

Inspection report for Sure Start Thornhill Lees Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
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Reporting inspector	Janet Stacey HMI

Centre leader	Judith Grizzell
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	53 Brewery Lane Thornhill Lees Dewsbury WF12 9DU
Telephone number	01924 324181
Email address	judith.grizzell@kirklees.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked Early Years and childcare, if applicable	Thornhill Pre-School EY389324 Sure Start Thornhill Children's Centre EY339027

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with local headteachers and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and the centre's equality and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Sure Start Thornhill Lees Children's Centre is situated in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire. The centre is on the site of Thornhill Lees Community Centre, the local general practitioners' surgery and the community library. It was established in September 2008 under Phase Two of the children centre development programme. Linked childcare provision is provided by Sure Start Thornhill Children's Centre nursery which is situated at Overthorpe Junior Infant and Nursery School, and Thornhill Community Pre-School in the grounds of Thornhill Junior and Infant School. The linked provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements and were last inspected in July 2010 and October 2010. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. Additional Early Years services are also provided by private and voluntary Early Years organisations in the local area.

There are approximately 460 children under five years of age living in the reach area. The centre serves the ward of Dewsbury South. The communities covered are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The main social issues affecting these areas are a high percentage of worklessness and the large number of families living on benefits. Qualifications achieved are lower than the national average; wages paid for those in employment are one of the lowest averages across Kirklees. Families face a range of challenges in the local area including relatively high numbers of infant mortality, poor dental hygiene, pockets of domestic abuse and women suffering from post-natal depression.

The centre offers the full core purpose. Family support, health, parenting programmes and Early Years advice are offered by a multi-disciplinary team based at the centre and also through outreach, group and home visiting programmes. The majority of families is of White British and South Asian heritage. The reach area is characterised by a mix of private, private rented and social housing. Data show that most children in the reach area enter Early Years provision with a range of experiences and skills expected for their age. The centre takes referrals from a range of professionals and supports families with children in three local schools.

Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority. A range of professionals is represented on the advisory board that supports the governance and direction of the centre; these include local day care providers, Job Centre Plus, a headteacher, midwives and health visitors.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good. The centre is a welcoming place to visit and serves the families that live in its reach area well. A typical view expressed was, 'I would be lost without this centre. I would have nowhere to turn.' The centre runs very effectively and efficiently on a day-to-day basis and staff morale, despite the current re-organisation of children's centres in the local authority, is high. Relationships with parents are good. Many parents were keen to speak to inspectors about how the centre has helped them, especially in developing parenting skills, assisting them in moments of crisis and accessing support they may need through partner agencies, such as the health service and the Citizens' Advice Bureau. The number of families accessing the centre has increased year on year. This fact and the strong teamwork of staff and centre partners demonstrate the centre's good capacity to sustain improvement.

Outcomes for users are good. This is because the centre responds well to local needs. Parents and children enjoy a wide range of activities. They have a good understanding of safety and the centre ensures that all are very well safeguarded. Inclusion of all families is

central to the work of the centre. Great importance is placed on listening to both adults and children. As a result, gender barriers are being removed with more men starting to take an interest in their young children's learning and women becoming less isolated and making new friends.

Centre staff, particularly the play and learning workers, along with Early Years partners and local headteachers, have been determined to improve children's skills and knowledge by the time they enter school. They have been successful in this. Children from all target groups have now been given the firm foundations they need to reach their full potential throughout their learning journey in school. Health outcomes are good, more and more new mothers are breastfeeding their children and while the numbers of mothers smoking during pregnancy is decreasing year on year, the centre staff and health teams know there is more work to be done in this respect to ensure that all children receive the healthy start in life they need. The parents' forum is well attended and realistic suggestions are put forward by the forum to the advisory board. While some parents are on the advisory board, their views have yet to be fully recognised at a strategic level to really help shape the way the centre operates.

