

Inspection report for Milefield Children's Centre

Local authority	Barnsley
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Milefield Primary School URN 106617
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Milefield Children's Centre EY306050

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 the interim management team and local authority representatives, centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners. These included childminders, early years coordinators for this and another local children's centre, health visitors, breastfeeding link worker, youth worker, multi-agency Common Assessment Framework (CAF) coordinator and representatives from Dearne Valley College and the 'Stronger Families' panel. They visited an outreach centre.

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

Information about the centre

Milefield Children's Centre is a phase one centre, co-located within the main building of Milefield Primary School. The centre is situated within the village of Grimethorpe. The centre was designated in 2006 and offers families within the reach the full core purpose. Childcare provision is located in a nursery at the back of the building. The nursery offers full day care in addition to sessional care which includes, 'Nursery Education Funded' places and 'Two-Year Entitlement Funded' places. The linked provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The nursery was last inspected in January 2013, in the week before the children's centre. The school was last inspected in May 2010. The reports of both these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre's accommodation is on one level and comprises a health room, office spaces, a large meeting room, a multi-purpose community space, dining area for childcare, a kitchen and childcare facility.

The centre offers support and integrated services for children and young people from pre-natal to 19 years. The centre runs a range of integrated services including health, support for teenage parents, sexual health, family support, and adult education. Since December 2012, an interim management team, comprising of the area manager and the children's centre's programme manager, has led the centre. The area manager also line manages three other children's centres. There was no outreach worker between December 2011 and May 2012. The centre works in close partnership with health visitors, social care, a breastfeeding link worker, midwives, the alcohol and oral health team, youth workers, pathway for domestic abuse and the Barnsley CAF coordinator. The centre is managed by the local authority, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, to deliver services to meet the government's core purpose for children's centres. The centre has a Service Level Agreement in place and some specific targets are linked to the trial 'Payment by Results National Measures'. The centre shares a core-purpose advisory board with Buttercup Children's Centre which is located three miles away. Both centres support the local 'well-being area' of Cudworth and North East.

Grimethorpe was renowned for its mining heritage. It was named in the 1994 European Union's study of deprivation as the poorest village in the country and among the poorest in Europe. Several regeneration projects have led to an improvement in Grimethorpe's economic profile in recent years, particularly the construction of the Dearne Valley Link Road and the Park Springs Industrial Estate which have brought jobs to the area. Business regeneration has also brought about major housing regeneration.

The reach area of the centre comprises six Lower Super Output Areas. There are 716 children under five years of age living in the reach area and half of these live in the most deprived areas. Of these, 68% are registered with the centre. There are 36% of children living in households dependent on workless benefits. Of the families where an adult is in work, 31% are low paid and are in receipt of Working Tax Credit. Of those families in employment, 13% receive the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Most families are of White British heritage and few speak English as an additional language. There is an increasing proportion of Eastern European families in the reach area, but it is still low in comparison with the national picture. Most children's levels of skill on entry to early years provision is well-below the typically expected levels for their age, particularly in their personal, social, emotional, communication and language skills. There are four primary schools and three private day nurseries within the reach 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

Milefield Children’s Centre provides satisfactory outcomes for children and families. The pace of improvement is accelerating following a period of disrupted leadership. The experienced interim leadership team from the local authority has consolidated performance and systems to ensure the centre continues to move forward in its development. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and the centre shows a satisfactory capacity to improve. Parents and grandparents praise the work of the centre and typically comment, ‘Absolutely brilliant. Fantastic. They made a very hard, horrible situation easier for me.’

Some aspects of the centre are particular strengths. The extent to which children are safe, the quality of care, guidance and support that centre staff provide to families and the effectiveness of safeguarding are all good. There is meticulous recording within safeguarding documentation. Parents say they feel safe at the centre and learn how to keep their families safe at home. Staff are always available in times of crisis to identify the best way forward for families. They take good care of all children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs.

The centre is bright, friendly, and offers a warm welcome to all users. Those who speak English as an additional language are made to feel at ease and are quietly supported by sensitive staff. Children have fun in the spacious learning environment. They learn and develop at a steady rate. However, it is sometimes difficult to judge exactly what it is that children, or their parents, have learned during sessions because their initial skills are not recorded. It is difficult to assess the progress they make following their participation.

