

Inspection report for Sunflower Children's Centre

Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	384121
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Moorthorpe Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Happy Days Day Nursery 322066 St Luke's Day Nursery EY256122

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.

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, staff, parents and representatives from the school, local authority and partner agencies.

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

Information about the centre

Sunflower Children's Centre is accommodated in a refurbished building adjacent to Moorthorpe Primary School. The centre is operated on behalf of the local authority by the governing body of Moorthorpe Primary School. The centre has links to a further three primary schools and with two early-years childcare providers, St Luke's Day Nursery and Happy Days Day Care. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision in school are generally below those expected for their age. The centre is a phase two children's centre which was designated to deliver the full core purpose of children's centres in October 2009.

Moorthorpe is a former mining village to the south east of Wakefield, West Yorkshire. The vast majority of the community served by the centre is White British and there is a small but growing eastern European community. Worklessness in the area is high, as is the number of young children who live in households dependent on workless benefits.

The centre serves a community in the top 10% of the most disadvantaged areas in the country, with large pockets falling into the top 30%. The profile of disadvantage in the area has changed recently with one of the Super-Output Areas served by the centre identified as being more disadvantaged than in the past.

Services delivered by the centre's team and partners include health services, family learning and support, employment and training, and signposting to targeted support for families whose circumstances make them vulnerable.. These are delivered from the centre and other venues across the area.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Sunflower Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre. There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere in a safe and secure environment where long-term friendships have been forged. A small and dedicated team of staff provides a service, in partnership with other agencies, which gives good quality care, guidance and support to families. The number of families registered with the centre is high, however, only around 50% of families in the area are using the centre's services. The proportion of families using the centre whose circumstances may make them hard to reach or more vulnerable is lower still. This is despite the efforts the centre makes to promote interest from the community in the centre's services. Outcomes for families are improving, some rapidly, but some of the key outcomes related to health are still not in line with national averages. These circumstances contribute to the centre providing satisfactory value for money.

Governance of the centre currently lies with Moorthorpe Primary School governing body and is in transition to the local authority. This process has been slow. In the last year the governing body has not been as focused on the centre's work as it has been in the past. This is due to the school being put into special measures and the governors' efforts being directed on bringing the school up to a satisfactory level. Leaders and managers acknowledge this. Monitoring and challenge have continued but in less depth. The transition process to the local authority is providing the centre with additional support, monitoring and challenge, including a review of their priorities and targets, giving the centre satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement.

The centre strongly focuses on developing and improving children's skills, knowledge and abilities. This has brought about a significant improvement in the outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The gap between the children in the lowest

20% of achievement and their peers is narrowing well. The centre offers family learning opportunities for parents which improve parenting skills and family relationships. Family learning activities are enjoyed by parents and inspire a small minority to progress on to further education opportunities. The centre has not had sufficient focus on helping adults to make progress and, as a result, does not have a clear overview of their success if they are signposted to external learning providers or employment support services.

Parents are routinely asked to give feedback on centre activities and this is the main method used by the centre to involve parents in the shaping of services. Evaluation and monitoring systems employed by the centre are used routinely to review services, although they are heavily weighted towards qualitative information. The centre is currently working to targets set by the local authority and agreed by the governing body that are broad, but have clear links to the government's core purpose for children's centres. Good knowledge of the local community by staff and the partnership board is used to appropriately shape service delivery. For example, a message was delivered to increase parents' understanding of how long-term use of dummies and feeding bottles affects a child's dental health and speech and language development. This was the result of staff seeing older children using dummies and feeding bottles in centre sessions. Activities such as this are not, however, routinely supported by clearly stated measureable and achievable targets, limiting the centre's ability to adequately analyse their effectiveness and therefore whether they need to cease or be repeated.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The school's governing body should:
 - work with the local authority to improve the governance of the children's centre.
- The children's centre should:
 - improve evaluation and monitoring systems to set sharp, measureable and achievable targets to address the areas of need and concern within the reach area
 - increase the engagement of families in the reach area, in particular those whose circumstances make them hard to engage, with the children's centre
 - improve opportunities for adults to participate in additional education and training activities to increase their ability to support their children's learning and develop their employability skills.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents who use the centre value and enjoy the activities, experiences and support they receive. Family learning programmes are well attended by parents who access them. A small number of parents have moved on to courses that provide accredited qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Healthy eating and exercise is an area that is given very high priority in service delivery. Parents are developing a good understanding of healthy diets and those who have attended cook and eat sessions say they use the healthy recipes repeatedly with their families.

