

Inspection report for Hedgerow children's centre

Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	361088
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Wendy Ripley HMI

Centre governance	Advisory Board
Centre leader	Lesley Brewin
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	161 Marshland Road Moorends Doncaster DN8 4SB
Telephone number	01405 818158
Fax number	
Email address	Lesley.Brewin@actionforchildren.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Brambly Hedge Day Nursery (formerly known as Sure Start Moorends)

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 100024

© Crown copyright 2010



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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Early Years Inspector.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

Hedgerow children's centre, previously known as the Moorends children's centre, is located in the centre of a former rural mining village located 15 miles from Doncaster town centre and in close proximity to Thorne. It serves a community that continues to experience relatively high levels of social and economic disadvantage being ranked in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage although there are a small number of traveller families and a growing Polish community. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is above average, as is the proportion of children aged under-four who are living in households where no one is working.

The centre first opened in 2003 as a Sure Start local programme using two sites. It moved to the purpose built centre it now occupies in 2005 where it operates as a 'one-stop shop'. The centre provides the full core-offer of services on-site with some specialist health-care provision being delivered through the Orchard Health Centre which is next door. Hedgerow is one of seven children's centres in the local area that Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council has commissioned Action for Children to run on its behalf. Reporting to the Action for Children group manager for the area, the centre manager has been in post since January 2009. Governance arrangements are currently transferring to an advisory board with a range of members. The centre is

currently seeking parent representatives and an independent chairperson is soon to be appointed.

The centre's full day-care provision is delivered by the Brambly Hedge Day Nursery (formerly Sure Start Moorends) which is housed within the same building. This is also managed by Action for Children but has separate Early Years inspection arrangements. Brambly Hedge was last inspected in October 2005. The inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Most children enter early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than expected for their age. The proportion of children in local schools with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Hedgerow children's centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families. The centre's approach to safeguarding, safe recruitment and child protection is robust and fully meets statutory requirements. The steps the centre takes to ensure users are safe and protected in the centre and at home are outstanding. Action for Children's 'E-Aspire' electronic and paper-based systems for case recording are exemplary. Family support workers and other appropriate staff use these extremely effectively to compile and maintain comprehensive notes of their work with vulnerable children and families and to monitor the impact of their actions and the engagement of other professionals in individual cases.

Other outcomes are at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Strengths include the quality of care, guidance and support offered to users by all who work with them. Although the contribution made by Jobcentre Plus in this respect is negligible and the centre is currently negotiating with a local voluntary sector provider to make up for this deficiency. Parents report how comfortable and well cared for they feel in the centre and pay tribute to the work of the staff. They talk with great feeling about the warm welcome and non-judgemental attitudes of the staff and provide many moving accounts of the difference the activities and support they have received have made to their own and their children's enjoyment and well-being. Their positive experiences of the centre have led them to be confident that they only 'have to ask' and their requests and needs will be positively received and addressed where possible.

Owing to the challenging circumstances it has found itself in, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council's Children's Services has not undertaken in-depth evaluation of the provision on offer or any recent assessment of the impact of the services it commissions from Action for Children on the local community. Similarly, there has been limited participation and lack of strategic steer from key local agencies. These factors have hampered the centre's ability to act and slowed down its rate of progress. Governance has suffered significantly as testified by the difficulties the centre has experienced in moving over to an advisory board. This has only recently been established and has yet to have any significant impact on shaping the direction of the centre's provision.

Additionally, circumstances in Doncaster in recent years and the conclusion of some service level agreements have resulted in previously strong and effective partnerships undergoing a period of turmoil and decline from which they are only just recovering. This has had a negative impact on multi-agency and integrated working including the implementation and use of the common assessment framework. There are encouraging signs and grounds for optimism that at the grass roots level at least, relationships with some professionals, such as midwives and health visitors, are beginning to recover and operate more effectively.

The flow of local intelligence and performance monitoring data from the local authority and the Primary Care Trust has been inconsistent in recent years. This has impeded efforts to monitor the centre's progress against national performance indicators and to evaluate the impact of its actions. It has also limited the staffs' understanding of the population it could be reaching in the local community, the needs of that population and their ability to calculate participation rates with any degree of accuracy. These factors mean that it has been difficult to get a true picture of Hedgerow's reach area and of the particular needs of the community it serves. Consequently it is a certainty that some parents and children, including those who are most vulnerable, are not yet accessing this good provision. Some information and data are now beginning to trickle in from the relevant external sources and are being captured in the self-evaluation form and other documentation. However, the statistical information this results in, is so incomplete and unreliable as to render any analysis and comparison to nationally established performance indicators and other benchmarks invalid.

