

# Inspection report for Bedale and Villages Surestart Children's Centre

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| Local authority     | North Yorkshire      |
| Inspection number   | 406991               |
| Inspection dates    | 19–20 September 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | Elizabeth Srogi HMI  |

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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 | Not applicable |

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

**Report Published:** October 2012

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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 Inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and previous manager, members of staff, representatives of the local authority and centre partners, members of the steering group and families using the centre. They held informal discussions with parents and children.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation document, its annual delivery plan and data about families in the reach area.

## Information about the centre

Bedale and Villages Sure Start Children's Centre is located within the Hambleton district of North Yorkshire. It is a phase two centre which received designation in December 2007. It is one of 10 children's centres in the Hambleton and Richmondshire locality of the local authority. The centre is run directly by the local authority, there is a steering group in place which carries out the role of an advisory board and a users' group called 'Friends of Bedale Children's Centre'. The centre has recently been through a period of transition and at the time of this inspection the centre manager has been in post for two weeks; she has also recently taken over the management of Wensleydale Children's Centre.

The centre's reach area covers the market town of Bedale, RAF Leeming (closed RAF base), Masham and several further smaller rural villages. It provides a range of services for families from its base in Bedale, Masham Town Hall and RAF Leeming and outreach work. It has links with Incy Wincy's Ltd and Bedale Under Fives early years provision. These settings are independently run and are subject to their own Early Years Foundation Stage inspection, reports can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The reach area is not one of significant deprivation; however, it does have two Lower Super Output Areas which are in the 20-40% most deprived ranking in North Yorkshire. A higher than average proportion of households in the area earn between £45,000 and £49,998; however, 22.3% of the population earn less than £15,000. There are 700 children under five years old in the reach area, of which approximately 55 are living in households dependent on workless benefits. The vast majority of those living in the area are of White British heritage although the number of children from other ethnic groups is beginning to rise. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are broadly in line with those expected for their age.

## 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**

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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

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## Main findings

Bedale Children’s Centre has, over the last 18 months, been through a period of transition and change. This has had some impact on the development of its overall effectiveness in moving the centre forward, therefore capacity to improve is satisfactory. However, the imminent appointment of the final member of the small staff team, the very recent appointment of the centre manager, who is described by a member of the steering group as, ‘like a breath of fresh air’, and a committed staff group who are determined to improve outcomes for all are strengths to support improvement.

This warm and welcoming centre provides effective support for those who use its services and although overall outcomes for families are satisfactory, those for being healthy and staying safe are clearly good. The centre covers a large rural area and this is taken into account when the venues for activities are decided upon, activities are held within the centre itself and in the other two most populated parts of the reach area. Despite this and centre staff’s on-going work, particularly with health colleagues at new-birth visits, where there has been success in increasing the numbers of children registered with the centre from 211 children in 2010/11 to 474 as at 14 September 2012, engagement is still relatively low although improving, especially in relation to some target groups. For example, of the 65 lone parents with children under five in the reach area in 2011/12 the centre is engaged with six, and of the 19 children in minority ethnic groups there is engagement with nine. Managers are acutely aware of this and of the need to better encourage their involvement,

the involvement of those who live in the outlying areas of the reach and the involvement of fathers. As a result they are taking action to improve engagement.

Arrangements for safeguarding and promoting good safety practices are particular strengths of the centre and are central in the centre's work. All centre staff are clearly well trained and knowledgeable of signs that may give rise to concerns, of the action they would need to take, and of their responsibilities to be good role models to parents at all times. Parents told inspectors that they feel safe in the centre and understand and accept the centre's responsibility to take action if safeguarding concerns are identified.

Equality and diversity are promoted in the centre and there are systems in place to ensure that all who use the centre are valued and can contribute to its work. Parents highlight how they are listened to and that, for example, amendments to programmes have been made at their request. That being said, and despite there being parent representation on the steering group and a very informative display about the parents/users group 'Friends of Bedale Children's Centre', some parents have limited knowledge of how they can contribute to the overall governance of the centre.

The centre provides a variety of activities and strategies including signposting to contribute to helping both children and adults to improve in their learning and development and to improve their economic stability. However, although centre staff have introduced planning into activity preparation, there is less emphasis currently placed on tracking individuals' development and improvement, which limits the centre's ability to be certain that individual need is being met or to show clearly the impact of the centre's work both in the short and longer term. There is evidence that there has previously been some work done in this area and there are plans in place to address this.

The centre works in partnership with a range of other professionals and organisations. Although partnerships overall are satisfactory, it is clear that the good partnerships with health, early intervention and social care and the developing partnerships with RAF Leeming are having a positive impact on outcomes for families. There were many comments made to inspectors by partners about how the centre and its staff are held in high regard and how their support is vital in improving the lives of families. However, there are some partnerships, such as those involving local schools, which are less developed; this impacts on the centre's ability to fully ensure it is supporting children's readiness for school.

