

Inspection report for Early Days Children's Centre

Local authority	Sheffield
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Early Days Children Centre 300738

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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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the group manager from Action for Children, health partners, partner agencies, the early years team, family support, outreach workers and team managers, the centre teacher, the childminder network coordinator, breastfeeding peer and support workers, volunteers, members of the advisory board, parents and a representative from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Early Days Children's Centre was designated a phase one centre in 2004. The single story building was previously a family centre. The centre offers a range of universal and targeted services with the support of partners and commissioned services on site or at a location within the area.

The centre is situated in Sheffield's North East Community Assembly area and it covers the wards of Parson's Cross and Ecclesfield. The community is less diverse than other areas of the city but this is changing and 22% of families living in the area are now from minority ethnic backgrounds. Figures show that 993 children under five years of age live in the reach area. The vast majority of families with young children live in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Unemployment is increasing. The proportion of families living in households dependent on workless benefits is 41%. The percentage of lone and teenage parents in the area is much higher than the city average.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is delivered through various settings and groups. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills below those expected for their age.

On-site childcare is provided for up to 68 children under eight years of age, and of these not more than 20 may be under two years old. Separate arrangements are in place to inspect this provision and the report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre manager is also responsible for another centre nearby. Action for Children is commissioned by the local authority to run the Early Days centre. An established advisory board is in place which consists of a range of professionals, members of the community, partners and parents and carers. A parent is the chairperson. The centre is open from 8am until 5pm, Monday to Friday, 48 weeks of the year. The centre is also open occasional weekends to meet user's needs.

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

Early Days Children's Centre is a good centre with several outstanding features to its work. The centre is extremely well established and it has consequently developed a good reputation. Several people referred to this centre as being 'the flagship.' The centre manager is a dynamic leader. The strong leadership team are passionate about their work and they regularly share 'good practice' across the city.

Adults and children confidently come to the centre for help. Several parents and carers commented on the warm welcome of the centre and how they appreciate, 'the big smile from the people on the front desk'. Families using the centre report high levels of satisfaction. Many users of the centre commented on the positive impact of the centre and the highly skilled, professional centre workers and their partners. Partnerships are outstanding. The centre benefits from the co-location of some partners and over time excellent relationships have been developed with the majority of partners.

High quality learning environments and provision promote individualised, purposeful learning and development exceptionally well. Exemplary procedures are in place to encourage each child's smooth transition on to the next stage of their learning. Adults make good progress in improving their confidence and skills through the excellent volunteering opportunities, student placements or through attending the family learning programmes. As a result, the

extent to which children and parents and carers are supported to enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development is outstanding.

Good leadership and management ensure safeguarding is outstanding. Family safety is significantly enhanced by the centre's well-established safety routines and the consistent implementation of their highly robust policies and procedures. Consequently, all families said they feel safe at the centre.

This is an exceptionally inclusive centre. The support for those children and families who are in particularly vulnerable situations is exemplary. Home-made books with carefully selected photographs are used in an extremely positive way to raise everyone's awareness of different family life styles. Adults and children use signs and symbols with great ease. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are extremely well supported to reach their full potential. Parents said, 'staff always find a resolution to address any issues.' The centre workers 'can do' attitude and solution based approach to remove any barriers to access is commendable. Any discrimination is tackled swiftly with vigour. The centre constantly strives for excellence and this demonstrates good capacity to improve.

The promotion of healthy lifestyles is strong, however, the impact of some support has yet to have the desired effect. Breastfeeding is enthusiastically encouraged and this has increased initiation figures but the number of mothers who sustain breastfeeding remains stubbornly low. Likewise, the impact of smoking cessation shows an increasing number of adults are beginning to stop smoking but there is still a high percentage of smokers in this area.

The majority of users of the centre are engaged in relevant adult learning. The centre is regularly informed of job vacancies by the Jobcentre Plus. However, evidence of the impact of their work is not available.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and the Primary Care Trust to increase the number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding and reduce the number of mothers smoking during pregnancy.
- Increase the involvement of Jobcentre Plus in providing robust evidence of the support they provide for parents and carers.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Effective early intervention ensures needs are identified at an early stage and children's growth and development is monitored well. Successful strategies are in place for promoting

good oral health and the uptake of immunisation. There is a strong 'bottle feeding culture' in this area. Nevertheless, the centre promotes breastfeeding well and this has been recognised through a baby friendly initiative award. 'The breastfeeding support group was an essential part of my decision to continue to breastfeed,' was a typical comment from a mother.

