

Inspection report for Bunny Hill Children's Centre

Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	365738
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre governance	City of Sunderland
Centre leader	Mrs Susan Ord
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Sunderland Customer Service Centre Hylton Lane Sunderland SR5 4BW
Telephone number	0191 561 8126
Fax number	0191 561 8180
Email address	Susan.ord@sunderland.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY335013 Buttercups Day Nursery

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 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.

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents and carers, members of the advisory board. They also spoke with a number of partners including, Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare providers, health, education and children's social care professionals and representatives from Sunderland North Community Business Centre (SNCBC), Health Scented and ETEC (originally East Training Education and Community).

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

Information about the centre

Bunny Hill Children's Centre is located in the North West of Sunderland. There are 13 super output areas in the children's centre area, the majority of which fall into the 20% most deprived in the country. The children's centre is based in a predominantly White British community.

Housing within the area is made up of 45.18% owner occupied, 36.46% local authority rented, 14.24% social landlord rented and 4.11% private rented. Local census information shows no overcrowded households and no temporary or mobile accommodation. Lone parents with dependant children make up 8% of families in Sunderland. This is mainly reflected in the Bunny Hill Centre community, particularly within Downhill where there is a peak at 21.4%. Domestic disputes (including domestic violence) averaged a rate of 18.6% for the city. Three North wards, two of which relate to the Bunny Hill centre community have rates higher than this, Castle 22.3%, and Redhill 29.5%.

The employment measure and 2001 census shows the percentage of male and female unemployment is above Sunderland and national averages, with parts of

Hylton Redhouse being over three times the national average. Unemployment rates are mirrored in the percentage of the population economically inactive due to being permanently sick and disabled, all being above the national average of 4.8%, and over half of children aged 0–4 live in households dependent on workless benefits. Around 20% of the 870 residents aged 18–64 with learning disabilities known to the council, reside in the north area covered by the centre, and the percentage of the population with no qualifications is higher than both Sunderland and national averages.

Bunny Hill Children's Centre developed from a former Sure Start Local Programme, designated in March 2006 and is one of three children's centres in the north locality of Sunderland. The centre is located within the Bunny Hill Customer Service Centre in the midst of predominantly social housing estates. The Customer Service Centre incorporates a GP Surgery, Minor Injury Department, Pharmacy, Wellness Centre, Adult and Community Learning, Café, Computer/Community Suite and a Library, as well as the children's centre's day-care nursery (Buttercups), operated by Sunderland North Community Business Centre (SNCBC). Governance arrangements transferred to an advisory board in 2010.

Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age. The proportion of children with special educational need and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.

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

Bunny Hill Children's Centre meets the needs of its users well and provides good support to children and families who reside within its locality. It is particularly well lead and managed and provides high-quality activities for those who attend. Multi-agency partnerships are outstanding and provide the foundation stone from which to deliver individualised, integrated support which is responsive to the diverse needs of the local community.

Support for breastfeeding mothers is a particular strength, facilitated by peer support volunteers and health care assistants who are able to support mothers on the delivery suite, ensuring they receive the support and assurance necessary to persevere with feeding their baby at this crucial time. This, combined with the excellent support of local health visitors and midwives, has resulted in a continued upward trend in the number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding beyond eight weeks. Fathers are also well supported through the 'dads and kids' group, as well as the popular 'what's cooking' courses. Increasing numbers of parents are encouraged to participate in adult learning through a wide range of courses offered through the centre in partnership with SNCBC and family and adult community learning. The volunteer pathway provided through the centre is first-rate, with over 60 adults currently participating in the programme. The centre is aware that more needs to be done to reduce the incidence of obesity in young children and to further engage young parents in the centre. This is a key priority for the centre and their partners.

The centre has a genuine inclusive ethos and challenging targets have been set to support the most vulnerable families and children through highly effective multi-agency working and well-targeted outreach provision. The centre's assessment of the individual needs of children and families is outstanding. This makes a significant contribution to improving outcomes for local families. Parents and carers told us that they particularly value the wide range of provision that the centre offers and speak highly of the positive response they have received to their requests for additional services. Staff are particularly effective in listening to the voice of the community, whether through evaluations or more formally through the parents group. This said, parents are under-represented on the advisory board, which limits the extent to which they can effectively contribute to the ongoing developments of the centre they represent.

All staff, partners and volunteers are united in their vision to secure improved outcomes for all families and this is a strength of the centre. A rigorous cycle of monitoring and evaluation ensures that the management team remains focused on improving the quality and impact of the services and activities provided, demonstrating good capacity for improvement. The centre maintains a comprehensive database, which greatly enhances the depth of the centre's self-analysis. However, the senior management team realises that there is scope to develop the use of this resource in order to improve outcomes for families, particularly in relation to increasing breastfeeding rates among teenage parents and reducing the number smoking.

