

Inspection report for Batley Central Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	107640 Park Road Junior Infant and Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Batley Central Children's Centre Day Care

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.

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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 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.

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

Inspectors held meetings with representatives of Kirklees Borough Council, members of the advisory board and the parents' forum as well as with a broad range of users and a number of partners, including health and social care. They observed sessions at the centre and at other venues, and reviewed a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Batley Central Sure Start Children's Centre is located close to Batley town centre in Kirklees. The centre was designated in 2006 as a Phase 1 centre. A large majority of families live within an area of 30% of the highest levels of deprivation. The centre was located within a local authority nursery with no capital spend or dedicated staffing at that time. The centre has developed since 2007–2008. It now consists of a Portakabin and shared office space within the day-care building. Following the establishment of relationships with the neighbouring school, a service level agreement for the use of a former headteacher's residence known as 'Community House', now provides a range of accommodation for the centre.

The centre's reach area is culturally very diverse. The largest groups have a White British, Indian or Pakistani heritage. There are 502 children under four years of age in the centre's reach area. A high number of workless families are dependent on state benefits. Families live in mostly high-density housing with no open spaces. A high proportion of homes are in local authority control with some social housing and private rental accommodation. Within the reach area of the centre there are significant issues surrounding unemployment, low

levels of educational attainment and aspiration, and a minority of families who speak English as an additional language.

Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority and is supported by an advisory board that includes providers, members of the local community and parents, as well as a parents' forum. A range of health, social care, family support and education services operates from the centre with associated professionals and centre staff. Childcare, free nursery education, stay-and-play and crèche facilities are delivered both on site and at other venues. Most children enter childcare and early education with a narrower range of skills and abilities than those expected for their age, particularly in their communication, language and literacy and social skills.

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

This children's centre serves the needs of its community well. It provides a warm, welcoming and safe environment for all its users. Parents and carers 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 the centre has turned my life around, I realise I am not a bad parent and the centre has taught me different ways to manage my child's behaviour.' A key strength of the centre is the good leadership provided by the manager, who engages and enthuses all those with whom she works.

There is very effective team-working and good partnerships with other services, particularly health partners, early years teachers and practitioners, and employment and learning agencies. Without the strong commitment from all partners to engage with this community, the centre would be unable to provide the range of activities that take place.

The centre promotes equality and diversity well. Families from different heritage backgrounds integrate well, demonstrating strong community cohesion. 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. All appropriate policies and procedures are

in place and up to date. Safeguarding is good, meets all legal requirements and ensures that all users feel safe at the centre.

Observations by inspectors, scrutiny of data, evaluations conducted by the centre and case studies demonstrate that outcomes for users are good. The provision is also good; parents and carers are developing their confidence, communication and self-esteem through very effective programmes of personal development at the centre. Jobcentre Plus works well with the centre attending the weekly 'One-Stop-Shop' sessions on a monthly basis, providing advice and guidance on routes into employment and signposting families to other services for benefits and debt advice. However, the analysis of the progress of adults through their learning journeys is underdeveloped. Similarly, the centre does not identify the progress made by children in school. This information would provide the centre with data to measure impact and set more precise targets for improvement.

Particularly effective actions are taken to support many families and children who are made vulnerable by their circumstances. Those who require support in times of acute need or crisis are helped through close multi-agency working. Many adult users say the centre is their first port of call if they face difficulties. The numbers of families attending the centre are good, as are the achievements of their children.

