

Inspection report for Buddies Children's Centre

Local authority	Barnsley
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Burton Road Primary
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY320619 Buddies Children's Centre

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 year's inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, parents and representatives from partner agencies and the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Buddies Children's Centre was designated as a phase one children's centre in 2006. It is accommodated in a purpose built extension to Burton Road Primary School. There is onsite early years childcare operating under the name of the children's centre. The childcare was inspected separately in December 2011 and the quality of the childcare was judged to be good overall. The full inspection report for the childcare can be found on the Ofsted website. The centre also uses the Metrodome leisure complex and New Street clinic to deliver services as its main accommodation is located at the edge of the reach area at the bottom of a hill.

The area served by the centre incorporates Barnsley town centre and is on a bus route from the main transport interchange in the town. The area was formerly a mining community with the majority of employment coming from the coal mining industry. Employment in the area now is largely in the public sector.

Almost all families in the reach area are of White British heritage. However, the number of families from Eastern Europe is increasing. There is a Traveller community within the reach area of the children's centre. Much of the area served by the centre falls within the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country and around 24% of children live in households dependent on workless benefits. Unemployment in the local authority increased by 12.4% in the year from May 2011 to April 2012. Worklessness in the local authority is high.

The centre is managed by the local authority to deliver services to meet the government's core purpose for children's centres. The centre shares a manager and advisory board with Lundwood and Monk Bretton Children's Centre. The centre provides a variety of activities for parents and children alongside services such as individual family support packages and parenting programmes. When children enter school Early Years Foundation Stage provision their skills, knowledge and abilities are below 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

'All the staff are very approachable and it creates a brilliant atmosphere', is a reflection of the feelings users have for Buddies Children's Centre. The centre provides good quality services that are well used by families from the area it serves and the wider locality. The impact the services have on families is good overall. The small, dedicated and highly-skilled staff team deliver activities and support packages offering outstanding care, guidance and support to families. There is a strong focus on increasing the number of families registered and engaging with the centre's services, particularly those whose circumstances may make them hard to reach or vulnerable. As a result, a rapid increase in families engaging with the centres services means that the majority are involved in some way. The information collected about a few groups such as the traveller community is not as good as that for all other groups within the reach area. This means that the centre is not able to shape services specifically for these groups as well as it does for others.

Governance of the centre lies with the local authority. Clear and robust management systems include regular staff supervision and thorough quarterly monitoring of the centre's performance against well-thought-through and measurable targets. Users have regular opportunities to feed back on the activities and courses they attend. These circumstances indicate that the centre has good capacity to maintain continuous improvement. The centre's parents' forum has not operated for some time and few parents are on the advisory panel. However, managers are keenly aware of the need to re-establish a parents' forum to give users more strategic involvement in developing the centre's service delivery.

The safety and welfare of children are at the forefront of the centre's work and safeguarding and safety for centre users are outstanding. Strong and very well respected working relationships between the centre and its partners bring about excellent team work when families have children who are subject to a child protection plan or where families are in need of extra support with parenting skills. The centre has an excellent reputation for its carefully considered use of Common Assessment Framework processes. Families engage extremely well with the process because services are provided swiftly that are instrumental in preventing many families from needing more intensive work.

Children make good progress in the childcare provision at the centre. Robust systems are used to track and monitor children's progress and data are used well to identify and plan for narrowing the gap in achievement between the 20% of children who find it more difficult to learn than their peers. The achievement gap has fluctuated, but it is narrowing. There is a good understanding of the reasons for the fluctuation and activities are underway to address it.

Adults enjoy a good range of learning and development opportunities. Case studies show that they make good progress when they work with family support workers to address specific areas of need and that some adults progress into further training or employment. Use of 'distance travelled' and other evaluation tools give the centre a good indication of the success, or otherwise, of their work. The centre does not have as clear a picture of adults' achievement and progress as it does for the children who use the centre. It loses sight of adults' learning when they are signposted to learning providers, such as further education colleges.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase parental involvement in the centre by re-establishing the parents' forum and increasing their membership on the advisory board.
- Improve some services by better monitoring and analysis of:
 - adults' progress in their learning and development, in particular when they access learning delivered off-site by other agencies
 - the centre's work with specific harder to reach groups such as the Traveller community.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents engage well with activities at the centre and enjoy the experiences they have. Healthy eating and exercise are high on the agenda at the centre in response to increasing levels of obesity in children at the end of Reception Year in school. Take up of swimming classes and parent-and-child exercise sessions delivered at the Metrodome leisure centre is high and recent data show that obesity levels are reducing well. Evaluation of these activities clearly demonstrates that parents have increased the amount of exercise they and their children do. They say they are likely to continue with their change in behaviour, particularly taking children swimming.

