

Inspection report for Silver Birch Children's Centre

Local authority	Rotherham Borough Council
Inspection number	406971
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Centre leader	Joanne Walker
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	106924 Flanderwell Primary School
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.

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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of Rotherham Borough Council, members of the advisory board, the leadership team, headteachers of local schools, centre staff and partner agencies such as health professionals and the Jobcentre and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Silver Birch Children's Centre is a phase two centre situated on the site of Flanderwell Primary School, in the village of Flanderwell in the Bramley, Ravenfield and Wickersley Ward in Rotherham. It is located in the centre of a large housing estate which was built in the 1970's and serves families living in one of the 13% most deprived areas in the country. Access to early years provision is provided through a few private, voluntary and independent nurseries and at the primary school during spring and summer terms. The linked primary school provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements and was last inspected in May 2010. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. The majority of families are of White British heritage and many are unemployed, some having been made redundant recently due to closures of large employers locally. Families face issues of poor housing, poor health, substance misuse and domestic violence.

Of the 756 children aged under five years living in the reach area, 25% live in households dependent on workless benefits. There are 88 lone parents in receipt of benefits. On entry to early years provision children's skills knowledge and abilities are typically below those expected for their age.

A range of health, social care, family support and education services is provided at the centre and through home visiting. Crèche facilities are available to ensure the centre meets its core purpose.

The head of centre is also the headteacher of Flanderwell Primary School, and oversees the work of the centre supported by a lead teacher. The advisory board consists of representatives of various professional partners, local community members and parents. Governance is provided by Rotherham Borough Council.

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

Silver Birch Children's Centre is good. Outcomes for children and families are good and parents are highly appreciative and benefit from the good provision and the work the centre undertakes to help and support them.

Parents are encouraged to learn about positively managing their children's behaviour and how to support their development and learning. Children benefit from the variety of good quality activities the centre provides. Healthy lifestyles are effectively promoted through a range of activities. Parents develop a good understanding of safety and the centre ensures families are effectively safeguarded. Those who are subject to a child protection plan are very well supported which helps children to remain safely within their families. All users are encouraged to evaluate the quality of the centre's work and be involved in shaping the programmes, and a few parents are involved in volunteering. Support for improving the economic well-being of families through training is good and a priority of the centre. However, the crèche facility is not always available and this impacts on some parents' ability to regularly access learning programmes that will enhance their employment prospects.

The centre uses its good knowledge of the local area to make sure that activities are matched well to the needs and interests of children and their families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable. Children's emotional well-being, development and safety are effectively promoted and parents are encouraged to develop their skills and self-confidence through the activities on offer. Sessions in the centre are creative, vibrant and stimulating and children make good progress during activities. However, the recording of what children learn during centre activities does not routinely monitor progress towards the early learning goals.

The centre has experienced changes within its day-to-day management and a local authority restructure has led to a reduction in staffing levels and some services. However, the staff team have remained steadfast and undeterred in their commitment to supporting families and making a positive difference to their lives. The centre is well supported by the local authority and governance arrangements provide effective challenge and good support for continuous improvement. Board members and managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the centre, and self-evaluation is accurate and comprehensive. Local data received from the local authority are good and is very effectively used by the centre to target its work where it is most needed. The centre's achievements through these changes indicate that the centre provides good value for money and its capacity to make further improvements is also good.

The centre has a strong, inclusive ethos which celebrates diversity throughout its work. Relationships with partner agencies are effective ensuring that integrated approaches to support families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable are prompt and sensitively tailored. Parents, including younger parents and fathers, are active in many aspects of the centre's work.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the recording of children's learning to accurately monitor their progress towards the early learning goals.
- Explore ways of providing regular crèche support to enable more adults to engage in learning to improve further their employability skills.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre ensures good outcomes for children and their families across its range of services and activities. Healthy lifestyles are promoted and the referral of families to a local weight management group, as well as a range of physical exercise programmes, such as 'Active Tots' has been particularly effective. New parents receive good quality ante-natal and post-natal support through midwifery and health services in the centre. Teenage parents engage well through links with a local project. One parent expressed the views of many that the centre was 'a lifeline' and that they 'wouldn't know what to do without it'. Children safely move between the activities inside and the large well-equipped outdoor play area. Breastfeeding support is good and is contributing to a significant increase in the area from a low baseline. The percentage is higher than local averages and close to the national average. At 7% the level of obesity in Reception Year children compares favourably with the national average.

