

# Inspection report for Valley Park Children's Centre

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Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	383609
Inspection dates	27-28 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Jean Webb

Centre leader	Mrs Amanda Boughton-Brown
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Valley Park Children's Centre 100 Norton Avenue Sheffield South Yorkshire S14 1SL
Telephone number	0114 2416968
Fax number	0114 2652476
Email address	amanda.boughton-brown@actionforchildren.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	URN 133623 Valley Park Community School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY355181 Valley Park Children's Centre

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the registered early years 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

An inspection of the co-located primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre and the local authority, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including: Early Years Foundation Stage staff; Action for Children; health; Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB); and the Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST). They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Valley Park Children's Centre is located to the south west of Sheffield city centre within the grounds of Valley Park Community School. It was designated in July 2007 and provides the full core offer. The centre is all at ground level and includes childcare rooms, and multi-purpose group and antenatal rooms. The two childcare rooms are linked and share an outside play area. The premises are managed by the school.

Action for Children delivers the children's centre services, including family support services. The work of the centre is monitored by an advisory board and the local authority. Local community midwives use the building as their district base and provide antenatal service provision, including a triage service.

The majority of the housing stock is social housing, a combination of maisonettes and high-rise flats dating to the 1960s. However there are pockets of privately owned houses across the area.

There is a high proportion of families reliant on income support or other benefits and 31% of children under five are living in poverty. Most children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge lower than usually expected. There is a high incidence of anti-social behaviour and substance misuse. The area has a small number of refugees and asylum seekers. The community is less diverse than other areas in the city with 17% from a Black minority ethnic background. People claiming a health-related benefit is over double the city and the national average. The level of young people not in education, employment or training is slightly above the city average.

## 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**

<b>3</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>3</b>
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## Main findings

Valley Park Children's Centre provides satisfactory support to children and families. Taking into account the robust Action for Children performance management systems and the satisfactory outcomes for users overall, the centre's overall effectiveness is also satisfactory. This, together with the ongoing developments in data collection, self-evaluation and the emphasis on improvement and identifying and meeting users' needs, demonstrates that the centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. The centre promotes the inclusion of children and their families satisfactorily and meets its duties with regard to equality and diversity.

The local authority commissions Action for Children to deliver the children's centre services. Re-structuring in both organisations has reduced the thoroughness of evaluation of the provision and restricted its rate of progress. Targets are not sufficiently measurable to demonstrate the impact of the services. The advisory board does not sufficiently represent all parts of the community nor significantly impact on shaping the direction of the centre's provision.

The centre's approach to safeguarding and child protection is robust and exceeds statutory requirements. The steps the centre takes to ensure users are safe and protected in the centre and at home are good. An Action for Children electronic-based system for case recording is particularly good. Family support workers use these efficiently to compile comprehensive notes of their work with vulnerable children and families. They are also used to monitor the impact of actions and the engagement of other professionals in individual cases.

Other outcomes are at least satisfactory and strengths include the enjoyment expressed by children and families in their learning and the good quality resources and activities available to them. There is good educational achievement and strong development of personal and social skills. Parents and carers report how comfortable, supported and well cared for they feel. They provide many moving and well-documented accounts of the difference the activities and support have made to their own and their children's enjoyment and well-being. The centre works well with some partners particularly those in the health services. Partnerships with those who help and support parents towards work, training and economic well-being, including Jobcentre Plus, are less successful.

Performance monitoring data from the local authority and health services has not been readily available, making it difficult to monitor the centre's progress against national performance indicators. Also there is insufficient detail available to understand the nature of the population it could be reaching in the local community, the needs of that population and the ability to calculate participation rates with any degree of accuracy. There is good work now in progress to ensure information and data will be available. However, at present, analysis and comparison to nationally established performance indicators are not reliable.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve the identification of target groups and how best to meet their needs by:
  - working with the local authority, Action for Children and the advisory board to collate and analyse local information and data
  - consulting more widely with groups and partners to shape and deliver services.
- Improve self-evaluation and target setting by:
  - involving users, staff and partners more effectively to review the performance of the centre
  - making good use of local and national data to measure the impact of services
  - ensuring the advisory board includes a strong parent, carer and local community presence to represent and fully voice their needs and concerns.
- Make better provision for all adult learners to increase their economic well-being by:
  - ensuring opportunities for training, developing job search skills, and volunteering
  - increasing the involvement with partners to support parents and carers into work and training.

