

Inspection report for The Meadows Children's Centre

Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	367869
Inspection dates	13 – 14 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Janet Stacey HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Jane Baxter
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Catcliffe Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Meadows Children's Centre EY380354

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 the centre manager, centre lead teacher, a member of the advisory board, users, key partners and three local authority officers linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at sessions in operation in the children's centre. They also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

The Meadows Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was established in 2008. The centre is attached to Catcliffe Primary School and serves the wards of Catcliffe, Brinsworth, Treeton and recently Whiston. The centre is run, on behalf of the local authority, by the headteacher of Catcliffe Primary School. The reach area has a few pockets of social and economic advantage with few workless households or families on benefits. However, the Catcliffe and Brinsworth areas are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Social issues affecting these areas are a high number of lone parents and families on workless benefits. There is low ethnic diversity in the reach area; most families are White British. The reach area is characterised by social and private housing. The centre takes referrals from and supports families with children in six local schools.

Family support, and early years advice and childcare are offered at the centre. Health visitors and the social work team are based at Aston Health and Social Care Centre. The centre works closely with Treeton and Brinsworth health centres. Children in the reach area enter childcare and early education with a varied range of knowledge and skills. This ranges from children entering nursery with similar or better skills than those of their peers and some entering nursery with a narrower

range of experiences and skills than found typically at that age. The centre operates a variety of groups and activities on site and at Brinsworth Howarth Primary school.

Governance of the centre is provided by the school governing body in conjunction with an advisory board with representation from centre staff, health partners, local authority, headteachers and users.

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

The Meadows Children's Centre provides a good service for the young children, parents, carers and families who live within its reach area. It is particularly good at identifying the most vulnerable families and ensuring that they are able to access its services.

Strengths include effective work to improve children's skills in speaking and listening, the improvement of parenting skills and the provision of emotional support to users of the centre. The way that the centre works in partnership with a wide range of agencies and partners is good at ensuring that families receive effective care and guidance. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used well to ensure that families can access the type of support that is most appropriate to their needs. However, Jobcentre Plus does not routinely share the impact of its work in helping adults into employment or training.

The range of services that is offered is good and results in good outcomes as families are beginning to develop their understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe. The family support worker is a real asset to the centre; she is well respected and valued in the community and is pivotal in ensuring that the most vulnerable families receive the support they need. Whilst the centre provides a good range of activities to promote most outcomes, it does not provide sufficient opportunities for users to improve their qualifications, gain work-based skills or to help users gain an understanding of the effects alcohol and drug misuse has on their families. In addition, domestic violence is a major issue in the area, yet training to

understand the symptoms of domestic violence and how to prevent this type of behaviour is not routinely planned for in the activity programme. However, parents, carers and families appreciate the good-quality support and advice they receive. They especially value effective groups such as 'Breast Buddies', where new mothers learn the techniques of breastfeeding and understand the benefits breastfeeding has on their baby's first years of growth. A very popular group is 'Baby Massage,' which provides pleasurable experiences for both the parent, carer and the child. During these sessions parents and carers learn to understand that nurturing contact enhances their child's feeling of being loved, respected and secure. They also teach their babies how to be aware of their body's tension and how to release it, an invaluable gift as they grow into adulthood. User satisfaction rates are high. A typical view of parents and carers was that, 'the support they receive from the centre is brilliant'.

The centre is effective in raising levels of attainment for young children, particularly in enhancing their social skills and improving children's communication skills. Children greatly enjoy their time at the centre. They particularly enjoy interacting with other children and taking part in activities, such as designing a book to show to new children starting at the centre.

Partnerships with local health visitors are particularly effective; they are instrumental in ensuring the centre registers all the families with children under five years of age that live in the area. This, together with the good quality advice and individual support provided for families, has had a good impact on the extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and are generally happy. The centre's main aim is to engage the hard to reach families in their area. They are successful in this. The centre can demonstrate that work is consistently taking place with those considered most at risk, not to only improve their well-being but also to empower them to create a more stable home for their families.