All staff pay careful attention to the promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity. They also tackle discrimination appropriately. Nonetheless, too few users, especially from target groups engage in centre-led activities, particularly fathers. There are some well-established links with early years settings within the reach area and local ‘well-being area’. Parents

complete evaluations at the end of the courses they attend. However, they are not sufficiently involved in taking decisions about how the centre should run or the future direction of services.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the numbers of users who engage with the centre, particularly from target groups and, of these, particularly fathers.
- Improve the checking and recording of the impact of the services provided by the centre and so give a clear picture of users' learning, progress and skills' development.
- Develop the role of parents in evaluating centre services and in contributing to decision making.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Expectant mothers and children under five years easily access vitamins either free or at a low price, as part of the 'Healthy Start' scheme. Children and families who are in specific need of help are identified by health professionals and pointed towards the centre. They access a range of services, many centring on key priorities such as oral health, healthy eating and smoking cessation. Families who engage with the centre mostly develop a clearer understanding of how maintain a healthy lifestyle. They learn not to give their children bottles of juice or to allow them constant access to dummies. The very popular 'Cook and Eat' sessions help parents to understand the basics of nutrition and how to cook simple, tasty and wholesome food for their children and families. One young mother said, 'I couldn't cook at all before. I had bought baby food but it's expensive. After the course, I knew how to cook vegetables for my baby and that it doesn't have to be soft.' The proportion of reception-age children in the reach area who are obese is below the national average at 6%.

Well-organised breastfeeding support encourages 58% of mothers to start breastfeeding, although figures of 23% sustaining breastfeeding by six-to-eight weeks are below national averages. Domestic violence, alcohol and substance misuse are priority areas. Staff ensure that children in the reach area are safe and well protected. Those children who are subject to a child protection plan or who are looked after are closely tracked and their needs carefully recorded and met. Staff initiate the CAF process whenever required, often as a form of crisis management. In approximately 40% of cases, there is a link to behaviour or emotional harm. The centre is the highest producer per capita of CAFs in Barnsley. It also has a good closure rate. Children behave very well at the centre because they copy the good behaviour of the staff. Parents say they feel safe at the centre. One affirmed, 'It's nice to know that you've got people out there looking out for you.'

Outreach work includes providing 'Chattytots' sessions in the area. There is a keen intention to encourage children's speaking and listening skills through story and rhyme and they enjoy

these sessions. There is also a clear focus to encouraging parents to restrict the use of dummies and bottles. Within the reach area, the percentage of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage rose by 12.9% to 51.6%. Although below the national average, this represented a significant increase on 2011. The narrowing of the achievement gap for the bottom 20% widened considerably to 48% in 2012. This was mainly due to children accessing education at an earlier age, so far more were younger when they reached the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, start points for children and adults are not clearly enough assessed or recorded when they first join a programme. Consequently, it is not possible to evaluate with ease or accuracy the exact progress made or skills learned. In addition, although the numbers of users from target groups is growing steadily, particularly from the most deprived areas, too few fathers attend the centre.

Children behave well and all users develop positive and respectful relationships with each other and the staff. Parents provide regular evaluations of individual activities or courses but too few contribute to any wider decision making about the centre's work or development. The Family Information Service receives regular referrals from the children's centre. An officer visits the centre regularly and provides useful information on training, careers and childcare. One satisfied user has enjoyed such a good experience at the centre that she is taking up a volunteering role, saying, 'It's a small thing for me to give back for what they've done for me. I can't think of anything that could have been done better.'

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	3
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

Centre staff develop strongly supportive relationships with centre users. Often, the family support worker is perceived as a 'best friend' based on trust and mutual respect. Staff offer support in a sensitive manner so that parents do not feel judged. Staff and health professionals rapidly identify families who require additional support and signpost them to the appropriate support or service. Adults appreciate the appropriate signposting to

employment and training opportunities. As one parent commented, 'I would not have accessed college and adult education if the centre staff had not been there to support me.'

Well-established links between local children's centres, early years coordinators and early years' providers in the locality ensure that children are successfully supported as they move from one setting to the next stage of their education. An early years teacher appropriately develops the skills of staff, parents and childminders. Parents say that they better understand how children's play relates to their learning about real life. They also acknowledge that 'now that they play with their children more, they fight less.' Staff model effective parenting strategies well. For example, they show parents how it is inappropriate to smack or hit their children.

'The centre has helped me be a normal person', is a typical comment from parents who turn to the centre for support in times of crisis. Family support workers refer to the 'stronger families' panel to enable families who are 'stuck' within the CAF process to move forward once more. Families say they feel able to access the good quality care, guidance and support at any time. Parents whose circumstances may make them vulnerable appreciate the clear way that staff record their start and end points in diagrammatic way. This clarity of recording is not common to all users however and too often, their progress is more difficult to track as recording is not thorough enough.

