

Birstall & Birkenshaw Children's Centre

Fieldhead Crescent, Birstall, West Yorkshire WF17 9BP

Inspection date 10–11 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Despite high levels of registrations and contacts with target families in the Birstall and Birkenshaw area, the centre is not supporting enough children and families who live in the wider reach. While activities are planned in Gomersall & Littleton and Liversedge the centre team is unable to engage with and give priority to those families who need the services most.
- There are not enough opportunities to engage parents and others in organising self-help and other volunteering activities to help them prepare for progression to training and employment.
- Assessments and tracking systems do not record sufficiently the progress made by either children or adults towards their stages of development or learning goals. For adults there are not enough opportunities to help them improve their work readiness.
- The proportion of breastfeeding mothers in this area is lower than that of Kirklees as a whole. There are high levels of obesity amongst Reception Year children.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- The centre is welcoming and well organised with resources that are of a high quality. Leaders and managers know the area well, are managing change effectively and the centre is improving.
- Centre staff and health professionals work well together to provide good support for individuals and families, particularly in times of crisis.
- Partnership working is good and parents can rely on effective care, guidance and support. A wide range of professionals, with different backgrounds and expertise, work well together to keep children safe from harm.
- Through a range of provision across the area, support for teenage parents is outstanding.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, centre staff, representatives from the local authority and from partner organisations in health, education, adult education and housing. There were discussions with members of the parents' forum and users of the centre. Parents' evaluations of activities were looked at by the team.

The inspectors visited all the rooms in the Birstall centre and the outdoor play area. They also visited Gomersal & Littletown and Liversedge children's centres, which are now merged with Birstall.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation such as development planning and leaders' evaluation of the impact of the centre's work.

Inspection team

Joan Cawdron	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Emily Wheeldon	Additional Inspector
Rajinder Harrison	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Kirklees' local authority has undertaken a review of its Early Intervention services, including children's centres. This has resulted in the merging of three previously individual children's centres into one, called Birstall and Birkenshaw Children's Centre. The new service plan includes closer and more integrated links with social care, family support and parenting support teams. Services include 'Stay and Play', debt and money-management advice, parenting programmes, confidence building courses and holiday activities. The new centre structure was established under one centre manager in January 2013, with new staff teams beginning work in June. The local authority is responsible for the management of the centre with the aid of the advisory board.

There are 2,302 children aged under five years within the area, of whom 73% live within areas identified as among the top 30% most deprived in the country. There are areas within this locality where unemployment, dependency on benefits, depression, domestic violence and other issues are high. The majority of families are of White British heritage and a small proportion belongs to a range of minority ethnic groups. There are 169 lone parents, and a few families with disabled children or parents. Children's skills on entry to early years provision are below expectations for their age.

The centre is linked to Fieldhead Primary Academy and also works closely with St Peter's Church of England Voluntary Aided Junior, Infant and Nursery School. The inspection reports of these schools can be found on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all locations consistently focus on the engagement of all target families across the centre's activities.
- Involve parents and other volunteers more effectively in planning and delivering the work of the centre through volunteering activities, to help them prepare for progression to training and employment.
- Address health priorities, in particular to improve the numbers of mothers breastfeeding and to reduce obesity levels in children.
- Develop tracking and assessment systems that accurately measure the impact of provision on:
 - children's learning and achievement, and their readiness for school
 - adults' learning and development to increase their opportunities to access employment and further education and/or training.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Through its partnerships with health professionals, the centre is successful in registering and having contact with a large majority of families with children aged nought to five who are in most need, particularly in Birstall and Birkenshaw. However, it is less successful at engaging families in the wider reach who need its support.
- There are good arrangements in place to ensure that most children take up the free entitlement to early education. Centre staff and partners are able to identify those children aged two years who are in most need of help. As a result of this support children start school well prepared for learning.
- Information for adults about potential work opportunities is well displayed. However, there are few opportunities for them to gain the relevant advice, skills and qualifications or support for volunteering. Some parenting, literacy and numeracy courses have been provided but these are not

linked closely enough to how they will improve adults' work-readiness.