Since her appointment in January 2009, the centre manager has had to contend with these very challenging external circumstances arising from factors beyond her control while at the same time fielding internal staff shortages. These have now all been resolved and there is a full complement of well qualified and well trained staff in place who form an enthusiastic and dedicated team. The group manager for Action for Children has provided very strong and able support for the centre manager and the staff team. Day to day management is clear, carefully organised and effective.

Taking into account the robust Action for Children performance management systems that are currently being implemented and the satisfactory outcomes for

users overall, the centre's overall effectiveness is also satisfactory. This together with the stronger, clearer focus all of the staff now have on improvement and identifying and meeting needs, indicates that the centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Use self-assessment, performance management systems and qualitative data effectively to record, evaluate and measure the full impact of the centre's work and set consistently challenging targets for improvement.
- Improve outreach working to ensure that:
 - all unmet need is identified and where relevant tackled through an enhanced range of activities and multi-agency partnership working
 - participation is widened and draws in hard to reach groups
 - the profile of the centre is raised in the local community and its benefits and services more widely known.
- Identify all the sources of early years provision in the area and develop better communications with providers, and especially childminders, so that they are more aware of what the centre can offer. Building upon and extending the existing childminder network:
 - provide a more effective source of support and advice for other childminders and practitioners
 - engage more childminders in the area and provide them with opportunities to undertake training and gain relevant qualifications.
- Ensure that the advisory board is fully functional by the end of September 2010, and the views of parents consistently contribute to the governance of the centre and determining and shaping services.
- Strengthen partnerships and multi-agency working in the local area, ensuring effective arrangements are in place by the end of September 2010.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Specialist provision such as speech and language therapy and the educational psychology service are not currently integrated within the centre. However, there are several positive examples of a range of health professionals and centre staff linking together effectively to deliver universal services. Consequently, Hedgerow offers a satisfactory range of child and family health related activities on site. It does not provide suitable accommodation for healthcare professionals to perform more specialist functions so other activities such as the 'Well Baby Clinic' and 'Baby Café' are held at the health centre next door. However, much of this provision is only open to families who are registered with the general practitioners at that centre. Centre staff and health care professionals are concerned that this means some individuals who may not be registered there, and others who might avoid a typical health care setting for whatever reason, may be missing the care they are entitled to. As a

result, midwives decided to make the most of what the existing accommodation can provide and have recently started an antenatal drop-in session and a breast feeding support group at the centre. Attendance at these sessions to date has been low and early indications are that the lack of appropriate facilities and privacy prevents repeat visits. Consequently, centre managers are currently investigating the resources needed and the practicalities involved in undertaking work to change the layout of the building in order to provide a dedicated health care room.

Popular health related activities on site include active birth workshops, parenting programmes, first aid training, dental care, food hygiene and dietary advice and smoking cessation groups. The lack of reliable performance monitoring and benchmark data means that it is not possible for the centre to measure the impact of these activities against any national or local performance measures such as those for obesity rates, uptake of breastfeeding and teenage conceptions. Nonetheless parents report that they are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy.

A significant strength of the centre is the way in which it supports the emotional well-being of children and adults, especially when they are experiencing difficult times. All of the adults inspectors met spoke with great feeling about the positive impact on their lives of provision such as the 'Clouds' counselling activities and complementary therapy sessions. Typical comments include: 'The centre has really brought my daughter out of her shell. She wouldn't speak to anyone or go to other adults before coming here'. More than one parent talked about suffering from depression and 'never being made to feel embarrassed or unwanted', some stating that they 'probably wouldn't still be alive' if it wasn't for the help they had received.

The centre makes an outstanding contribution to the safety and welfare of its users. Robust systems for security ensure that parents and children remain safe and feel safe when attending sessions. As a result of the very good relationships between centre staff, children and parents, parents have the confidence to speak out about any issues that concern them at home, in the centre or in the local community. A good range of information and acutely sensitive support is available to support those users experiencing domestic violence. A range of activities such as 'Incredible Years', the grandparent support group and the teeny tots group for young parents raise adults' awareness of how to keep children safe. Some exemplary work through a good home risk assessment and equipment scheme and strong partnership work with the fire service ensures a strong emphasis on accident prevention and safety in the home.

