

Inspection report for Balby Children's Centre

Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	362435
Inspection dates	3-4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Steve Isherwood HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Denise Lane
Date of previous inspection	NA
Centre address	Balby Children's Centre, 1 Sandycroft Crescent, Doncaster, DN4 0TY
Telephone number	01302 570270
Fax number	01302 570475
Email address	Denise.lane@actionforchildren.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	NA
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bright Beginnings EY 290457

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.

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 Action for Children and a copy is sent to the children's centre. They may send the report to such persons they consider 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 an additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leadership team, front-line staff and a representative from Action for Children. Discussions were held with members of the advisory board, parents and carers and service users and representatives from the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Balby Children's Centre is a phase one centre and was designated in 2006. It has developed from a family centre which was established in 1997 and is situated close to the centre of Doncaster. It provides the full core offer. The area served by the centre is mixed and densely populated. Much of the area is socially and economically disadvantaged being ranked in the top 10% and 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. In contrast, some of the other areas served by the centre are more affluent. A high proportion of families are from White British heritage backgrounds with a smaller number from minority ethnic groups. The number of children attending schools in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Most children enter early education with a lower range of skills than expected for their age.

The centre 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. Governance arrangements are transferred to an advisory board with a range of members.

The centre's full day-care provision is provided by Bright Beginnings Nursery which is situated on another site. The nursery is privately managed and is subject to separate Early Years inspection arrangements. It was last inspected in March 2010. The inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

‘The centre gives me hope’. ‘It has built my confidence’. ‘It is my social life where I can meet up with other parents in a neutral place’. These comments expressed by some parents and echoed by others help to explain why Balby is an effective Children’s Centre. It lies at the heart of the community. Outcomes for users are improving. Strong multi-agency partnerships and effective outreach support ensure that there are positive improvements to the well-being of children and their families through the delivery of a cohesive package of integrated services. Relationships at all levels are very productive and there is effective transfer of information between key partners. The centre’s work is spearheaded by the centre manager who along with her senior colleagues drives the centre forward. They are very well supported by a committed team of staff and advisory board members who share their vision and sense of ambition. As a group, they have a clear commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity and strive to improve the life chances of all users in the community, whatever their circumstances. This means that provision is personalised well to all members of the community, including the most vulnerable and is impacting positively on their lives.

Staff and other adults consistently give the highest priority to safeguarding. All procedures and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and their families are up to date and meet statutory requirements.

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of where the centre is strong and where further improvements can be made. For example, they are well aware that further work is still required to reach more fathers in the community, including those who may be reluctant to engage and access the centre’s services. They are also aware that at present, the centre’s plans for improvement are not sufficiently targeted on the impact of the centre’s work on improving outcomes for users. Some of the evidence, although useful, is anecdotal and limited to user satisfaction rates. It is not yet reliable enough to enable leaders to judge accurately whether some of the provision is as effective as it could be against local or national performance indicators. In addition, the centre’s systems for recording its own evaluations are too

cumbersome and do not consistently provide a clear picture of the centre's performance or evidence to support improved outcomes for children and their families.

Nevertheless, the centre's has a good track record of improvement and its overall performance has consolidated and improved. For example: The Early Years Foundation Stage data are improving year-on-year. There are increasing numbers of users accessing the centre's services. More numbers of families from black and minority ethnic communities are attending the centre's activities. All disabled people and teenage parents in the area are registered with the centre. Increasing numbers of families return to the centre with second and third children. As a result, and along with its other strengths, the centre's capacity for further improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve action planning and self-evaluation by:
 - developing evaluation procedures that are more succinct and focus more clearly on the impact the centre is having on making a difference
 - ensuring that targets for improvement are specific and measurable and focus on improving outcomes.

- Increase the involvement of harder to reach groups in the community by:
 - identifying and engaging further with fathers in the community who are not accessing the centre's activities.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for parents and carers are good and improving. Children and their families are provided with invaluable support and detailed information to promote their good health. Parents and carers report that they are benefiting from the wide range of opportunities that the centre provides to promote their health and well-being. These include: strong support for breastfeeding and weaning, healthy eating, maintaining a good diet on a budget, smoking cessation, dance activities and health promotion groups such as 'Buggy Fit', 'Jumping Tots' and baby massage and yoga. In addition, the centre places a strong emphasis on promoting the emotional health of all users and staff are proactive in providing individual support to families in times of crisis and to those suffering from depression. Parents comment, 'the workers are always there for me', 'I feel listened to'.

All staff at the centre, outreach workers and health partners see the safety and well-being of users and their families as a key priority. As a result, parents and carers feel safe at the setting, are confident to approach staff, trust them implicitly and feel involved. They receive a range of advice on safety and are able to access home safety equipment such as safety gates and smoke alarms. Opportunities are also

provided for parents and carers to access first-aid training. Children are encouraged to keep safe at the 'Stepping Out' groups through the promotion of regular safety themes such as road safety and talking to strangers. The most vulnerable children are quickly recognised and effective packages of support are put in place for the whole family. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively when specialist intervention is required. Information from case studies about children who are subject to a child protection plan is shared well between key workers ensuring that children's safety is enhanced.

The centre has established strong links with the early years setting where children make good progress from their starting points. Children in all activities at the centre, including the 'Stepping Out' groups, after-school clubs, and drop-in sessions for pre-school children and babies, enjoy their learning. This is because activities are well chosen and stimulating and are matched well to children's interests and stages of development. However, senior leaders are not complacent and recognise that the next challenge is to look more closely at the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and gaps in attainment for children aged five who have attended the centre.