The centre has access to a wide range of data that is used, with some success, to contribute to the evaluation and planning for the centre. The amount of data available can be overwhelming and does not always promote its easy use to more fully contribute to showing the impact of the centre's services on improving children's and families' lives. Despite this the centre generally knows its strengths and areas for improvement and has plans in place to take the work of the centre forward.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- The centre should work with the local authority to streamline and improve the data provided to make them more timely, reach specific and user friendly so as to ensure they can be used more productively and easily to inform planning and to measure impact on families in the reach area, in both the long and short term.
- Improve the tracking of both children's and adults' learning and development, both in the short and longer term to better show how the centre's work is improving children's and families' achievement, enjoyment and economic well-being.
- Build on the work already started to further improve partnerships, particularly with local schools.
- Improve engagement with children and families in the reach area, particularly those in the centre's target groups including fathers and also encourage further involvement of users in the centre's steering group and 'Friends of Bedale Children's Centre' to enable them to be more involved in the governance of the centre.

### How good are outcomes for families?

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The centre has a firm commitment to ensuring children and families have access to opportunities to promote good health. This is supported, for example, by mothers who highlight how attendance at activities such as the breastfeeding support group have helped them to continue breastfeeding and has significantly helped some mothers not to 'give-up' when things were tough. Data show that those sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has risen from 38.4% in 2009/10 to 51% in 2011; the uptake of immunisations is high. Parents report how sessions such as 'baby massage' and 'baby yoga' help immensely with parent/baby bonding. Healthy eating is promoted at every session where possible and activities to specifically promote healthy eating, such as 'Lets Cook', have been successful. The joint 'stay and play' and health clinic is well used with 28 families attending on the day of the inspection.

Ensuring families' safety is a significant strength of the centre. Comprehensive risk assessments are recorded and are diligently implemented for all activities and services. Children, particularly those subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework process, are safeguarded well due to the effective targeting of services and partnership working. Case studies show how such families have been well supported, which has enabled children to come off child protection plans or has ensured they have not needed the escalation of services. The dedication of staff in the determined promotion of safety awareness throughout all activities and by the provision of safety equipment by the centre successfully improves the lives of families; this is exemplified by such comments from parents as, 'Session on safety made me aware that the dangers are more than just obvious ones.' and 'Safety packs are brill, buying safety stuff is expensive when money is tight.'

Across the reach area children's progress at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Data show the profile scores for children achieving 78+ points including six points in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development has risen from 48.6% in 2009/10 to 65.6% in 2011/12. Staff now better plan activities to follow children's interests; however, the tracking of children's development to clearly show the impact on individuals' achievement is in its infancy. Adults are supported to access training and development using in-house courses and adult learning partners and to pursue employment through the centre's advertising of jobs and access to a warm phone to Jobcentre services. There is some evidence to show parents' success in achieving qualifications and employment; however, there is limited monitoring carried out by the centre in both the short and longer term to fully show how this is supporting families' economic stability.

Children behave well in activity sessions. The centre provides a range of opportunities for adults and children to provide feedback about their experiences with the centre. Parents feel they are listened to and there are examples of how changes, such as timings of sessions, have been made to the programme. There is a well-advertised users' forum in place and there are parents on the steering group, yet a number of parents spoken to do not really know about these or know how they could be part of them in order to contribute to the governance of the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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| <b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>  | 2 |
| <b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>   | 2 |
| <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>   | 3 |
| <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>          | 3 |
| <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> | 3 |

## How good is the provision?

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There is very effective assessment, and well-targeted support and activities provided to those children and families who are specifically referred to the centre. Case studies and parents' comments show that appropriate and timely provision and support make a discernible difference to these families. However, on-going assessment of both children and

adults who use the more universal centre services to fully show how the centre is improving learning and development and meeting individual need is in its infancy. That being said, there is a varied selection of activities, services and opportunities provided for families who use the centre and its outreach provision which are clearly linked to the centre's development plans. However, parents highlight courses and activities that are often over-subscribed and are time limited, often to five weeks. This is said by parents to sometimes impact on their ability to continue to enjoy and use activities such as 'BuggyXercise', as their involvement has to stop to enable others to take part. The centre is aware this will need particular attention in the future as it targets improvement to increase engagement with children and families in the reach area. The centre promotes its services and activities across the reach by ensuring programme information is made available to partners, such as health professionals; however, the centre is not signposted from the main Bedale thoroughfare to ensure it is 'visible' within the town.

