

Inspection report for Ravensthorpe Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	384062
Inspection dates	21 - 22 September 2011
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	311273 The Children's Place

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.

Report Published: October 2011

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report. An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre manager, parents and carers and representatives from Action for Children, the local authority, a local school, and partner agencies.

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

Information about the centre

Ravensthorpe is a former mill town near Dewsbury in West Yorkshire. Ravensthorpe Children's Centre was designated to provide the full core purpose of a children's centre in 2006. The children's centre is managed by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. A new manager was appointed at the centre in May 2011. Over time the centre has been based in an old library building and then, temporarily in a community building. The centre is now located in newly built accommodation, set back from a busy main road. The centre shares the facility with the local library service and information centre. The local health centre and the centre's nominated day-care provider are found in neighbouring buildings on the same site. The large majority of housing stock in the area served by the centre is rented accommodation, both local authority and private landlord owned. Services delivered from the centre by the children's centre team and partners include family support, child and family health services, employment and training signposting, targeted support for vulnerable families, and family learning.

The centre serves an area in the top 20% most disadvantaged areas in the country and within this almost all of the area is in the top 10% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Worklessness in the area is high and the very large majority of children aged under five years are living in families dependent on workless benefits. The local population of

Ravensthorpe includes a significant transient community. Most of the population in the reach area is South Asian and there is an emerging Hungarian community with young families. Local children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and abilities that are lower than those typically found nationally.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Ravensthorpe Children's Centre is valued highly by the families who use and receive its services. Users commented that they could not find enough words to describe the difference the centre has made to their lives. The centre manager and staff team are passionate about their work and are striving to make the centre's new building a hub of the community. The large majority of families with young children in the reach area are registered with the children's centre. Although currently engagement is not yet at a high level participation is increasing month on month. Attitudes to entering training or improving educational attainment to enhance employment prospects are not always positive. This means that self expectations for adults and children are generally low.

Based on the available information, the centre manager has a good knowledge of where the families who are not registered or not using the centre live in the reach area, and a concerted effort is being made to engage with these families. However, the high mobility of some families within the community means that the centre's initial contact are difficult to maintain. Nevertheless, actions taken by the centre recently are beginning to reap rewards. There is a small month on month increase in the number of families registered and using the centre, including those from groups whose circumstances have made them hard to reach, for example fathers. Diversity is celebrated well and the information in the centre is accessible in a number of ways, including translation into some community languages.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are used and understood very well. There is a strong focus on early intervention work at the centre. The family support team work very closely with partners to prevent families from needing more intense social care intervention. Centre users say that there has been a significant difference made to their lives. Case study evidence shows that individual families make good progress when they engage with the centre, particularly those in receipt of family support. For some, the centre's support helps

families stay together as a family unit. On the other hand outcomes overall for families in the area are mostly static and significant health indicators such as childhood obesity, infant mortality levels and poor dental health incidence remain high and breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is quite low. The exception to this static trend is the improving number of children who are achieving within the expectations for their age at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The centre has a good capacity to sustain improvement. Centre services are heavily influenced by good local knowledge and data provided to the centre. Targets set for the centre are ambitious for the area and are clearly traceable to the local authority's priorities, local data profile and issues identified by the advisory board. There has been some local success in narrowing the achievement gap between children who find it difficult to learn and their peers. In-house evaluation of the short-term impact of the services delivered is robust and influences the development of service delivery. The centre's long-term impact is more difficult to quantify due to the high mobility of families within the community. As families move in and out of the area at very short notice and many do not settle in the community any success the centre has in improving outcomes for these families is not captured in the data sets provided by the local authority. As a consequence, the centre cannot fully demonstrate its impact on outcomes for families.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve in-house evaluation to demonstrate the longer term impact the centre is having on outcomes for families.
- Improve outcomes for more families in the reach area by:
 - increasing the number of families accessing and using children's centre services at a more rapid rate
 - raising adults' aspirations and developing their understanding of the value of play and education.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Users who access the centre are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to keep their families safe and healthy. Take up of immunisation against high risk childhood illnesses is high. The majority of users who spoke to inspectors now know that they need to reduce the fat, salt and sugar content in their families' diets and are adapting their food preparation appropriately. One parent commented that she had baked a courgette cake for her family, which they had enjoyed without realising it was a healthy option. Families say they feel safe at the centre. Most children who take part in the centre's activities demonstrate their