Parents' increased understanding is paying dividends, which are seen in the rapidly reducing number of children who are obese at the age of five. Data show there is also some reduction in the number of children who are obese when they reach the end of Year 6 in school.

Children behave well and are confident when they attend activities in the centre, and parents and partners say they feel safe. Parents who use the centre are increasingly using their improved parenting skills to protect the welfare and health of their children. Fewer children are taken to hospital as a result of injuries, either accidental or non-accidental, and most children are immunised against high risk childhood illnesses. The number of women who continue to smoke throughout pregnancy and after the birth of their child, however, remains high.

Children's learning and development are well supported and, as a result, they make good progress. Work to identify and target children who may find it hard to learn is successful and families are supported to help them to access funding for early education places for two-year-old children. Staff engage well with families whose children are subject to child protection plans and those involved with Common Assessment Framework processes. As a result, families receive tailored support that in most cases is instrumental in helping them to continue to live together with increasing independence from external intervention and support.

The centre regularly consults families that use its services to canvass their opinion on the activities and services available to them. This is a positive approach to involving parents in reviewing the centre's work. There is also a small parents' group, 'Helping Hands' that meets around four times a year to discuss local need and feed ideas into the centre's service delivery plan. However, too few parents actively contribute to this process. A small number of parents have been supported to develop their skills and become volunteers at the centre and, subsequently, gain National Vocational Qualifications that have led to employment.

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	3
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	3
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.	3

How good is the provision?

3

Over 80% of families in the reach area are registered with the centre and the number of families using centre services is increasing, but not rapidly enough, especially those whose circumstances make them hard to reach. The centre has had some success in engaging with Polish families who have moved into the community, however, few of them regularly use centre services. Families working with the family support team benefit from well-structured individual plans that provide well-matched support and guidance. In times of crisis the centre is a valuable lifeline for families who use it, providing them with emotional and practical support, such as sourcing free children's clothing and baby equipment. For example, one parent commented the centre had, 'gone over the top to help us.'

The range and quality of support, advice and guidance given to families is good and much appreciated. The centre programme of activities and services is appropriately matched to meet its stated targets. Community venues and partner agencies are used appropriately to take services out of the centre into the local area. Group activities, such as 'Stay and Play', 'Story Time' and 'Rhythm and Rhyme' are popular and well attended.

Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the area is either good or outstanding. Providers are well supported by the children's centre teacher. Childminders have a regular group session at the centre with the teacher. This is used well to provide them with training and advice on a wide range of subjects including planning, observation and implementation of the revised Early Years Foundation Stage. Visits to private and voluntary providers are used in a similar way with a focus on their inspection report recommendations included in the support.

The centre's approach to adult learning is family focused. This is where the centre has judged the adult learning need to be, and attendance is regular. Parents say they recognise the benefit of parenting courses, and that this helps them to develop more confidence and

bring their families closer together. However, too few parents take the opportunity to move on to other learning activities and the centre does not have a clear view of how many parents have made progress and to what level.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Staff receive appropriate and regular one-to-one meetings with their manager. These sessions include reviews of their work with individual families. Safeguarding arrangements are good and relationships between social care teams and centre staff secure good quality work to protect vulnerable children. Centre staff work with families across the thresholds of need from those accessing universal services to families whose children are subject to child protection plans. They are very aware of the need for consultation and discussion to ensure work at an appropriate level is taking place with each family. Staff work sensitively with families who have had their children taken into the care of the local authority.

Governance at the centre is in place and is understood. However, it has been subjected to significant disruption and this has inhibited the procedures for target-setting and monitoring of the centre. Nevertheless, monitoring and challenge have continued, albeit at a reduced level. The centre is receiving more support from the local authority during the current transitional arrangements in governance. There is a good pool of local knowledge. The staff and partners are very aware of what the issues are in the area and the barriers there are to engaging with pockets of the community. The centre is appropriately focused on working to address local issues and areas of need. This is not identified well enough in the centre's action planning or target-setting and the work is, therefore, not visible and not being measured sufficiently in the review cycle.

All activities are routinely evaluated by staff using their own observations and comments given by parents. This information is discussed by staff in team meetings to make ongoing adaptations to activities and groups. The centre does not always focus well enough on whether groups that have been running for long periods are still meeting their initial aims. For example, 'Rhythm and Rhyme' is a very popular group and staff skilfully manage the large numbers attending. However, the number of adults and children in the group observed meant it was not practical for everyone to fully participate in the session.