Outreach work is appropriately targeted to meet individual needs. The teenage parent group meets at a local youth club so that they feel more at ease in a familiar environment rather than offering the same service at the centre, which does not appeal to this age group. The centre secures improvements in the achievement of these families, including the most vulnerable. The family support worker uses the youth centre as an outreach centre. This, in turn, makes the youth workers' jobs easier as teenagers grow in confidence and access childcare which allows them to re-enter education.

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

The leadership team has worked successfully to re-establish a clear organisational structure. The centre has clear targets and an ambitious vision which are driving its plans for further improvements. These are linked to the Service Level Agreement which links these targets to 'Payment by Results'. All outcomes are reviewed quarterly.

Governance is satisfactory. Staff receive appropriate supervisions at regular intervals. They say that they feel well-supported in their work and through well-targeted professional development. Advisory board members represent a variety of local health services, education and other professionals and organisations. They meet regularly to discuss the centre's work and that of another children's centre which shares the same advisory board.

The centre adopts recommended good safeguarding practices in every aspect of its work and safeguarding arrangements comply with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board requirements. Staff update their safeguarding knowledge regularly and follow policies and procedures with care and attention to detail. There are meticulous recruitment and vetting procedures to check the suitability of staff, partners and volunteers. The CAF is central to the centre's work with families. Close working relationships with the local CAF coordinator bring rewards as cases regularly de-escalate from child protection or child in need to CAF or are closed. Parents typically comment, 'Full of friendly staff. The centre is really useful.'

The centre pays appropriate attention to the promotion of equality and diversity and the tackling of discrimination. For example, families moving into the area who speak English as an additional language receive good one-to-one support. There is a keen focus on including children and their families in all aspects of centre life. This applies equally to disabled children, the children of disabled parents and also children with special educational needs. Links with Dearne Valley College, for example, support carers in accessing education such as literacy courses. The centre helps users to overcome barriers to accessing these courses such as childcare and transport costs. There is a trend of improvement in its overall performance and in how it is engaging with its target groups, although too few fathers currently engage with the centre. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Partnership work meets the needs of centre users satisfactorily. Staff are tenacious about matching individual need with the correct support and the impact of this work continues to develop and become more evident. Staff seek out the knowledge and skills of other partners and thus help centre users to do better or to access the right levels of guidance and support. For instance, childminders are invited to group activities such as healthy-eating courses. The majority of childminders in the reach area are judged as providing good quality care and education. The new leadership embraces childminders as service providers and recognises the value they add to the local community. Although parents provide regular evaluations about services, too few families are involved in strategic decision making at the centre.

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	3
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 recent inspection report for Milefield Children's Centre nursery provision helped to inform judgements for this inspection.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Milefield Children's Centre on 24 and 25 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Our thanks go to all of you who met or spoke with us during the inspection. We appreciate the time you spent telling us of your experiences at Milefield Children's Centre.

We judged that the centre has particular strengths in its procedures to safeguard you and your children, in the levels of care, guidance and support they offer and generally in how they help you and your children to feel safe and act in safety-conscious ways.

You are learning to live healthier lifestyles and particularly appreciate the 'Cook and Eat' sessions. Some of you explained how they help you to learn more about cooking healthy meals for your children and also gave you more confidence during weaning. Breastfeeding supporters work with you to help more of you to breastfeed.

Many families receive high quality help to overcome difficult situations through the Common Assessment Framework process. Similarly, some of you who attend the behaviour management courses talk about the 'special time' you now have with your children. You said that you felt well supported by the centre. Others of you told us how you appreciate the 'winter warmer' packs which include clothing and bedding for your children, as well as information on how to access free insulation. Centre staff also support some of you when making difficult telephone calls to sort out issues affecting your lives and this helps you to solve problems. It was clear from our discussions that many of you are very happy with the support you receive from the centre staff and the activities on offer.

There is an increasing range of activities offered at the centre and, increasingly, through outreach sessions in the community. However, it is difficult to see how much progress you and your children make because staff do not make a clear check of what you can do when you first start on a course. We have asked the centre to make sure this initial check takes place and is recorded. This will help centre staff to monitor how well you learn during the courses you attend. More and more families and children in the reach area are registering with the centre. We have asked the leadership to work to engage even more families and children from its target groups and, in particular, fathers.

The centre's leadership, management and outreach work has been disrupted over recent months due to staffing issues. The interim team has stepped in well and is making sure that lost ground has been made up and that all is running to plan. They have set clear targets to measure how well the centre is improving.

There are appropriate partnerships in place between different agencies and health workers. They work together well to make sure you all have access to just the right type of support you need. Many of you fill in evaluations of the activities and courses you attend. This is helpful when the centre's leadership checks to see what has been popular or successful. However, too few parents are involved in helping to make bigger decisions about what direction the centre should take next and we have asked the centre to improve this.

We wish all of you the very best for the future.

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