- Early intervention features highly in the centre's work, with priority given to those families who are most in need. Where concerns about the safety or well-being of any child or family member are raised, teams work well together to provide the support that is needed.
- Staff work effectively with schools and others to support family contact visits and when making referrals for additional support for those with disabilities. This increases families' access to relevant services and helps to reduce inequalities.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Centre staff use 'A Child's Journey', created by the local authority, to plan and deliver activities for children. These include 'Stay and Play', 'Let's Play' and 'Babies into books'. There is, however, little continuous observation, assessment and planning of next steps for individual children. This means that it is difficult to chart their progress from their starting points.
- Young parents are very well supported through one-to-one and weekly sessions, with 100% engagement. These visits build confidence and provide opportunities for additional support where needed. Many have achieved better bonding with their babies. Some have accessed help that has led to progression into work or onto a college course.
- Adults do not have enough opportunities to gain qualifications or the skills needed for work. Those who do access training, such as parenting programmes and how to keep children safe, are not routinely tracked, so the centre does not know what impact it is having. There are few opportunities for parents to attend activities for self-help or volunteering.
- Parents comment on how the support that they have received over the years has helped them. For example, how to manage their children's behaviour more effectively and how to better manage their finances. One parent said, 'I think if I didn't come here I would go out of my mind at home.'
- Successful partnerships with health services ensure that there is an appropriate range of activities and services to promote families' health, safety and well-being. However, despite healthy eating programmes and the growing and eating of vegetables, obesity levels, particularly in Birstall, are high.
- Midwifery services make early contact with expectant mothers and they are encouraged to register with the centre at this stage. Recent actions have been successful in encouraging some pregnant mothers to stop smoking, although levels are still above the national average.
- Breastfeeding information and support, and 'Baby Bistro' programmes for weaning are provided. However, the centre's work in this area is not yet effective enough since the incidence of breastfeeding is below both local and national levels.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders are managing the centre's structural changes and new staff team competently. Support from the local authority is strong with the provision of data and some new recording systems and approaches to working with families. Policies and procedures, along with good financial management systems, contribute to the improvements being made.
- Family support staff now work as a coordinated team across the locality with requests for support being referred to one central team which then allocates staffing according to need. Improvements are beginning to be seen, but the full impact of these new systems has yet to be measured.
- A new advisory board is being established to better reflect the new structure. Systems are in place that provide information on which families do, or do not, access early childhood services. It is too early for any evidence of trends in improvement, including the use of performance management, or reducing inequalities.
- A parents' forum is well established and parents meet regularly. Some have expressed concerns regarding their lack of involvement through the changes. The group is committed to supporting the centre in its new form. Members are planning fundraising projects to support additional family

activities during school holidays.

- The centre is welcoming and effectively promotes an inclusive environment. It is well used and has a wide range of high quality resources. There is a large area for children, which is divided into different activities, and a large outdoor area with a small garden where vegetables are grown.
- The site at Gomersall has a particularly good sensory play environment but this is underused by families from across the wider reach area. Different faith festivals are celebrated during 'Stay and Play' sessions, widening children's knowledge of different cultures.
- Safeguarding has a high priority with staff and their partners. Local authority systems ensure that staff are recruited with the right level of qualifications and skills required to fulfil their roles. Training for safeguarding is well managed and ensure new staff receive the appropriate training.
- The needs of children subject to child-protection plans and children in need are appropriately met with staff using the Common Assessment Framework. Regular supervision meetings and the establishment of a more reflective process ensure that staff are well supported and consistently work at a high level of professionalism.
- Links with Kirklees College are strong and provides opportunities for parents to attend mathematics and English courses at the centre. Parenting programmes are a significant part of the centre's work and much appreciated by parents.
- Evaluations provide sufficient information for the centre to plan future provision. Parents contribute regularly to feedback on centre activities, and a survey is carried out annually by the local authority. All of these contribute to well-structured business planning that sets priorities to meet the needs of the target families in the area.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	20314
Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	427449
Managed by	Kirklees
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,302
Centre leader	Tracey Daniel
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01924 326392
Email address	Tracey.Daniel@kirklees.gov.uk

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