## How good are outcomes for families?

3

There is effective promotion of healthy eating and the centre has been awarded the Healthy Early Years Award. A range of activities based at the centre promote physical activity and healthy living. Fathers are particularly well engaged with developing activities to improve physical activity. The percentage of children in the Reception Year who are obese has decreased and is below the city's average levels. There is good promotion of breastfeeding but levels of breastfeeding are below average. The incidence of mothers smoking at the time of delivery is above average. A well-resourced 'Ready, steady go' programme for children with disabilities is having a positive impact on children and their families. One carer stated 'It is an excellent service that has helped our child develop motor skills that we did not expect her to achieve and also made sure we know of all the other benefits open to us because of having a severely disabled child.'

Children are well safeguarded in the centre and at home. Staff confidently challenge any inappropriate behaviour by parents and carers in a supportive way. Children demonstrate they feel secure in the centre and make decisions about their preferred play, using all parts of the play facilities well. Parents and carers feel the centre is safe, welcoming and friendly. Effective multi-agency work identifies and addresses safeguarding issues in the home. This has reduced the incidence of child protection plans (CPP) as well as ensuring there is no return to a CPP after it has been closed. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used well to ensure a full range of protection. The centre runs road safety awareness sessions and there are below average rates of death or serious injury for children on the roads.

There is good educational and personal and social achievement for children, parents and carers. The level of achievement across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile is above national averages at the children's centre. Recently introduced assessment processes show that children make good progress and parents and carers are better involved in their children's learning. Children and parents and carers get great enjoyment from all the activities. Parents and carers use playgroup activity to talk to staff and improve their parenting skills. One commented, 'I talk to staff about sleeping patterns, healthy food and potty training and it's made mine and my child's life better.'

Children display positive behaviour and develop good relationships with other children and staff. Children's preferences are taken into account when developing activities for them. Parents and carers give their feedback about services and sessions and the majority have the confidence to make suggestions. The parents' forum has had limited success in attracting parents and carers to take part in the decision making of the centre and only one parent has recently joined the advisory board. There is just one volunteer at the centre. Parents and carers have access to information about jobs and training opportunities but there is no data to show how well this used and the impact it has. Positive interventions from the CAB have led to increased economic stability for some users as well as

improvements in their living conditions. However, the impact of services on the economic well-being of adult learners is not currently strong enough.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>3</b>
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The centre effectively identifies its main user groups. However, local profile and registration data do not allow them to show how well the centre reaches them. The centre has successfully increased the number of children under three years old attending and introduced more services for children with disabilities. There is a good range of activities to engage fathers. It is less clear how well lone parents, and families from black and minority ethnic groups are engaged. Due to changes in the registration process, only a minority from the two most deprived areas are registered. However, of all those registered, a large majority use services and the centre responds well to requests and suggestions from their users such as putting on further Makaton courses. Good work is in progress to reach a very vulnerable group of families through outreach.

A range of positive learning opportunities is promoted to adults with the option for nationally recognised qualifications including child development, talking and listening, behaviour discipline, healthy eating, home safety and quality play. Parents and carers report improvement in child development and talking and listening as a result of this and comment, 'It's great to see other people who are doing the same as me, it helped my confidence a lot.' The activities and opportunities for children and their families to learn are good for those who choose to participate.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The centre has good quality information for families. There are many case studies showing effective individual support through the

outreach service. Response to need is extremely fast as one parent said, 'She (the support worker) was here within half an hour of talking to me on the 'phone. I don't know what I would have done without her.... my children would be in care...they just make me feel good and never turn me away when I ask for help.' Families referred by external agencies and partners are targeted well and all have family support workers who efficiently coordinate services. This is aided by a well-designed electronic tracking system 'E-Aspire' to record children's and their family's needs. Managers make good use of the system to monitor progress and outcomes for children. It is known that there are higher-than-average levels of drug and alcohol abuse in families in the community and staff have undergone training to recognise early signs of abuse and how to support and signpost families effectively.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>2</b>

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

<b>3</b>
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Clear arrangements are in place for the delivery of services and performance management. Staff are effectively trained, developed and supervised. Priorities for improvement are agreed and shared with staff and partners but almost none of the targets are specific and measurable. New data are now being produced to help with setting targets and measuring impact but these are not embedded. The centre's current self-evaluation is brief in parts but new processes set out by the local authority are planned to address this. Resources are used well with the families who engage with the centre. Satisfactory overall effectiveness and outcomes for users demonstrate that the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Safeguarding is given high priority across the centre. There is good training and staff feel confident and are well prepared to deal with possible child protection situations and to recognise potential risk factors including domestic abuse. Policies and procedures are used well and protect staff as well the users. Criminal Records Bureau checks are completed above the statutory requirements. There are robust risk assessments and the environment is safe, secure and well maintained.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. However, lack of data means it is not clear how well the range of families using the centre reflects the community that the centre serves, including those most in need of intervention and support. Some information and displays at the centre are very text based and are not family friendly. Good use is made of a city-wide interpreter resource so that there is effective communication between non-English speakers and staff. Attention to equality and diversity is embedded in children's play and activities and the centre celebrates diversity and different cultural and religious events.

