can be measured so that it is easier to check the improvements being made.

We would like to wish you, your children and the families in the Castleford area the best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).