All staff share the leader's enthusiasm, commitment and ambition for the future. Staff morale is high despite several changes within the staff team over the last year. The centre meets safeguarding requirements and promotes equality and diversity well. The analysis of the needs of those who use the centre is good. Parents and carers and other members of the local community are represented on the advisory board. This has resulted in the views of the community helping to shape the development of the centre. The centre has clearly identified where improvements are necessary and the strategies for improvement are being rigorously implemented, not only by the centre and the governing body but also by the local authority. Therefore, the centre's capacity for further improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the sharing of relevant data with key partners, in particular Jobcentre Plus.
- Ensure the programme of activities is more precisely based on the key issues affecting the area, such as:
 - providing further opportunities for adults to gain formal qualifications or work-based skills
 - raising awareness within the community of the impact of drug and alcohol misuse has on the family unit
 - raising awareness of the signs and symptoms of domestic abuse and promoting zero tolerance.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Good partnerships with health professionals and peer support volunteers ensure that parents and carers of young children and babies are offered very effective levels of support. Parents and carers speak highly of the good range of sessions that are designed to help them bond with their babies. They are particularly appreciative of the 'Birth to Walker' sessions; as one parent cited, 'the group has enabled me to meet other mums and has been a really important point of contact, particularly during the first few weeks of motherhood'. The number of children who join the Reception Year in school and who are classified as obese is below average, reflecting the centre's strong focus on developing healthy life-styles. The 'Cook and Eat' sessions along with interactive cooking sessions and cook and taste weaning parties have helped parents and carers learn the basics of a healthy diet plan, to transform their eating habits and choose healthy, nutritious food instead of takeaways.

Good quality personal support for families makes a good contribution to the mental health of parents, carers and children. Many users say that the help they receive from the family support worker has been invaluable to help build their self-esteem and self-worth. They also comment on the impact that this help has had on their children; as one parent said, 'the centre has helped my child to be a child again'. Parents and carers who spoke to the inspectors said they really appreciate all the help they receive from all the staff in the centre and the new friends they have made during the sessions. Parents and carers who attended FAST (family and schools together) learnt to improve relationships in a family and reduce conflict. The course also helped to build a supportive community amongst the parents and many of those that attended continue to meet to run the school library, and build upon the friendships that have been formed during sessions at the children's centre.

There is a good emphasis on helping children and parents to be aware of how to keep themselves and their families safe. Parents and carers say that they feel very safe and secure in the centre and in the community. The 'Dads and Grand-dads Club'

meets regularly and members have been well-supported in a wide range of activities, such as the 'Forest School Activity'. Here fathers and grandfathers build dens with their children, light fires and learn to use tools, whilst teaching their children how to manage risks in a safe environment.

Children make good progress in their learning when they attend the centre's provision and demonstrate good behaviour and good relationships. Enjoyment levels are high. Children grow quickly in confidence and make very good progress in improving their speaking and listening skills. Consequently, the proportion of children meeting the Early Learning Goals at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in local schools has greatly improved. Whilst the centre has been successful in developing children's progress in literacy and mathematics, insufficient attention is paid to raising the level of users' educational qualifications, or helping them gain the skills they need to find work.

The chairperson of the advisory board is a parent in the community. She visits all the groups and activities that operate in the area to seek user's views and shares these at board meetings and with centre staff. The centre makes use of this information in order to refine what it offers. For example, the centre has changed the days and times of several courses to ensure that they fit in with what the users say best meets their needs.

The centre possesses a number of good quality case studies which show how well individual families have made progress in their personal and social development and how some families improved their economic stability. The centre has been successful in ensuring that families are able to access the benefits to which they are entitled to, which in turn has helped some families avoid getting into debt.

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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre actively seeks out parents and carers who would gain the most from using the centre. They do this by making contact with health visitors and other agencies, such as social services and the local General Practitioner (GP). Joint home visits are often made with staff from the referring agency ensuring that family support is carefully focused on parents' and carers' needs. The centre is now obtaining more precise information about new births in the area and, as a result, the centre manager is confident they are registering all families with children aged under five years of age at the centre.

The lead teacher in the centre is very well respected in the community; she provides a wealth of knowledge and experience across the private and voluntary sector as well as in the centre. As one provider said 'she is invaluable, she helps me to ensure that our observation and assessment of children is accurate'. This support, along with the implementation of ECAT (Every Child A Talker), is helping to ensure that children develop the skills they need to prepare them for school. Consequently, there has been a good improvement in children's skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, not only in the centre but in all the schools the centre works with.

The activities provided are of good quality and promote purposeful learning and enjoyment. The Extended Services Partnership Officer (ESPO) is a real asset to the centre. He is instrumental in organising a wide range of activities and community trips for the reach area, such as bird box building which was supported by the Rotherham Park Community Rangers, 'Rowdy Robots' where children parents and carers designed and built their own robots, and circus workshops. A comment from a child after attending this activity was 'circus is super and good fun'. The ESPO also arranges trips to Melton Mowbray and Twin Lakes and recently organised a weekend away for the most vulnerable families in the area. All the activities are extremely popular and very well attended. Free places are available for some families.