Parents receiving family support describe how they are reassured by vigilant staff who 'keep an eye on us for signs of concern'. They understand the necessity for this and feel the

centre is an essential safety net during times of difficulty. The centre leads on some Common Assessment Framework (CAF) interventions, as well as providing targeted support for children in need or those subject to a child protection plan. Effective early intervention has led to tailored support, de-escalation from child protection plans and in some cases, avoided children being received into local authority care.

Children make good progress in their learning and development overall given their starting points. As a result the achievement gap between the lowest 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest is narrowing. Analysis of children's progress towards the achievement of 78+ points, for those who have attended the centre, is good. Whilst children clearly make good progress during activity sessions in the centre, learning is not routinely recorded to closely monitor their progress towards the early learning goals. Speech and language programmes have shown improved outcomes for children likely to be at risk of language delay. Childminders engage well with the centre and are effectively supported to improve their skills. Links with local schools ensure transition is effectively supported for children as well and communication between their parents and school staff. Disabled children and those with special educational needs accessing services, receive an individualised approach to their learning and subsequent transition to school which enables them to settle well.

The centre offers adults opportunities to attend programmes through family learning that effectively support the development of their self-confidence and self-esteem. These include parenting programmes and short courses on safety at home, paediatric first aid and essential first aid. Progression onto literacy and numeracy and volunteering programmes is available and has led to a number of parents moving into education, training and employment after a period of time volunteering. Links with the Jobcentre and the location of a well used information kiosk in the reception area provides parents with good information on job vacancies and community information as well as debt and benefits advice.

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

Provision is good because the centre provides a wide range of integrated services and activities to increasing numbers of families in the reach area with circumstances that make them most vulnerable. Activities such as 'Active Tots', 'Riddle and Rhyme' and 'Super Stories' are well attended. The very large majority of families are registered and use the centre regularly. Information sharing between agencies ensures that work is well matched to meet needs. The family support and outreach workers are effective in supporting the most disadvantaged and families in crisis. This work is challenging, and case studies and records show that family support and outreach workers effectively encourage better parenting skills and improved circumstances for many families. The centre works with the local comprehensive school to offer work experience for students on childcare programmes who provide voluntary support at the crèche. There is, however, limited access to qualified crèche workers, which inhibits attendance for parents on some courses.

Learning and enjoyment are central to the centre's work. Staff work diligently to encourage parents to engage fully in the range of activities and, as a result, participation rates are good. In an 'Active Tots' session parents commented enthusiastically about how much they had learnt about their children's development and gained in confidence to support them. Information cards are usefully placed close to the different activities to show how they support wider learning. Families come to the centre because they know they will be welcomed and will have fun. They also know they will be safe and will receive help should they need it. Parents are very effusive, and emotional, about the quality of guidance and support they receive, particularly in times of crisis. Advice and support about domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse and sexual health is discretely available, and staff often act as a mediator for referrals to specialist services.

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

Governance arrangements are clear and effective. The local authority and members of the advisory board provide good support, oversight and challenge which hold the centre to account. Reports about the centre's performance and budget management are regularly discussed by the advisory board which provides good scrutiny of the centre's self-evaluation. The centre's development action plan sets out clear and challenging objectives which are closely aligned to the council's priorities. The lead teacher makes good use of the local authority data and aligns provision effectively to meet the needs of targeted families, including those who have disabled children and children with special educational needs, within the reach area.

Day-to-day operation of the centre is effective. Staff receive clear line management, and robust supervision and performance reviews. Team work is effective and morale is good. Staff provide peer support for one another which contributes to the continued success in meeting targets within reduced hours at the centre. Staff are well-qualified and have access to many professional development opportunities. Accommodation and resources are made of high quality sustainable materials and are used well. As a result the centre provides good value for money.