Parents and carers and their children enjoy learning and playing together. Through training and support from the centre in developing their parenting skills, they report that they have gained a better understanding of how to play with their children and of how to manage their behaviour by setting clear boundaries and having the confidence to say 'no'. As one parent commented, 'The centre has done wonders for me about understanding what my child wants and needs'.

Parents and carers are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the centre and wider community by becoming volunteers and members of the advisory board. They feel encouraged to offer their views and suggestions on a regular basis through face to face meetings, evaluations of activities and satisfaction surveys. Senior leaders recognise that one of the next steps is to re-establish the forum for parents and to increase the involvement of harder to reach groups in the community, particularly fathers. Support provided by the centre helps to promote economic stability, for example in securing benefits, budgeting, accessing local training courses and in returning to work.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 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	2

The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2
--	----------

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is meeting its core offer well and provides a wide range of additional services. Assessment of need is built upon strong relationships and a friendly, welcoming approach by staff. The centre demonstrates a good knowledge of local families and the community and strives to ensure that those with the greatest needs have highly personalised support. As one member of staff commented, 'We bend our services around the families in our area and not the other way around.' The Common Assessment Framework is well embedded and strong partnerships with other agencies ensure that assessments of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are robust.

There are clear programmes in place to promote the health and social well-being of users, including a strong emphasis on providing emotional support to boost their confidence and raise their self-esteem. For example, through one group, teenage parents organised a 'Big Lunch' event and as a result, felt more engaged with the local community. High quality support from qualified teachers in the centre team has helped to ensure that purposeful learning is well promoted across the centre and that activities are of good quality.

Opportunities for formal and informal learning are regularly promoted through home visits to local families and services at a range of outreach sites. The centre is constantly striving to ensure that local people feel valued and included. As one parent said, 'I feel relaxed here'. A further reflection of this was seen in the inclusive images used throughout the centre environment and the fact that materials can be translated into 30 different languages within the centre on the same day.

The quality of care for children and parents is good. This is because support and advice is personalised to individual needs and is flexible. In addition, high quality information and sign-posting is provided on a range of topics including parenting, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual health, adult training and breastfeeding. Support for smoking cessation is particularly well developed due to a strong partnership with health colleagues.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities	2

meet the needs of users and the wider community	
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre manager leads from the front and sets the tone for the high quality relationships that exist. Teamwork is strong at all levels, value for money is good and staff are forward-thinking and reflective in their work. As a group, they have a clear understanding of their different roles and responsibilities and work effectively with other agencies and professionals to improve the life chances of all users. As one member of staff commented, 'Nobody gets turned away here'. As a consequence, the centre's commitment to equality of opportunity is strong and the inclusion of all children and their families, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is at the heart of the centre's work. For example, staff work diligently to remove barriers for all users to the activities and services on offer by varying the times and venues of courses and by giving parents and carers coupons to use on childcare provision of their own choice.

Staff have a good understanding of the strengths in provision and where further improvements can be made. For example, senior leaders are well aware that work to engage harder to reach groups, particularly fathers, could go further. The centre's development plan is fitting and includes some clear targets for improvement but requires some fine-tuning to ensure a sharper focus on outcomes and data for measuring success. In addition, the centre's self-evaluation procedures are too lengthy and descriptive and are not sufficiently well targeted on the outcomes for users or set against local and national targets. Senior leaders are correct in identifying this as an area for improvement.

The centre's safeguarding arrangements are clear and are given high priority. All staff have been fully trained at the appropriate level in child protection procedures and they demonstrate good levels of awareness and understanding. All staff employed at the centre are subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. The centre also carefully checks CRB checks undertaken by partner agencies for staff working at the centre.

Strong partnership working between agencies and early intervention ensure that the centre is responsive and sensitive to local needs. As one key worker commented, 'The centre is not isolated and very much part of the community'.

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. Members of the advisory board are very committed and bring a wide range of experience to their work. As a group, they are increasingly confident to act where necessary to support improvements or to questions proposals.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 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	2
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	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during 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

As you know, we inspected Balby Children's Centre on 3 and 4 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall. We spoke to many of you about the centre's work. You told us how much you value the services and activities that the centre provides. Many of you said that coming to the centre has given you more confidence, has helped you to make new friends and has given you ideas about how to help your children learn and develop. You told us how much you and your children have gained from the 'Stepping Out' groups and how much more confident your children are when you leave them and how better prepared they are to start in the nursery as a result.

There are a good variety of activities for you to get involved in at the centre, the nursery and other venues. We were delighted to see how these help you to gain new skills, for example in how to manage your children's behaviour and in how to help them learn through play. We were pleased to hear your positive views about how much you enjoy the activities and how helpful and supportive the staff are.

You told us that the centre is like home from home and how much you appreciate the fact that the centre staff go out of their way to get to know you and visit you in your homes. It is clear to us that the centre has a good knowledge of the activities that you need and we could see with our own eyes how well the centre is making a positive difference to your lives.

It was really encouraging to hear that many of you feel less isolated in the community and have made lots of new friends by simply popping into the centre on a regular basis.

The staff work really hard to make the centre as good as it can be. To help them we have suggested that they look more closely at how they plan and measure whether the activities they provide are making a difference to you. By doing this they will then be in a stronger position to see how well they are doing. We have also asked them to try even harder to get more fathers involved in the centre, particularly those that are hard to reach.

Thank you once again for your help.

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

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