The centre is committed to initiating and sustaining breastfeeding. 'Breast Buddies' which is run by two local parents, who have been supported by the centre to become qualified peer support, have a good level of expertise. They visit local groups and health centres to discuss the benefit of breastfeeding. As a consequence, the number of mothers who are initiating breastfeeding is above the national average and whilst some mothers do not continue to breastfeed at the six to eight week period, 50% of mothers do manage to sustain breastfeeding.

The centre always evaluates sessions and takes careful note of children's responses. It is successful in signposting users to advice and in providing support for ways back into employment but is less successful in helping adults to improve their educational attainment.

Potentially vulnerable families are quickly identified and receive good-quality individual support that sometimes involves eliciting the support of other agencies in

developing a whole package of care. Additionally, parents and carers are offered good quality support in times of crisis. The centre ensures that good quality information about many aspects of parenting, including advice about how to keep children healthy and safe, is freely available to parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities 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

High expectations are shared by all staff. Leaders are enthusiastic but are also reflective and keen to improve practice further. They channel their efforts to good effect and manage themselves and others well. For example, the performance management of staff is rigorous and arrangements for supervision meetings and appraisals are thorough. Meetings with staff have helped to identify the key strengths and weaknesses of the centre's services. Teamwork amongst staff is good and contributes well to the positive ethos and welcoming environment in the centre.

Governance is good. The centre's work is well supervised by the governing body and the local authority. Both are rigorous in the way they monitor and challenge the centre. The advisory board consists of a good range of partners and users.

Partnerships are pivotal to the centre's good work. The work with the health and social work teams are extremely effective. Together they provide a real 'team around the child' approach to ensure that the most vulnerable children and families are protected and cared for. Links with the local childminders have helped to build upon and further improve their practice. Staff, partners and users all have a conscientious approach to safeguarding. All staff are vetted and carefully checked. Staff training is very thorough and staff are sensitive to child protection issues. The centre successfully promotes equality and diversity. For example, visual aids are used to help adults who have difficulty in reading text, such as a pictorial book to help a parent understand the ingredients during a 'Cook and Eat' session. The inclusion of all children and families is central to the centre's work. Parents with children who have autism are well supported by other parents and carers at 'BASH' (Brinsworth Autism Self Help group).

Leaders know where the strengths and weaknesses of their services lie and have clear, measurable plans for improvement. However, they are not always targeting

services precisely enough to address some of the main issues affecting the reach area. Case studies provide good examples of improving outcomes for children and their families. The centre offers good value for money and is particularly creative in the way it uses resources to ensure that some of the most vulnerable families can take part in and enjoy the services the centre has to offer.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

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 Meadows Children's Centre on 13-14 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We spoke with many of you about the centre's work. We learnt a great deal. You told us how much you value the services and activities that the centre provides. Many of you said that coming to the centre has given you more confidence, has helped you to make new friends and has given you ideas about how to help your children learn and develop. You expressed your views very clearly and they were very helpful to us.

Many of you told us that staff are friendly, hard working and give you good support. We agree with you. Families who are facing complex or difficult times receive strong and effective support. It is clear to us that staff in the centre know the local families and the wider community and we can see how the centre is working hard to reach all of you to ensure that they do everything they can to make a positive difference to you and your children's lives. We were particularly impressed by how much the centre has done to support children's learning and development as they enter into their first year in school. You told us how much you enjoy the good range of courses and activities the centre has to offer and how they help you to bond with your children and understand how to provide healthy meals. However, we noticed that the centre does not give sufficient advice and training to help address the high dependency of some adults on drugs and alcohol who live in the area. In addition, we were told that there are some high levels of domestic violence. We have asked the centre to look at their activity programme to find out ways they can offer advice to try and help address this issue.

The staff work really hard to make the centre as good as it can be. To help them we have asked that all agencies who work with you share information and provide relevant data to help the centre prioritise and identify where help may be needed for the most vulnerable families. For example, we know that jobs are advertised in the centre and that courses such as literacy and mathematics are offered to you. However, it is not clear what difference these have made to you, or if they helped you to get jobs and enrol for more training because the centre does not receive the relevant information it needs from Jobcentre Plus.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and wish you all well for the future.

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