A good range of programmed activities such as 'Play-a-Way', and drop-in sessions help parents to support and improve their children's personal, social and emotional development and to build good relationships with them. Parents report that these sessions have also helped them to feel better about themselves, reduced their isolation and enabled them to make friends and feel a part of the community. 'Chatterbugs' sessions are proving particularly effective at helping to accelerate the speech and language of those children whose skills are not as advanced as their

peers. Structured parenting programmes help develop parents' confidence in their own abilities and provide a guiding hand and reassurance in challenging circumstances; for instance, when children are demonstrating inappropriate behaviour. A grandparent and a foster-parent both explained how much the centre has helped them to cope and talked about how their children's' behaviour improved as a result of using the specific strategies learned at the centre.

The centre provides ample opportunities for children to make a positive contribution and there is some strong anecdotal evidence of exemplary practice in supporting individual adults in this respect. For example, one young mum, with the support of the centre, has turned her own life experience into some very well-received project work around teenage pregnancy in local primary schools. This highly successful initiative is now attracting national attention. Centre users are good informal advocates of its benefits. They routinely communicate their positive experiences of the support and help they and their children receive by word of mouth and this encourages others to participate. Some users now feel confident enough to contribute more formally to the development of services and are ready to participate in the decision making process through membership of the advisory board for instance. Wider community participation in Hedgerow activities and parental involvement in the governance of the centre is currently at the very early stages of development.

Information, advice and guidance available to users on a range of issues such as support for health and well-being issues, housing and benefits are satisfactory. Signposting to further learning opportunities and employment is effective. Some eye-catching and beautifully produced displays make a good contribution to this. A small number of parents interviewed by inspectors were able to demonstrate that they have raised their expectations and aspirations and improved their own educational attainment as a result of the opportunities presented by the centre. Overall though, access to further learning opportunities and advice that may increase adults' chances to progress into employment or training are limited.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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	1
The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre meets nearly all areas of the core offer at least satisfactorily. There is a strong ethos of care among all of the staff. A qualified early years teacher employed by the local authority works in the centre for half of the week and provides good support for early years staff and delivers some effective activities such as 'Chatterbox' that makes a strong contribution to children's development. All of the provision is of good quality and helping to improve outcomes for those children and parents who come into the centre as well as the small number of families who receive more targeted support in their homes, as regular attendance at most sessions and progression to additional activities attests.

The centre has yet to develop any provision for the small number of minority groups that are known to live in the area such as those from the Polish community or of traveller heritage. Nor has it targeted any activities specifically at fathers; although there is evidence that a very small minority have attended some of the regularly timetabled events as well as the limited number of community events such as the barbeque held last summer. The centre does not know how many early years providers there are in the area.? Activities to support childminders and promote good practice are underdeveloped. A weekly drop-in session is provided for childminders but attendance is generally very low.

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meets the needs of users in the wider community is not known and cannot be evaluated accurately by the centre. This is because of the lack of robust data from the local authority and the Primary Care Trust; although there are early signs that there is an improving picture in this regard. Given this lack of information and recent difficulties with formal partnerships arrangements, Action for Children has rightly focused all of its energies on embedding its own rigorous assessment methods. Scrutiny of a sample of electronic and paper based files show that assessment of individual cases is robust and detailed, especially for children and families referred to the centre who are then provided with timely, high quality support. While multi-agency working at a strategic and formal level is currently limited, these files clearly demonstrate that professionals from different services are finding ways of working together effectively to support individual cases.

The quality of care guidance and support for those adults who currently access the centre is good. Parents are very positive about the wide variety of activities, resources and experience they and their children can access together which support learning and achievement.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning,	2

development and enjoyment for all users	
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre manager has worked diligently and effectively to maintain provision and services in a difficult context. She has been ably supported by the Action for Children group manager and the rest of the staff. Now that a deputy manager is in place and the staff team is at full complement more attention is being given to strategic planning and establishing systems to identify local need, monitor performance and re-build fragile partnerships. Governance arrangements are satisfactory even though the establishment of the advisory board has been slow to get off the ground having been delayed by local circumstances.

Safeguarding arrangements are good and comply with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and Action for Children's requirements. Clear procedures are in place for reporting child protection issues and are fully understood by the staff whose training is regularly updated and exceeds the minimum requirements.

Action for Children's comprehensive range of policies and procedures are well-embedded in the centre and applied routinely. Its rigorous financial management systems are increasingly being used to good effect. The Action for Children Aspire performance management system is a very robust tool that provides a solid platform to manage and monitor the quality of provision and most aspects of the centre's activities. As yet this is in the early stages of implementation at Hedgerow so that target setting for the centre and monitoring against Action for Children's own benchmarks is underdeveloped. The recently established business support team is making a strong and effective contribution to the collation of the centre's own growing local intelligence. While the centre often demonstrates its outcomes and the qualitative difference it has made to individual children and families, it is not currently able to show its impact quantitatively through comparison to national performance indicators for example.