Leadership and management at all levels are good. The centre manager is supported well by her experienced staff. They have a clear sense of drive and passion and a good understanding of the difficulties they face in the reach area they serve. As a result, users are supported well. Partnerships with the local community and other agencies are good. Regular partnership meetings are arranged, which enable everyone who is involved in the work of the centre to meet and discuss their work. However, some partners do not routinely share the impact of their work with the centre staff. While all staff have ownership of evaluating and planning their services, evaluation is sometimes inconsistent and does not always capture fully the impact the activities have on improving outcomes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve evaluation procedures by further utilising all available evidence and feedback from partners to demonstrate fully:
 - the impact of services and activities on the outcomes for users
 - how this is used to shape and improve services and activities.
- Improve the extent to which families using the centre participate in decision-making and the governance of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. Children's dietary needs are well catered for. Activities, such as 'Cook and Eat', which encourage families to eat healthier foods is having a positive impact as the

percentage of children who are entering school obese is now in line with the national average of 9.1%. The percentage of mothers breastfeeding in the reach area is higher than the national average of 47%. The centre has been successful in supporting mothers who were experiencing difficulties to continue breastfeeding. This is due in part to the training of local mothers as breastfeeding support workers. Adults are encouraged to have healthy lifestyles. For example, families were taken on a two-day camping trip. This gave parents and their children the chance to bond by spending time together without outside distractions and access new outdoor experiences. Other initiatives, such as the 'Kirklees Passport', which is facilitated by the library service, enables families to access amenities at the local leisure centre at a reduced cost. However, the centre is not routinely informed if families from their target groups are using this service.

Parents value the centre as a safe, welcoming and friendly place to be. As a consequence the community café and library are thriving with constant activity. Children in the linked day care enter the premises and separate from parents with ease. Adults are confident to approach the centre with concerns about community issues. They have been supported well to share the information with the police service which works closely with the centre. Parents who are experiencing stressful situations trust the children's centre to continue to work with them to improve their family situation. Case studies show significant impact and improved outcomes for children subject to a child protection plan. Children and adults behave in ways which are safe for themselves and others; for example, children help tidy away in the nursery and show an increasing awareness of the importance of risk-assessing situations and use of equipment themselves.

Children's progress is good and most make progress in line with or above expectations, given their abilities and starting points. The services offered by the centre are popular and groups have high levels of attendance. Parents attending the 'Stay and Play' group agree that it has had a positive impact on their child's development and social skills. Crèche and childcare workers are well qualified and they know their children well. They identify gaps in children's learning and achievement and take appropriate steps to narrow these. Children are well prepared for transitions into nursery and school.

Children's behaviour is good and they form positive relationships within the centre's crèche and linked childcare provision. Courses, such as 'Strengthening Families', support parents to understand positive behaviour management strategies. As a result they have greater success in managing their children's challenging behaviour and promoting positive behaviour. A typical view was 'I don't get as angry any more. I am much calmer'. Children are able to influence the environment in which they play because the nursery and crèche sessions offer high levels of child-initiated play.

Through the parents' forum users have good opportunities to express their views. For example, they were instrumental in helping to design the holiday activity programme. While parents are engaged in the governance of the centre they do not always put their views forward as well as they could do.

Children make good progress in developing skills for the future. Outcomes for children, parents and other users are good and improving. Children improve their literacy and social skills well. Parents are encouraged to identify and work towards their aspirations, for example, dads have developed skills in Do-It-Yourself and photography. The English for Speaking Other Languages (ESOL) courses are meeting the needs of the increasing number of non-English speaking families.

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

Overall the quality of provision is good. The centre works effectively with a wide range of partners to ensure that assessments, such as those carried out for disabled children and those with special educational needs, are robust and well informed. The centre uses assessment information to provide a good range of programmes for the needs of diverse adult groups. Individualised support is available to meet families' needs appropriately, particularly for those subject to a child protection plan. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is being used well to support families and prevent the escalation of problems and the need for specialist services.

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in the linked childcare and crèche is good. Children behave well and follow staff instructions. They are provided with a good range of activities and learning opportunities which effectively support their development. The 'Ready Steady Go' transition into school project, along with the 'Child's Journey' are key factors in why the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest has narrowed overall across the area from 32% in 2009 to 16.4% in 2011. The centre is not complacent and is determined to close the gap even further to reach the national average of 12%.

The centre offers a broad range of services and activities ranging from 'Baby Massage' to 'Family First Aid'. Families particularly appreciate the fun days. 'Boost' was a community

event aimed to increase registration and engagement figures. The event led by an artist, resulted in children and adults creating striking designs which were fitted to the external walls and windows of the centre. The centre became 'eye-catching' and the objectives of increasing the reach to families were met. Although this proved successful, staff did not become complacent. As one member of staff put it 'It's not like we can just sit back and wait for people to come to us. It's a first step and now that momentum has to be maintained'. Users fed back that this was 'a wonderful day, not just for kids, but adults too'.