The very effective use of outreach facilities and shared staffing has enabled the centre to reach more families. The range of programmes and good outcomes confirm that the centre provides good value for money. Its self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Users are encouraged to evaluate activities routinely. The collaborative culture, motivated staff and good user outcomes as well as its highly-effective leadership give it good capacity to improve further. Play and learning resources are good and the partnership with the local school is of a rewarding nature, allowing the centre to offer a wide range of programmes. The facilities in the Portakabin and the range of rooms in the community house are well-equipped, bright and cheerful. However, the shortcomings to the accommodation, due to lack of level access and inadequate toilet and running water facilities on the ground floor, do inhibit the centre's ability to offer a higher standard of service. The resilience of the centre staff and the community to overcome these disadvantages demonstrates a strong 'can do' approach.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Initiate new dialogue with the local authority and other potential funders to identify the financial resources needed to build an extension to the community house to provide level access, toilets and running water facilities on the ground floor and to ensure better quality services for the families using this centre.
- Liaise with local schools to measure more precisely the numbers of children who have benefited from the services at the centre to support more effectively the progress they make in meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

- Improve the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data for the progress of adults in achieving learning and work-readiness goals.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

All groups that attend the centre, from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, work harmoniously together. The centre acts as a hub for the local community and effectively addresses users' feelings of isolation and provides good opportunities for families to engage in a range of services and to begin to develop friendships. Parents and carers notice improved bonding and better relationships with their babies through breastfeeding buddies, support groups and baby massage. Immunisations have increased through 'catch-up' visits, and specialist smoking cessation advice is provided. One parent commented that 'the staff give non-judgemental support that has helped me be a better parent. I have learned how to play with my children and how babies learn from these activities.'

The effective partnership-working between health visitors, midwives, the mental health team and family support workers results in positive outcomes in children's and families' emotional well-being and physical health. Families noticed improvements after attending baby weaning and healthy cooking sessions where they have learned to use less fat and salt and to cook more vegetables when preparing meals. Opportunities are also taken up by a majority of families to take part in various physical activities provided through 'Fit and Fun' sessions, and swimming at the local swimming baths and leisure centre. Some of these sessions are able to be targeted at females only, an important cultural issue in this community. These activities are helping the centre work towards reducing the number of children under the age of five who are obese.

All users feel and are kept safe when using the centre for the various services on offer. The centre's good quality relationships with families and their children allow staff to identify any safety concerns within families and to intervene appropriately. Road injuries and deaths for children under 5 declined to zero in 2010. Case studies and discussions with parents and carers provide strong evidence that having access to language development classes helps adult users form more positive relationships with others, as well as preparing them to be more work-ready. This support also enables them to understand the wider range of information they receive on improving their children's communication skills, learning and behaviour better.

The centre has clearly defined its core purpose in focusing on child development and school-readiness. Children are well-prepared for nursery and mainstream school due to a range of support as well as through the implementation of the development strategy 'The Child's Journey', which has been created by Kirklees Council's Children's Centre team. The centre also delivers a very effective ten-week 'Nearly Nursery' programme over the summer before children start school. Two local primary school headteachers speak highly about the good partnership-working and the positive effect the children's centre has in contributing to improved outcomes for young children and their families. They also comment on how well

children have settled into school, and how parents are much more confident in their relationships with school staff.

Children’s behaviour throughout the centre is good. The centre staff successfully promote a sense of belonging and respect for different cultures. As a result, users and staff fully enjoy their time spent in the centre. Several parents from the parents’ forum are members of the advisory board where they can influence plans for future activities.

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	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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

Much of the work at the centre is aimed at supporting the most potentially vulnerable families in this area. The wide range of services on offer meets users’ needs well. To promote children’s learning across the area, outreach provision is provided in Mill Lane School and Soothill community centre. These sessions are effective in promoting the Early Years Foundation Stage provision and focus particularly well on children’s personal and emotional development, communication and language.

The centre staff and their collaboration with other professionals ensure that a wide range of assessment tools is used to identify needs. The Common Assessment Framework effectively brings together health visitors, midwives and mental health workers to provide sensitive individualised support where needed. The centre provides good accommodation and support for contact visits for looked-after children. A few of these supported visits have led to the successful return of children to their parents. Kirklees Council has adopted fully ‘The Child’s Journey’ strategy and has trained a significant and increasing proportion of staff across children’s centres, primary education and health professionals to ensure a consistent approach in the development of children. Parents who have attended the parenting support programmes comment that: ‘Learning how to communicate and listen to our children has changed our lives.’