Care, guidance and support are good. The vast majority of parents spoke highly of the centre staff and their involvement with the centre and of the positive impact that this has on their family lives. Centre displays provide a plethora of information, including sensitively displayed information on domestic violence, contraception and drug awareness. Powerful case studies and comments such as, 'They listen to you and help you to make positive changes and decisions.', 'It's fantastic thank you.', 'No one has ever helped us.', 'We didn't know you were there.' and, 'You're helping so much and don't have to.' show how valued the centre is. Crèches are provided to enable parents to access courses and help can be given with transport where there is a discernible need identified.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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



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

**3**

Leadership and management overall are satisfactory. Despite a number of changes in the leadership of the centre over the last 18 months, there is a clear management procedure in place with effective line management and supervision. As a result staff are supported and morale is said to be high. The steering group has undergone significant changes to its membership and is in the early stages of re-developing its role in providing support and challenge to the centre. The centre focuses on activities that are sustainable, building on existing provision and knowledge and sharing costs and resources with other agencies where possible, this successfully impacts on the financial management of the centre. This, together with at least satisfactory outcomes, ensures that the centre offers satisfactory value for money.

The enthusiasm and drive of the new centre manager, coupled with the enthusiasm of staff, other colleagues and partners who are committed to making a positive difference to families' lives, results in a centre that is determined to improve the lives of families. However, although the development plan identifies the way forward for the centre, it is often complex. The self-evaluation document completed is overly descriptive and although generally accurate is generous in some aspects. Comprehensive data are available to the centre but are not always timely or easily understood and therefore are sometimes not sufficiently helpful to planning and evaluation of impact.

Robust and well used safeguarding training effectively enhances all staff's awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities. The centre uses good procedures and protocols to share information to ensure that the safeguarding needs of individual families are met. Robust recruitment and vetting procedures are used including Criminal Records Bureau checks to ensure that all working with families are suitable to do so. There are a variety of partnerships in place which are strong, such as those with health, early intervention and children's social care which result in a comprehensive delivery of services. However, others, such as those with schools, are developing at a slower pace. The centre facilitates contact visits and provides a venue for portage sessions; it also works well with 'quality and improvement' in improving practice and in supporting childminders.

The centre has appropriate policies in place to meet its statutory duties in relation to equality and diversity and the centre is accessible to and used by those with disabilities. All children and families are welcome in the centre and registration and engagement are improving, particularly through partnership with health in respect of children less than one year old. However, the engagement with some target groups, such as fathers and children who live in households dependent on workless benefits, are lower than expected of a phase two centre. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is fluctuating slightly over time; however, it is acknowledged that some school reception years have very small cohorts of children.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

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| <b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>                          | 3 |
| <b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>  | 3 |
| <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>                    | 3 |
| <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>      | 3 |
| <b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>                 | 2 |
| <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>      | 3 |
| <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> | 3 |

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

The findings from a random selection of the most recent inspections of local childminders, childcare provision and schools have contributed to the centre report and judgements.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Bedale and Villages Surestart Centre on 19 and 20 September 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at a range of documentation, and talked to a number of children and adults, including parents, staff, local authority representatives and partners. We were very pleased to speak to some of you and to listen to your comments. You made your views clear to us and we have used them to make our judgements.

Many of you told us how the centre has helped you individually and how coming to activities has helped improve your families' lives. Comments given to inspectors show, for example, how attending the breastfeeding support group has helped mothers to continue to breastfeed their babies and how sessions on safety have helped parents to be aware that, 'dangers in the home are more than just the obvious ones'. However, although the centre is used well by those who attend activities, the numbers of families using the centre, particularly from those who the centre has identified as target groups, is not high enough, so we have asked the centre staff to improve this. We would also ask you as users of the centre to tell your friends and neighbours about the centre and how they can use its services.

Arrangements to ensure children and families are kept safe in centre activities is very well supported by well prepared and used risk assessments and staff promote safe practices in all they do. Staff and users of the centre fully appreciate the centre's role in safeguarding children and parents understand and accept that if concerns about children's welfare are identified then staff have to take action to address them.

The centre provides a variety of activities and services to promote both your and your children's learning and development and although activities are planned and based on your and your children's interests there is limited monitoring of how this is improving your lives. Therefore, we have asked the centre to do more tracking so as to ensure all that is provided meets your individual needs and is helping you and your children to develop and improve your economic well-being. Additionally, the centre works well in partnership with health to provide you with opportunities such as joint health clinic sessions and 'stay and play'. However, other partnerships, such as those with schools to promote school readiness, are less well developed. We have asked managers to develop this work further.

As I am sure you all know the centre has seen a number of changes in leadership and staffing over the last 18 months. There have also been a number of changes to the members of the centre's steering group and they are now developing their role in providing challenge and support to the centre. This group has some members who are parents. However, some of you told us you had little or no knowledge of the work of this group, nor did you take part in the 'Friends of Bedale Children's Centre' group. We would ask that you find out more and take part in the groups, as it is important that you are involved in the governance of the centre. Additionally, we have asked the centre and the local authority to work together to make the data available more 'user friendly' so that they can be used more easily and productively in the planning of services and in determining how the centre's work impacts on families.

We thoroughly enjoyed our time at your centre and hope it goes from strength to strength in being a focal point of an enjoyable life for all of you with young children in the area. Please accept our thanks for your support in carrying out this inspection.

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