Healthy eating is promoted effectively throughout the centre yet levels of obesity in the area remain an issue. Parents and carers find topics, such as the healthy lunch box, helpful due to the clear guidance they receive. They learn how to cook low-cost, healthy meals for their families through the popular 'Cook and Eat' sessions. They learn about portion sizes and the fat, sugar and salt content of everyday foods through shocking visual images which helps them to make healthier choices. Families learn how to plant and grow fresh produce at the allotment and they are encouraged to grow food at home. Children regularly enjoy movement to inspiring music which engages their activity spontaneously. They have good physical challenges in their exciting, exploratory play outdoors.

Parents and carers develop an excellent understanding of how to keep their children and themselves safe through the well managed daily routines at the centre. The enthusiastic staff team act as excellent role models. Topics on safety in the home and on the roads further raise awareness on how to minimise risks. Feedback from parents and carers was, 'I am now more aware of the importance of keeping tablets away from children because they can look like sweets' and 'I understand the dangers of passive smoking.' The centre's evaluations of first aid training clearly show the difference this has made to parents' confidence in dealing with accidents, particularly in tackling choking incidents.

The Common Assessment Framework is used extremely well to target bespoke support for individual families, including looked after children. Users of the centre described the support they receive as, 'excellent'. The inspectors observed several case studies and complimentary letters which described the positive impact the centre has had on family's lives including the development of their skills which can lead to economic stability. Adult have access to a good range of family learning and other courses which the centre runs or are delivered locally which can lead to accreditation.

Early years data shows some children make rapid progress. The majority are almost in line with expected progress in their development. This is outstanding progress due their low starting points. Data shows that the achievement gap is rapidly narrowing between the lowest 20% and the rest. Children are well prepared for school. They enjoy meeting and taking photographs of their new teachers and the school environment which are collated into a special book for them. They also put their favourite items from home into a box which they can take to school. Parents and carers said, 'Fabulous transition and reassurance promotes children settling well at school.'

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
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The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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

There are high levels of poverty, substance misuse, domestic violence and anti-social behaviour in this area and some families have a range of complex needs. A high percentage of parents and carers in this area are in debt. Therefore, good partnerships have been developed with community projects such as Southey Owlerton Area Regeneration and the Citizens Advice Bureau to ensure families get the practical support they need regarding debt management, benefits and employment advice.

The centre runs regular 'one stop shop' sessions where users can access a range of different services all under one roof. Parents and carers said, 'It is a joy to come here, there is always lots to do and it is so convenient having everything so readily available.' A large majority of families engage well with the health services and attendance at the clinics is good. Families are confident they get good quality care and guidance from the centre.

The nursery and 'plaza' which is the name given to the broad corridor which links users to other areas of the centre is a vibrant place to be. High-quality, attractive displays and resources welcome and inform others of the centre's good work. Children who attend the centre and the nursery have access to high-quality childcare and learning. Achievements are celebrated well. Uptake of the free entitlement to early years places is high.

Astute assessment recognises there are a growing percentage of children in this area who require Early Years Action Plus support. Families make good use of the well equipped sensory room. The centre's special educational needs coordinator and inclusion teacher have developed excellent relationships with other agencies, such as the Portage service which helps promotes excellent outcomes for all children. Parents and carers said they found the 'Starlight' and the 'Ready Steady Go' groups to be a tremendous support when they had specific concerns about their child. 'Martin the Music Man' has introduced musical instruments to families and the medium of music is used extremely well to develop self-esteem and engage particular children's participation. Focus on certain areas of learning, such as communication, language and literacy is well supported through close partnership working with the Speech and Language Therapist. Specific groups, such as the 'Talking Toddlers', promote effective early communication.

Regular consultation with parents and carers ensures services continue to meet their needs and drives up their participation. The centre has excellent knowledge of the families who are using the centre and they are meeting the needs of target groups extremely well. Teenage parents are very well supported. Support for families who speak English as a second language is also good. The popular 'Baby Massage' sessions effectively promote a good sense of well-being and positive relationships. Many parents have attended Makaton at the centre and can now confidently sign to their babies.

Families have regular opportunities to go on local walks. The centre recognises that engagement in this type of physical activity is far greater when they introduce a purpose for the walks, such as den making in the park. The manager has successfully overcome barriers to service delivery by offering a range of services, such as 'Toddler Play and Stay' in partnership with the school at the far end of their reach area. The families who live in this area are not attending the centre at all. Plans are in place to further increase outreach services delivered at the school to ensure that these families also benefit from the superb services the centre offers.

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	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear to all staff. Good links between the strategic planning and service provision promote high-quality integrated provision and ensure outcomes for families are at least good. The centre's change over to a new electronic data base has been problematic. However, the system to collect data is now being used well to evidence increasing registration figures and to identify trends more easily. New target setting and self-evaluation procedures are developing well.