growing understanding of personal safety and play with due regard to themselves and others. Families who have been subject to the Common Assessment Framework are very well supported through well targeted work. As a consequence, some families at risk of domestic violence and those struggling with parenting skills, such as establishing bedtime routines, experience noticeable improvements in parent and child well-being. 'This place has been my saviour', is how one user described the centre's impact on her life.

Take up of funded nursery education places is increasing. Children in the nominated day-care provision make good progress from their starting points. Despite the significant improvement in children's readiness for school outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are still low when compared with local and national expectations. The proportion of families living in the area who are dependent on workless benefits is not decreasing. A small minority of adults served by the centre have generally low expectations and aspirations. An increasing number of adults are seeking to enter the volunteering programme operated at the centre. This valuable scheme has benefited the vast majority of those who have accessed it. Volunteers have improved their emotional well-being and have moved into further education and employment as a result. While this is a positive outcome the centre is not having a significant enough long term impact on adult achievement for the majority of families in the area. Users are keen to be involved in the life and development of the centre. The parents' forum is very well attended and there is good parental representation on the advisory board. These groups are well informed about the community's issues and the centre's priorities. Their input has brought about greater opportunities for women and children to exercise in a way that is acceptable to their individual culture.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	3

How good is the provision?

2

Assessment of family and individual need is a strength of the centre. The success of assessment and co-working is reflected in the analysis of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results in the area. The resulting tightly coordinated and well delivered piece of work

had a very positive impact on outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Centre staff have mapped the area and work to engage those who may be hard to reach is under way as part of this exercise, for example, the White British community.

The centre delivers a good range of family learning opportunities. The centre has struggled in the past to retain participants, for example, on courses run for over six weeks. Alternative courses and delivery styles have resulted in greater retention rates and the centre is now enabling a steadily increasing number of adults to access learning. The centre does not deliver accredited adult learning on site, however it does signpost adults to nearby adult learning centres. This partnership works well. Adults have their needs assessed accurately so their future learning is fully supported, for example, by improving their basic skills in English. The centre values and celebrates adults' and children's achievement. Photographs displayed around the centre show the presentations of awards and certificates. One volunteer, who is also studying at college, was nominated for a local authority adult learner's award by the centre and was very pleased to have her achievements recognised when she received an award.

Much of the work of the centre is focused on improving health outcomes for families and reducing infant mortality rates. However, long term impact in this area is difficult to measure given the transient nature of the community. Centre staff are highly skilled in their approach to their work with users. They use universal sessions very well to reinforce the work being done to meet the centre's priorities. For example, the popular session, 'Time to Play and Learn' includes a free, healthy but tasty lunch. Staff are good role models who guide and support families in group sessions and on a one-to-one basis. Families are comfortable and confident to approach the centre for support when they feel they are moving towards a crisis and they comment that they never feel that they are being judged.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre's governance arrangements are strong and well established. They take into account the relationship between the local authority and service providers, Action for Children. The advisory board is well informed about the priorities for the centre and members are confident to question and challenge the centre manager about the centre's performance. Performance monitoring systems are used well to track the progress of the centre towards its targets.

The centre team has a very good range of skills and backgrounds which they use effectively to deliver services across the area. They are led by a highly motivated centre manager. The

centre's self-evaluation is accurate and the centre has a clear view of the needs of the community. There is a growing understanding of the impact of the centre's work over the period of a short course or when family support work has been completed. However, the centre has not been able to conduct longer term evaluation to monitor whether families continue to benefit from the centre's work because of mobility within the community. The static nature of some key health indicators and worklessness mean that the centre is providing satisfactory value for money.