Relationships in the centre are good and respectful. Staff create a welcoming and non-threatening atmosphere that establishes a deep sense of trust from families. As a result, families who need high levels of support engage very well with the centre and respond extremely well to carefully planned support programmes. Activities such as baby massage and baby yoga are used particularly well to improve parents' understanding of their child's emotional needs. They also strengthen parent and child relationships, especially with families who may be vulnerable, for example, due to domestic violence. Families with children who are subject to child protection plans are very successfully making progress and, in a six-month period, over half of them have had their child protection plans closed. Staff skilfully raise parents' awareness of how to protect their children from injury and harm. Consequently, parents have a very well-developed knowledge of how to keep their children safe. Admissions to hospital as a result of injury are steadily decreasing.

Parents see the centre as 'a lifeline' that supports them emotionally as well as practically. While adults' academic progress is not always apparent, their overall progress is. Many families are involved in courses and activities that are preparing them well for further training. A small number of parents have successfully moved into volunteering roles at the children's centre and others have accessed college courses or gained employment. Case studies show that parents have raised aspirations and are looking to make positive changes to their lives. Users are keen to share their views on the centre's work and regularly use the mechanisms available to give feedback on activities. However, they are less likely to take up the offer to act as members of a parents' forum to give users a more strategic involvement in developing centre services.

Family life is enhanced in a number of ways. For example, parents are supported to tackle debt and find their way around the benefits and support systems, especially when children have a disability or the family is new to the country. Data show that children in the reach area are making good progress in their development with year-on-year improvement in the scores they achieve at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is particularly noticeable in children who have accessed Buddies Children's Centre childcare and who have received funded childcare places as two-year-olds.

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	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	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

'I did not know what to do or where to get help until the family support worker became involved.' Parents do not hesitate to contact the centre when they are in difficulty. Equally, when staff find a family in crisis they respond rapidly with immediate, practical support, such as providing food, clothing and nappies when families have not received benefits payments. Rapid response work is swiftly followed up with carefully tailored work packages that support progression. Adults who have found themselves in difficult circumstances have moved on from intensive support to a position where they have accessed education and training courses, but this is not monitored in a systematic way. Excellent work is done with families to help them to develop confidence and skills to ensure they are not dependent on the children's centre or its staff team. The centre provides outstanding care that looks after the welfare of children and families very well.

Staff and management's insight into the needs of the area and individual families is highly perceptive and, as a result, the services on offer are fitting and appropriate. Individual families are consulted on their needs and how well they think they are doing, using a family star assessment tool. Users find this a helpful and supportive process that enables them to reflect on their circumstances and gives them a visual image of the progress they are making. The process for referrals to the centre has recently been centralised by the local authority. Cases allocated to family support workers are now reviewed and the work package offered is monitored well. When a family is receiving support, issues are not dealt with in isolation but are managed in ways that mean they are achievable and beneficial to the family. Staff work tirelessly to find ways to help families to make progress. They use the services of private, voluntary and statutory partners very thoughtfully to enhance their work with families and to bring about good outcomes.

The centre has made good progress in identifying and working with families whose circumstances make them hard to reach or vulnerable as they are identified in the government's agenda for children's centres. The engagement of these families with the centre is increasing rapidly. There are a few hard to reach groups that are particular to the reach area with whom the centre works. However, the checks on the impact of the services these groups receive are not detailed enough to better shape the services for them. Managers have identified that a number of families who have registered with the centre do not use its services and they have put in place systems to find out why this is. While this work is recent, information gained so far has prompted the delivery of a parenting group on Saturdays that is more accessible to working parents and parents-to-be.