Innovative learning pathways for adults, focused on being more work-ready have been developed. The centre’s tailored ‘Bus Routes’ pathway offers opportunities to participate in programmes with clear steps towards employment, from gaining literacy, language and numeracy qualifications through to National Vocational Qualifications. A more detailed analysis of these outcomes would provide the centre with robust evidence of their impact over time.

Achievements are recorded and celebrated well, whether this is a small step in a very young child’s development, or an adult’s progress in developing their language, literacy and numeracy skills. Following attendance at an arts and crafts course, parents’ work was displayed in an exhibition at the local library. The event was supported well and parents involved were immensely proud of their achievements. Childminders attend the centre regularly and are supported well through the provision of books and learning resources. The children under their care are provided with an opportunity to use different equipment and resources in play at the centre, which broadens their skills and contributes well to their development.

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

Leaders and managers are extremely effective at all levels. The centre manager and locality manager both work well with the integrated service teams across the local authority, and with the advisory board. This work with the board has created the underpinning ethos of the centre and sets important priorities, particularly the promotion of safeguarding for staff, children and parents. Risk assessments are carried out for all activities and child protection arrangements are good. All appropriate checks are carried out before anyone has the opportunity to come into contact with children. Recruitment is managed to a high standard using the local authority systems and procedures.

There is a strong focus on inclusion and equality, which can be seen in the good work that is taking place with parents and children, with minority ethnic groups, fathers, young parents and those families suffering from domestic violence. Information is displayed and access to staff from the domestic violence unit is managed with a high degree of confidentiality and security. The centre provides a powerful force for community cohesion in the success of its work across the community.

Self-evaluation, informing target-setting and planning are good. All learning interventions are evaluated by users and any changes suggested are actioned where possible. These detailed views have made the centre aware of those areas that are effective and those

requiring further development. Leaders are forward-looking and innovative and have demonstrated success in achieving good outcomes.

The centre is very good at collaborative working, which is particularly important for this small centre; the ability to work with partners ensures that a wide range of support is available. Partners range from major public services such as health and social care, local authority leisure services, and Jobcentre Plus to commissioned services from the private and voluntary sector. All partners expressed confidence in the professionalism of the centre staff. They clearly enjoy working with the centre.

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	2
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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Batley Central Sure Start Children's Centre on 29-30 September 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

Thank you for making us feel welcome and for taking the time to talk 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 ensure all the services for children and families work together in your best interests. Your centre does this well. By working together with partners, such as health professionals, Jobcentre Plus, and the local college, you are provided with a good range of support and the opportunity to participate in a variety of beneficial programmes and courses. These help you to learn how to lead a healthy life and to be more confident. The centre is helping some of you improve your language skills and to find work. We have asked it to check how you get on over time in order to have a better understanding of the impact of its services.

Some of you told us that taking part in the centre's activities has given you the opportunity to make new friends, learn new skills and not to feel so alone. Particularly helpful has been the support provided through programmes on developing your parenting skills and understanding how to better ensure the safety of your children. Children who use the centre make good progress in their learning and development. We have also asked the centre to work with local schools to be able to identify how well this support contributes to children's achievements in their early years in school.

We saw how much you and your children enjoy the activities in the centre, including the opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. We found that the work of the centre in supporting children to develop their communication and language skills is good, especially in their knowledge of letters and sounds. Without the use of the Community House the centre would not be able to offer you such a wide range of activities. However, as there is no level access to this building and no toilets or running water facilities downstairs, we have asked the centre to continue to work with the local authority to be able to secure the necessary permissions and funds to provide these much-needed facilities.

The manager and staff in charge of running the centre are doing a good job. The 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 at the centre shares this strong commitment. We heard many examples from you about how the staff 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 good quality of the individual support that is provided and in the range of activities that can be accessed either in the centre or in other local provision.

The advisory board and senior leaders are committed to making a difference to the lives of families in the local area. The centre uses a variety of information to assess the value of the wide range of services that it provides.

We would like to wish you, your children and all the families in Batley our best wishes for the future.

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