The staff are well-qualified and work well together as a team. There are good staff supervision and performance management arrangements in place that operate in accordance with Action for Children's framework. These processes provide for equality of opportunity. There is a strong focus on developing the skills of all staff and ensuring they are sensitive to the needs and views of users. As yet however, equality impact assessments are not being used to ensure provision is inclusive.

The views of parents and users of the services are regularly canvassed and are taken into account when planning and determining future provision. Evidence from evaluations of activities, discussion with parents and individual case studies show

that there are very high levels of satisfaction among the centre's present users. Outreach work and other activities to draw in the wider community have been limited to date.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspection of Sure Start Moorends now known as Brambly Hedge Day Nursery has been taken into account to a limited extent when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in the report.

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 Hedgerow Children's Centre on 9–10 June 2010. As part of our investigations we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff and others who work with you. We have judged that the children's centre provides satisfactory and improving support to you and your families. The centre does some things especially well. For example, the good quality care, guidance and support offered to you and the outstanding steps taken to ensure yours and your children's safety and well-being in the centre and at home. We found that the centre works very well with some other services like the health visitor and the fire service. Parents told us how they have improved safety in their homes following the advice and support provided and that they now have confidence to administer first aid.

The children's centre offers a number of activities to help the people in your community to improve their health. This includes some good services for dental care and food hygiene. In particular it has helped some of you to overcome problems and worries through the 'Clouds' counselling service and complementary therapies such as Indian head massage, and encouraged your children to eat more healthily and to try more fruit and vegetables. Staff are aware that accommodation in the centre is not ideally suited to supporting sensitive activities such as breast feeding and there are limited resources for post-natal and ante-natal care. Even though these are available next door at the health centre, staff and midwives are concerned that some mothers might not be using this provision and may prefer to access these services in the centre instead. That is why the centre manager is looking at whether it is possible to make any changes to the building so that these services can be offered on site.

All of the parents we spoke to told us how much their children enjoy coming to the centre and gave us some really good examples of how children have grown and developed as a result. While most parents said the centre helps them to grow more confident about themselves and learning, only a small number of you are currently helped to gain qualifications. While the centre signposts parents to appropriate advice on training and employment opportunities, staff know that Jobcentre Plus is not providing enough information and guidance and they are looking for different ways of making this sort of service available to you.

Parents who spoke to us all said how warm and welcoming the staff are and that coming to the centre is a very important part of their life. It is clear from watching the children that they too love coming here and the activities help them to grow and develop. Parents were full of praise for the staff and the activities on offer. They told us how they feel safe and cared for in the centre and that it has improved theirs and their children's lives. They also said that there is a very warm welcome and staff are very helpful and listen carefully so that you only 'have to ask' and they will try to meet your needs and requirements. We too found that the centre is really good in helping people when they most need it. Once families are known to the centre, they are quickly provided with support and help. A small team of outreach workers are

helping to encourage more families to come to the centre to make use of the activities and to access the help and support available. However, leaders of the centre know that they need to do more work to make sure even more parents and children can make use of all the good things that are on offer.

People in charge of the centre are doing a satisfactory and improving job. The going has been tough for them for a while because of staff shortages and some of the issues the local authority and other services have had to deal with. One of the effects of this has been that the ways in which the centre could work in partnership with other professionals to support you and your children has been limited and they have not had the opportunity to get out into the local community to talk to residents as much as they would like to. This picture is now improving because all of the staff are in place and more outreach work and partnership working is starting to take place.

The children's centre manager and all staff are determined to continue to improve the centre and to make sure the activities and support they provide for you is based on your needs and wants. Centre staff do ask how satisfied you are with the services you receive through discussions and through evaluation forms. The centre manager would like more parents to be involved in deciding what activities they need to provide. We know that some of you are already interested in doing this important task and are also considering how you might be able to help 'spread the word' to others in the community about the benefits of the services the centre provides. We hope you will take on some of these roles because your involvement in shaping the centre's activities can make a real difference.

The centre has recently changed the way in which decisions are made about its work and the different services it provides. An advisory board, with parent representatives is now in place. However, the ability of this group and the centre staff to properly understand how well the centre is doing in improving the lives of you and your families is limited. This is partly due to the centre not receiving enough information and data from outside agencies such as the local authority and health services about the people who live in the local area and because reviewing arrangements are not strong enough. We have asked the centre to make sure actions are in place to improve this.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you happiness and every success for the future.

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