Recruitment and selection procedures are robust. Staff apply their knowledge of safeguarding procedures very well in their day to day work, for example, when a safeguarding issue arose in a parenting course, procedures were followed swiftly and without the knowledge of other course participants. Case files are well organised and are monitored regularly to ensure the quality and timeliness of the work being done. Relationships across the different agencies that may be involved with a family are strong. As a result when concerns are identified and a referral is made to the children's centre, action is taken promptly to reduce the risk of escalation.

The centre has developed effective relationships with partners in the area for example, the midwifery service has established a 'buddy' scheme for pregnant teenagers. This scheme is an effective early intervention tool and incorporates antenatal and post natal health care for mother and baby. Key messages about the links between smoking in pregnancy and low birth weight babies, still births and infant mortality are delivered alongside advice and guidance about healthy diets and exercise and contraception following the birth of the baby.

Inclusion of all those who want to access the centre is at the forefront of the centre's thinking. Sound knowledge of the diversity of the area meant that the centre was able to respond swiftly to an increasing number of Hungarian families in the area, enabling them to access services for their families. Initially they were offered sessions in basic English skills to enable them to access health services. More recently, workers who speak Hungarian have been employed to support families' access to the services of the centre and wider community. Children with disabilities and their families are supported well by the centre. The Portage worker operates some services from the centre and centre workers help families to attend appointments where needed.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

The findings linked to outcomes for children and the progress they make in their learning and development from the inspection of the linked day-care provider 311273 The Children's Place conducted on 19 September 2011 have been used to contribute to judgements made at this inspection. Children in the linked day-care provision are making good progress in their learning and development and outcomes for children are good in all respects.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ravensthorpe Children's Centre on 21 - 22 September 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to speak to us at the inspection. We found our conversations with you very useful. We also took some time to read the comments you made when you used services at the centre. We know that you really appreciate the work the centre does with you and your families. We found that when you use the services at the centre it is making a real difference to your lives. For example, you have a good understanding of the need to reduce the amount of salt, sugar and fat in your families' diets. The centre is good at asking you if the work they have done has helped you. However, they do not know whether their work is still helping you in the longer term, for example six months later. We have asked the centre to improve how they find out how effective their work is. This is important because many families do not stay in the local area for very long. This is affecting the overall outcomes that the centre is measured against because they do not have enough information to measure how well they are doing themselves.

A large number of families who live in the area are registered with the centre. However, although the number of families who use the centre is increasing, there are still too few of the families with young children in the area actually using the centre. For example, too many young children are still obese and have poor dental health, too many children are still

born or die in infancy and too few babies are still being breastfed when they are six to eight weeks old. The centre is successful in assessing your needs and the needs of the local area. This means that the centre's work is focused on things that are going to bring about improvement in what is most important for you and your area, such as your health. We know that those of you who use the centre are more aware of how to keep your children safe from harm. We have asked the centre to increase the number of people who use the centre's services in order to improve these outcomes for more families in the area.

We found that most families in the area with young children are dependent on workless benefits and we know that a large proportion of the adults in the area do not have the qualifications or training to help them gain employment. We know that those of you who use the centre value the learning and development opportunities you and your children have. However, we found that in the area not all families appreciate how important play and learning is for young children and they do not have high enough expectations for their children or themselves. We have asked the centre to work with more families in the area to improve this. The centre has worked hard with their partners to improve how well children do when they get to the end of Reception Year in school. Children are now doing better than they have previously and children who find learning harder than their peers are also doing better. The centre is very good at making sure they employ people who are suitable to work with your families. They also use the policies and procedures that are in place to keep you safe very well. We found that when the centre works with other agencies to support and guide you, they are kept informed about your progress.

Thank you again to those who gave their time to speak with us and we wish you and your centre our best wishes for the future.

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