Care, guidance and support arrangements are good. Good, tailored support develops families' well-being. Families express high levels of satisfaction with the standard of care and support offered at the centre. A parent typified this by saying 'My child has additional needs. The centre has helped improve our lives for the better, they helped me claim the benefits we were entitled to and arranged for adaptations in the centre. This means we can now both join in with everything the centre has to offer'.

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

Operational management is good and financial resources are carefully managed. Governance is very supportive. There are regular performance management arrangements and supervisions in place. Priorities within the development plan are well adapted to meet changing user needs. While evaluation of activities takes place, it is inconsistent and sometimes fails to capture fully the effectiveness of the programmes on offer. Staff feel valued and able to develop their own professional expertise through a wide range of training opportunities. Systematic monitoring of attendance by fathers, young parents, disabled children, lone parents and minority and ethnic groups ensures that the centre is well informed about how effectively services meet a broader range of needs. Taking all of this into account, the centre provides good value for money.

The centre's action to promote greater equality for different groups, such as those who speak English as an additional language, is effective in removing barriers for many families as they access the services provided. Careful consideration has been given to the design of the centre so that all users can gain full access. The centre provides an effective level of service for families with disabled children and those with special educational needs that are known to them.

The centre has effective partnership working with a range of services that meet the needs of users very well. The links with health partners has been particularly successful in helping those mothers suffering from post-natal depression to overcome it. While multi-agency partnership meetings take place, not all partners routinely share the day-to-day impact of their work with the centre. This impacts on the centre's ability to capture collective knowledge and improve outcomes even further for families in the area.

Good safeguarding arrangements are in place and there is a system to maintain and update them. Robust vetting procedures safeguard children and adults and ensure that only suitable people are able to work with children and families. Criminal Record Bureau checks are accurately recorded and maintained. Staff are trained in child protection to levels that are appropriate to their responsibilities. The premises and environment are safe and security is good. The risk assessment of the environment is effective in minimising risks and is well-monitored to ensure that this remains the case.

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	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 Sure Start Thornhill Lees Children's Centre on 19-20 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We are very grateful to you for all your time and help in coming in to visit us and for spending time talking to us. We really appreciated those of you who translated for us so that we could get the views and opinions of everyone, including those who are not so fluent in English. All of you said how much the centre helps you, your families and your children. We were genuinely moved by some of your stories and the trust and close relationships that have been built up between you and some of the staff.

You praise all staff for the way in which they help you to make improvements in your lifestyles and improve the health and emotional welfare of your families. If they are unable to help you themselves, you said they are very good at putting you in touch with other organisations or agencies that can help you. You talked about how the centre has helped you in sorting out financial difficulties or helping you into training or to find a job. Most of all, many of you mentioned how the parenting classes have really helped you in your relationships with your children, in particular, in dealing with your children's behaviour.

The centre is a safe and secure environment for you and your children. All the staff are very good at, and very well trained in, signposting you to other services or activities they believe will be helpful. Many of you spoke very highly about the ESOL classes, which are very popular, particularly as you can leave your children in the crèche. The centre activities and the linked childcare provision are very good at helping your children to make good progress in their learning and development, and you are learning how to support them through parenting courses and guidance. We were particularly impressed by how much the centre and their Early Years partners have done to raise your children's knowledge and skills as they enter their first year in school. This is a tremendous achievement and one which we are sure you are equally proud of.

The people in charge of running the centre are doing a good job in helping you find the support and practical help you need to give your children the best start in life. 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. 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 by the centre staff and the wide range of partners that work with the centre.

We have said that some elements of the centre's work need to improve. The centre asks you to evaluate the activities you attend. However, staff do not always capture how well the activities you attend are helping to improve your family's outcomes, or use your feedback well enough to plan what activities and services the centre needs to provide you with. We have asked the centre to improve this. The centre works well with a good range of partners who are committed to help improve your lives. However, not all partners share the impact of their work with the centre staff. We have asked the centre and key partners to improve this. We know that the parents' forum is very active and that many of you told us you have good opportunities to raise suggestions to the centre's leadership team. However, while some of you are members of the advisory board there is more work to be done to ensure that you, as parents, have a true voice at a strategic level. We have raised these issues because once they are in place the centre will be in an even stronger position to see how well it is meeting all of your needs.

Thank you to all that we met for your input into the inspection. It really was appreciated. We hope that you, your children and many more parents who live locally will continue to enjoy and benefit from all of the services available to you in the future.

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