Partners work effectively together and outcomes have improved, as a result of the particularly good links with the school. Multi-agency allocation meetings are effective in sharing information and ensuring they work together to protect and work with children and their families. More links are now being made in the community including doctors' surgeries. Partners who work with parents and carers to provide training and work opportunities are less effective.

Parents' and carers' views are gathered in an informal way which users like. Displays also offer parents and carers an opportunity to contribute in different languages. Evaluation of services by users develops and improves a particular service. Nonetheless, it does not enable the centre to draw out common themes that could be used by the centre and advisory board to reflect on progress and any further actions required. There is insufficient representation by parents and carers on the advisory board.

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>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<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>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>3</b>



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

Information from the concurrent Ofsted inspection of Valley Park's full day care has been taken into account when writing about early years' provision and outcomes for children in the report.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaints procedure: raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted* 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 the Valley Park Children's Centre on 27-28 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During our visit we evaluated the centre's work and the quality of its resources, as well as its plans and documents. We talked with a number of you and the professionals that work with you. Your centre does some things especially well. For example, the good quality care, guidance and support offered to you and the good steps taken to ensure you and your children's safety and well-being in the centre and at home. Your centre works very well with some other services such as the health services. You told us how safe you feel in the centre and what a warm and welcoming environment it is. Dads as well as mums take part in activities at your centre.

You really enjoy and value the quality of the activities your centre offers. We observed how much fun your children have and how well they are progressing educationally and in their personal and social skills. The staff have helped you a lot when you asked for advice on any aspects of your children's behaviour and play in the home. Your centre does a great deal to support mothers who want to breastfeed, although this has not resulted in an increase in breastfeeding at your centre. Your centre is also trying hard to influence the higher-than-average number of parents and carers who smoke during pregnancy and in the home. For those of you who have children with disabilities, there are good resources and support that are used well.

You also told us how much you enjoy the opportunity and challenges offered to you to improve your own skills, including parenting skills and courses on such things as Makaton. Some of you have achieved nationally recognised qualifications. Not all of you are sure what is on offer to help you towards vocational training and work opportunities and some of you would like more opportunities for volunteering. Your centre makes sure you have access to good quality information, advice and guidance and as a result, some of you have been helped a lot to deal with financial and housing worries.

Your centre asks for your feedback about the services it provides and how it could improve them. You feel staff listen to you and respond to your comments and develop the services you need. Your centre is trying to encourage a parents' and carers' discussion group that looks at how to improve the centre, although it is not having a great deal of success. Your centre is also trying to get more of you to represent yourselves at an advisory board that works with all the partners in the community. So far only one parent has committed to this.

Your centre is effective at working with all its partners, particularly those in the health service to identify families that may be vulnerable and so need help and support. The support is then coordinated well by family support workers to make sure you get the most from all the relevant partners. Some of you feel that not everyone in the community knows about the services on offer.

The people in charge of running the centre are making sure services are effective and improving. They are working hard to improve the way they evaluate their services and set targets to ensure their performance can be managed well. Staff are well trained and prepared to carry out their role. They give safeguarding a high priority. They work very well with partners to safeguard parents and carers and children at risk.

The centre promotes equality and diversity effectively and celebrates different events. For those of you who do not speak English there is a good translation service. This ensures you are able to communicate effectively with others, as well as being offered courses to improve your English. Some of the displays and newsletters produced at the centre are not very parent and child friendly as they over rely on small text. Unfortunately your centre cannot be sure if it is reaching all parts of your community and there is some evidence to suggest that certain groups are underrepresented when it comes to how much they use and access your centre. Your centre is trying to do more to take services to those people.

We have asked the manager and the local authority to look at how they can make things even better. These are the most important things to do. Firstly, ensure they have enough information to be clear about who is in most need of their services and how best to meet their needs. Secondly, improve how they evaluate their services, set themselves measurable targets and ensure more of you help to shape the services on offer. Last of all, make sure there are more opportunities for adults to learn and develop skills for work including volunteering opportunities.

Thank you very much for your welcome and for your frankness with inspectors. We are very grateful and wish you every success in the future.

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