The parents' forum and the well-established advisory board are currently exploring the proposal to change to cluster arrangements. The centre manager is keen to encourage more parents and carers to join the parents' forum so that they have a good representation from all groups in the area who can contribute to decision-making and governance. Parental ideas and views sought by responses to surveys and evaluations have been used well to shape some services to meet needs. The 'You said, we did' board effectively ensures parents and carers are kept very well informed of any requests or suggestions they have made to the centre.

The staff team are highly-skilled and many are committed to working towards higher education. Staff have developed many trusting relationships with families and children. Parents and carers spoke highly of them saying, 'they are respectful and non judgmental.' Excellent partnerships ensure all are clear about priorities and there is a strong focus on continual improvement. Co-located, multi-agency and disciplinary partners deliver 'seamless' services to users of the centre.

The centre very effectively fulfils its statutory duties in respect of equality and diversity. The centre's high-quality inclusive practice has been recognised and featured in the media. The centre has embraced the rapidly changing cultural diversity in their area extremely well. Festivals are regularly celebrated and diversity is valued highly.

Reductions in funds have impacted on some services. Where it can, the centre has been very innovative in finding solutions to problems. When the nursery made staff redundant some were supported to set up their own childminding business. This not only met the staff needs but also the working parents and carers and their children's requirements. The centre recognises the important role fathers play in their child's development and several males work at the centre. Although a specific fathers group no longer runs from the centre due to financial restraints, ongoing consultation is currently taking place to identify if users would like this to resume again.

High quality safeguarding practice is adopted across all areas of the centre's work. The centre has excellent risk assessments and quality assurance. All agencies give the highest priority to safeguarding children. Safeguarding arrangements exceed the Local Safeguarding Children's Board requirements. Recruitment and vetting procedures to check the suitability of multi-agency workers and partners are very robust. Protocols and practice for making referrals and sharing information between the relevant agencies are exemplary.

A strong group of volunteers strengthen the work of the centre. Many of them develop their confidence and skills which often leads them to progress to further education or employment. Adults have access to a good range of family learning and a range of courses which the centre runs or are delivered locally which can lead to accreditation. Taking all of this into account the centre provides good value for money.

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 in setting ambitious targets which secures 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	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	1
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

Early Days Children Centre childcare provision delivered at the centre was inspected 21 November 2011. It was judged to be outstanding. This inspection has contributed to this children's centre report and judgements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Early Days Children's Centre on the 23 and 24 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall with some outstanding features.

Attention to safeguarding is outstanding. The centre provides you with a safe place where you can be sure to receive a warm, friendly welcome.

The centre's attention to promote equality and diversity is outstanding. You described the centre as 'really inclusive' and some spoke of the centre 'educating you on your child's behaviour so that you understood your child was not being naughty.' You said the 'Starlight' and the 'Ready Steady Go' groups were 'tremendous support if you have any specific concerns about your child.'

The centre has developed outstanding partnerships. The multi-agency partners all work extremely well together to use their professional experience, knowledge and resources to meet your specific needs well. Together they assess any difficult situations successfully and they know what support to provide you with in times of crisis. Families who have difficult circumstances receive excellent support. Typical comments from parents and carers were, 'we have fantastic relationships with the staff' and 'they promote positivity and confidence.'

The provision to promote your learning and development and accelerate your children's progress into school is outstanding. You told us how much you enjoy the 'brilliant activities.' We thoroughly enjoyed observing the lively 'Martin the Music Man' singing session. You were positive about the benefits of using massage to improve your relationships with your baby. You told us you enjoyed bonfire night and the day trip to Cleethorpes. You said the parenting programmes, such as 'We Can Build It' and the new 'Amazing Babies' have had a positive impact on your lives. You enjoyed being provided with a range of different low-cost ideas which you can use to play with your child at home.

Parenting courses, such as 'C'Mon Everybody' and the 'Incredible Years' programme have developed your confidence and self-esteem and taught you better ways of managing your children's behaviour. You told us that you 'would recommend the courses to others' because they helped you to 'provide strategies and activities at home' like giving your full attention to your child's play. Some of you have also attended the 'First Aid' course, which has raised your awareness about what to do if your child has an accident, particularly if they start choking.

You understand the importance of helping your child develop good speaking and listening skills because some of you have attended 'Book Start' and the 'Talking Toddlers'. Several of you have moved from one course to another to develop your knowledge and parenting skills.

Some of you described the breastfeeding support as, 'absolutely fantastic.' We have asked the centre and its partners to increase the support they provide for you to increase the number of mothers who are breastfeeding and to help reduce the amount of prospective mothers who smoke. We have asked the centre to work with Jobcentre Plus to monitor adult learning that you may be directed to, so that they have a clear picture of how many of you are coming off workless benefits or accessing education which can lead to employment.

We would like to thank everyone who was willing to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and wish you every success in the future.

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