The promotion of equality and diversity and inclusive practice is well embedded across the centre's work. Adaptations to accommodate disabled parents and children and those with special educational needs are made where required. The celebration of different faith festivals, displays and equipment widen users' knowledge of multi-cultural communities. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff are well-trained, and policies and procedures for safeguarding children are well-established and effective. Safe recruitment practices, including enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks, are regularly monitored and reviewed for all staff and volunteers, including the volunteers from the local comprehensive school. Risk assessments and attention to health and safety procedures are robust and ensure staff and families are safe. There is an effective lone-working policy in place to promote the safety of all staff undertaking home visits and outreach work.

Effective early intervention and preventative work developed with key partners and agencies, such as health services, social care, churches and voluntary organisations, contribute to the good provision and outcomes achieved for many families with circumstances which make them most vulnerable. Joint working arrangements such as home visits and group work alongside other professional colleagues, are efficient and effective. Duplication of services is avoided and information is shared appropriately. Families comment favourably on the benefits of these arrangements.

Parents regularly contribute to the centre's development through feedback about activities and services they receive. The parents forum operates creatively by discussing selected 'hot topics' and their views are then forwarded to the advisory board. Changes are regularly made to programmes and events following these discussions.

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

The Ofsted inspection report for Flanderwell Primary School provided supporting information about partnership working, achievement of pupils and contextual information about the area in which the centre is situated.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Silver Birch Children's Centre on 28-29 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We very much enjoyed our visit and thank you for the time you gave to sharing your experiences of the centre. Your views have helped us to inform the conclusions we have come to about how well the centre is doing and what it needs to do to improve further. We also talked to staff and other professionals who work with you.

Everyone is welcomed at the centre and treated with respect. Relationships between staff, parents and children are good. The centre provides a range of high quality programmes, activities and services. Children and families who come to the centre and join in with activities do well. Healthy lifestyles are promoted effectively and staff make sure that you and your children are supported to learn about many aspects of health, including eating healthily and taking exercise.

We spoke to parents who have benefited from adult courses and this has had a significant impact on their confidence, self-esteem and willingness to find solutions to their problems. There are, however, some missed opportunities for you to attend more programmes because the crèche facility is not always available and we have asked the centre to explore how they might improve this.

Promoting children's learning and development is central to activities provided at the centre, and you told us you are helped to understand how you can help your children learn. Play sessions such as 'Active Tots', 'Riddle and Rhyme' and Super Stories' are very popular,

creative and fun. These activities help children grow in confidence and skill before they move onto nursery. The recording of children's achievements in activity sessions in the centre does not currently link to the early learning goals well enough and we have asked the centre to develop a method for this to happen. There is good practice in place for those children who attend special activities, such as those programmes which help with speech and language development.

We think arrangements for ensuring you and your children are safe are good. You told us that you feel safe in the centre and are able to talk to centre staff about any worries or concerns you have. Family and outreach staff provide good support to promote safety in the home, and thorough risk assessments are undertaken for all activities to ensure safety for everyone.

The quality of the care, guidance and support for families is good. The health and well-being of parents and children is given the highest priority. Family visitors provide help to those of you with circumstances which may make you vulnerable when you need it most. This support may be for a variety of reasons, such as help with children's behaviour, managing the household budget or coping with domestic violence. The centre takes swift and effective action to provide targeted support and this helps keep children safe. You were very positive about the difference this work has made to your lives. Partnerships with other agencies are effective. Joint working with families is well-established and adds good value, both to the centre's work and in helping to make life a little easier for families.

You told us you are encouraged to feedback about the centre, by saying how you feel about the services and what could be improved. Many of your comments are positive. We also spoke with parents who volunteer and they told us how much they had learnt, and how much they had grown in self-confidence.

The centre is well managed and the staff team works hard to deliver good services. The building is busy and in good condition. Displays, materials and photographs throughout the centre give good attention to inclusion and diversity and the activities you and your children have taken part in. Staff are very knowledgeable about the area and the families who live in it. Staff make sure that resources are targeted to meet your needs.

Thank you again, for your welcome and for taking the time to talk to us. We thoroughly enjoyed our time at the centre and wish you every success in the future.

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