The centre appropriately meets its duty to promote equality and diversity and tackle discrimination. The centre is welcoming and inclusive. Families of disabled children and those who have special educational needs are very well supported. Practical support includes securing funding for specialist equipment and attending meetings with professionals involved in their child's life. Parents are also given good levels of emotional support which has helped improve some family relationships. There is still reluctance from some of the centre's target groups to use the services and activities on offer. In addition it is a limited number of parents who take an active part in the 'Helping Hands' group and the partnership board, which is the centre's advisory board. Parental engagement and involvement is an area the centre recognises as something in need of improvement. As a result, the centre currently provides satisfactory value for money.

The range of partnership work is strong and partners are well represented on the partnership board. Families are often introduced to the centre through partners, for example, midwife drop-in sessions are delivered at the centre establishing parental links with the centre ante-natally. Partners are often used well in the centre to introduce parents to the benefits of other services at the centre. The Bookstart coordinator and community food and health development worker are invited to attend activities and give a taster of the activities they deliver. They also give parents strategies in response to individual questions or concerns, such as advice on healthy weaning techniques. This is a well-planned approach that avoids over-exposure to messages in general sessions so that parents take on board what is being said.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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.	3

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

The findings from the inspections of Happy Days Nursery and Rainbow Nursery were used to guide the inspection judgments on the progress made by children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and on the quality of early years provision. Children make good progress and provision is good or better.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sunflower Children's Centre on 9 and 10 October 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much to those of you who spoke to us in meetings and in activity sessions. We found the information you gave us very useful. We also spent some time looking at the comments you have made about the centre and the activities you have used, to help us to make our inspection judgements.

The centre provides you and your families with a safe and secure environment. We found that there is a warm and welcoming atmosphere at the centre where long-term friendships have been forged. The dedicated staff team and their partners, such as health teams and Bookstart, provide services which give you good quality care, guidance and support. Some activities offered by the centre, such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Rhythm and Rhyme' are very popular. The number of families who live in the area and register with the centre is high. However, only around half of the families in the area use the centre's services. The number of families whose circumstances may make them harder to reach or more vulnerable who use the centre is lower still. We have asked the centre to work with the community to increase the number of families who use the centre. Outcomes for you and your families are improving. Some, such as the skills and knowledge of children when they leave Reception Year in school, are improving very well.

Moorthorpe Primary School governing body is responsible for managing and monitoring the children's centre at the moment but plans are underway to transfer this responsibility to the local authority. This process has been slow. In the last year the governing body has not been as focused on the centre's work as it has been in the past. This is because the school was in special measures and the governors were concentrating on improving the school to bring it to at least a satisfactory level. The governors have continued to monitor and challenge the children's centre but this has not been as detailed as it has been in the past. The local authority is also providing the centre with monitoring and challenge visits and is

reviewing the centre's targets. With this support and challenge the centre has satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement in its work with you and your families. We have asked the school governors to improve its work with the children's centre.

We found that the centre has a strong focus on developing and improving your children's skills, knowledge and abilities. This has particularly helped the children who might find it more difficult to learn, and the gap between how they and the other children in their classes achieve at the end of Reception Year is narrowing well. You told us that you enjoy the family learning opportunities that the centre offers and that they are helping you to improve your parenting skills and family relationships. When you are on a course we found that you attend regularly. We learned that a small number of you use the family learning courses as a stepping stone to progress on to other adult education opportunities and we were pleased to hear how some of you have successfully gained National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). We have asked the centre to increase the number of opportunities you have to move on to other learning and development activities.

We found that the centre regularly asks you to give feedback on its activities and this is the main method used by the team to involve you in influencing what happens in groups and activities. We know that a small 'Helping Hands' group of parents meets around four times a year to discuss what parents feel the centre should be doing to meet the needs of families in the area. The centre tries hard to help you to make comments about the activities. The centre leaders use the information you give them appropriately to help them review the quality of what they are providing for you and your families. However, this does not help them to find out how effective the activities are in helping to improve outcomes for you and your family. We have asked the centre to improve how they review activities.

The staff and members of the partnership board have a good understanding of the needs and issues that affect your community. They use the information they have to make sure the activities they are providing are helpful to you and your families. For example, we know they have taken time to help you to understand how the long term use of dummies and feeding bottles affect a child's teeth and speech and language development. When the centre is providing groups, courses and activities that are aimed at meeting the needs of you and your community staff do not always have a clear and measureable target that would help them to test how well they have done. We have asked the centre staff to improve how they set their targets.

Thank you to all the users we met for your input into the inspection. It really was appreciated and we wish you all the best for the future and for the future of your centre.

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