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.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements for the centre are clear and there is good, regular support for the manager from the local authority. Challenge is a strong feature of the local authority's monitoring and it also comes from the well-briefed advisory board. The shared advisory board has representation from parents but these are not currently drawn from the centre's reach area. Nevertheless, parents are regularly and routinely consulted about the centre and its services. Their views and comments are acknowledged and responded to with clarity. Evaluation is an ongoing process integrated into all aspects of the centre's work. This means service delivery is continually reviewed and carefully crafted to meet the needs of the area, illustrating the centre's good capacity to sustain improvement and deliver good value for money.

Attention to the promotion of equality and diversity is strong. All centre activities have an equality-impact assessment in place. Recognition that the location of the children's centre is a potential barrier to families using centre services resulted in delivery being taken out into the community. For example, staff took equipment and activities out to a Traveller site that is within the reach area. This helped to establish a relationship with the community and resulted in families accessing funded places in the childcare setting for two-year-olds. They also established a pattern of regular attendance that continued when children started at the adjoining school. This is an example of the good insight and determination the manager and staff have to break down barriers to accessing services.

The centre fulfils its responsibilities to ensure staff are suitable to work with children very well. Clear and meticulous records are kept of staff vetting checks including a record of the

person checking their identity. Training in safeguarding and associated subjects, such as domestic violence, are a frequent feature in staff training records. Staff's excellent skills and knowledge in this area are reflected in the type of work they carry in their caseloads. They regularly work with families who are involved in high level, intensive work with the social care team, including working with looked-after children. There are excellent and open channels of communication between agencies working with families. Centre staff are highly skilled in instigating Common Assessment Framework processes with families.

Use of the centre's resources is well thought through to maximise service delivery. There is a clear local agenda in place to reduce the duplication of services and to harness expertise. Delivery of healthy lifestyle activities at the Metrodome leisure centre and New Street clinic go a long way towards meeting this agenda. Staff use the strong and well-established relationships with partners to good effect in their work with families.

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	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	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.	2

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Buddies Children's Centre on 8 and 9 November 2012. We judged the centre as good 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.

We found when we spoke with you and read your comments that you think the children's centre has a good and friendly atmosphere. You also find the staff friendly and approachable. The centre provides you and your families with good quality services that more and more of you are using regularly. This includes families who might not want to use the centre and those who might need extra help to cope in a new environment such as young parents or fathers. We know this because the centre is good at gathering and using information about who uses the centre. We have asked the centre to get even better at this by monitoring how well specific groups such as Traveller and families from Eastern Europe use the centre.

The staff team is small, dedicated and highly skilled. We found that the activities and services they provide offer outstanding care, guidance and support to you. They are also having a positive impact on the health, safety and education for you and your families.

The local authority is responsible for monitoring how well the centre is doing. They have good systems in place to make sure that staff are supported in their work and the centre is meeting the targets that have been set for it. We found that you also have regular opportunities to tell the centre what you think about the activities and courses you attend. We know that the parents' forum has not operated for quite a long time. However, we also know that the centre is keen start the parents' forum again to give you even more say in developing what is on offer at the centre. We have asked them to work on this with you to encourage you to come to the forum or even to be a member of the advisory board.

The centre puts the safety and welfare of your children at the forefront of its work and we found that safeguarding and safety for you and your families are outstanding. The centre has strong and very well respected working relationships with its partners, such as health workers. We found that this made for excellent team work if families have children who are subject to a child protection plan or need extra support with their children. We found that the centre has an excellent reputation for how it carefully uses the Common Assessment Framework process. We saw that you appreciate this involvement with your families and you participate extremely well with the process.

Your children make good progress in their learning and development when they go to Buddies childcare. We know this because there are good systems to track and monitor children's progress. We also found that the centre is good at using the information it has about children who find it more difficult to learn to give them extra help. Work is done to help them and this means that they are beginning to catch up with other children in their age group when they get to the end of Reception Year in school.

We found that you are offered and enjoy a good range of learning and development opportunities. When you work with family support workers on areas where you need help and support we found that you do well and some of you go on to access further training or gain employment. The 'family star' and 'distance travelled' work that you do with staff give you and them a good idea of how well you are doing. However, we found that the centre does not have as clear a picture of how well you are doing as it does for your children. We have asked the centre to get better at this.

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.