Safeguarding is given the appropriate priority, with effective, robust policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and protection of both families and staff. All staff are confident in their understanding of child protection policies and procedures and are confident to identify vital signs, referring quickly and appropriately when necessary. This, coupled with the centre's flexible approach to service delivery, ensures that the good quality support provided is responsive to the changing needs of the community, and so remains correctly targeted.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the use of available data to further enhance the delivery of targeted services in order to improve outcomes for families by:
 - raising breastfeeding rates and reducing the incidence of smoking among teenage parents
 - reducing obesity in young children.
- Continue to develop work around participation to ensure parents are empowered to contribute to the governance of the centre through meaningful representation on the advisory board.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

'They have made me feel like there is light at the end of tunnel,' is one parent's description of the personal impact Bunny Hill Children's Centre has had. The centre has effected some real lasting change; improving outcomes for many local families.

The conspicuous impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and their physical health is evident across the work of the centre. This includes the excellent work and tireless dedication of all staff, as well as services commissioned by the centre, for example, through ETEC, Health Scented and SNCBC. A whole-family approach to helping parents and pregnant mothers to cease smoking is proving to be successful. Individualised support is offered to all family members in a venue of their choice, with regular follow-up sessions at pre-determined intervals. While the centre recognises there is still some work to do in relation to reducing smoking in the under 20's group, the most recent figures indicate a reduction in city-wide smoking figures to around 25%. Dads are also well supported, through the work of the community involvement worker. The positive impact of this work is reflected in the increasing number of men who attend activities, many of whom commented on how included they now feel and how much more confidence they have. The promotion of healthy lifestyles threads through every activity within the centre, from cookery classes to 'Busy Bodies' active play sessions. The successful development of a food policy for the early years is a significant milestone in the centre's strategic vision for this area of work, and it is hoped that this might be introduced more widely as an example of best practice.

A continued focus on the promotion of issues around child safety, combined with productive working partnerships with health professionals, the local social housing service and fire service has resulted in a significant decrease in the numbers of children under five attending the local accident and emergency department. All families receive a universal safety pack from their midwife, and health staff use subsequent development visits to offer practical advice about potential dangers in the home and inform parents of how to minimise these, including signposting to low

cost safety equipment schemes. Excellent multi-agency support ensures that children subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework processes are well supported. Robust procedures and effective protocols between relevant agencies ensure that appropriate information is shared between professionals, with care packages identified to meet need in a consistent and rigorous manner.

The work of the early years consultant and her highly skilled team, has had a significant impact on the achievement of children. The gap between the lowest 20% of children achieving expected levels in key early learning goals, and that for all children in Sunderland has narrowed considerably over the past year, and work is beginning to track the individual achievements of those children who have attended the children’s centre. The centre’s involvement with the ‘ICAN’ programme has empowered early years staff with the knowledge to consistently apply best practice in the development of children’s communication skills. Education professionals spoken to during the inspection testified to the positive impact close working with the centre has had in raising aspirations and improving outcomes for young children.

Many parents spoken to commented on how their confidence has improved through their participation in the activities offered by the centre. A visit to a baby massage session provided compelling evidence of babies and their parents bonding well, while mums at the bosom buddies group enjoyed the opportunity to chat and share concerns and tips about dealing with issues such as feeding or sleep routines. The voice of parents is genuinely heard and respected in this children’s centre, a sentiment echoed in the comments of parents we spoke to, all of whom felt they were valued and respected by all centre staff and their partners. The well-established parents group has worked successfully to raise additional funds for the centre, enabling the purchase of some additional equipment.

The centre has helped many parents take the first steps into learning, training and employment. Effective partnerships with SNCBC and family and adult community learning has enabled a significant number of parents (111) to progress onto formal training programmes. The volunteer pathway is particularly impressive, with all volunteers following an individualised package of training to suit their specific interests. Parent volunteers told us how they are supported and assisted to set and achieve their own goals and how their confidence and self-esteem have improved as a result. All had increased aspirations both for themselves and their children as a result of the support received through the centre. The innovative ‘Inspiration Fund’ has enabled some parents to develop and support local groups, facilitating enterprising behaviour.

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	2

their personal and social development	
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

All centre staff and partners have an in-depth understanding of the issues and challenges facing families within the local community. This ensures well-targeted and highly effective support for all children and families, helping them to make the best of available opportunities. The centre can point to numerous striking examples where families have been supported, helping them to fully engage in everyday life and enjoy their families again. As a result, the work of the centre, particularly with its most vulnerable families is commendable, a clear reflection of the caring yet expectant ethos, which permeates throughout the centre. This flexible and personalised approach to identifying and assessing need is a key strength of the centre.

The shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are good. The well-established, close working partnerships which exist ensure the provision of individualised packages of support. The newly refurbished sensory room provides space for children and their parents to relax and explore, doubling as an ideal chill out area for families in need of some space away from group activities. Through its 'Inspiration Fund', the centre is supporting the establishment of a support group for parents of children on the autistic spectrum. Delivered by 'Health Scented', a local alternative therapy centre, this support group will provide opportunities for parents to meet others in a similar situation, reducing the isolation felt by many of these families.

A comprehensive range of services and activities are delivered through the centre or on their behalf, and these are reflective of the specific needs of this particular community. The well-established 'Health Scented' centre is a first-class example of how the centre works in partnership to reach some of the most vulnerable members of its community. Parents we spoke to who had experienced this service, spoke of the life-enhancing support they had received and the confidence they had found to go on and re-engage with life and their families. 'I am learning to live for the day again' said one parent, while another spoke of how full of confidence they now felt. The sensitivity with which practitioners engage with their clients ensures that all, no matter how anxious, visibly relax in their presence, facilitated by the welcoming and comfortable surroundings.

Home visits from family support and community involvement workers have been

hugely successful in engaging harder to reach families, identifying need and supporting them to access a range of services through the centre. These visits encompass of whole range of issues including breastfeeding, smoking cessation, safety checks and parenting support. The level of support received by families has been greatly appreciated and this has contributed to the genuine sense of trust and respect displayed by local parents towards all staff within the centre.

Good quality early years provision is ensuring that the achievement of children continues to rise. Every activity run by the centre incorporates a learning journey book which tracks the progress and achievements of all children throughout their time on a course. The high quality and often innovative work of the early years consultant and her team, in partnership with the 'play and learn' workers, has ensured the integration of the progress matters principles into all aspects of their work. This, combined with effective arrangements for transition which involve parents, staff and school, ensures that children are well prepared for this challenge. Evaluations from parents about the quality of support all highlight the difference this has made to their own and their children's development and well-being; ensuring all who engage with the centre gain the confidence to take steps to improve both the life chances of all in their families.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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 meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre manager, ably supported by her senior team and advisory board are relentless in their drive for improvement. All have a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities and direction. There is a coherent link between the Children's Trust, Children and Young People's Plan, and the centre's action plan, and as a result, the centre's priorities link effectively to those of the wider area. The centre manager and local authority ensure that the profile of the children's centre is raised through its representation within a range of local strategic partnerships.

The centre maintains rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of its work over the short and medium term. The senior management team draw upon their substantial knowledge and understanding of the local community to identify future priorities, and coherent action plans have been developed as a result. These are based on robust data combined with good local intelligence provided by

community involvement workers, family and child development workers and other relevant partners. A key strength of the centre is its ethos of 'working with' rather than 'doing to' the community it serves and this is reflected in the good and improving participation rates in the activities it provides. Working closely with partners such as SNCBC, the centre is beginning to develop monitoring systems that will enable the longer term evaluation of the impact of its work, tracking the journey of parents through training into employment, and the progress of children to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. These systems are beginning to enable staff to monitor the progress of specific target groups including; young parents, dads and those living in the most deprived areas of the community. This helps to ensure equality of opportunity and to identify potential barriers to access. The centre recognises that work is needed to refine the use of this data in order to further improve outcomes for families. The voices of parents and users are listened to through evaluations of individual activities as well as the work of the local parents group. Those we spoke to felt respected and heard, and believed they had a genuine role to play in the future planning of provision.

Arrangements for the performance management of staff are robust and systems for appraisal and supervision are thorough, with outcomes used to plan training and support staff development. As a result, staff are well motivated and remain committed to ensuring their ongoing professional development. This is facilitated further by the centre manager's commitment to empowering all staff to develop their skills, qualifications and knowledge, in order to provide a holistic service to centre users. The centre provides a warm welcome to all. Ambitious and challenging targets have been set around the engagement of specific users, including young parents and dads, and this is reflective of the genuine inclusive ethos of the centre and its staff.

Early intervention and prevention is at the heart of the centre's work and this is facilitated by the excellent partnership working that exists across the locality. Well-skilled and knowledgeable staff are able to deliver cohesive and timely integrated services, intervening at the earliest opportunity to prevent situations escalating into crisis. There has been a recent focus on the further development of policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding children and as a result, systems are well developed and comprehensive. Robust arrangements are in place to ensure that all staff, professionals and local organisations working with children and families within the locality are suitable to do so.

Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure. Delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support to families. Staff are well deployed and utilised ensuring good value for money, the centre manager remaining acutely aware of the need to ensure the long term sustainability of the centre.

<p>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</p>	<p>2</p>
--	-----------------

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	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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

Bunny Hill children's centre hosts full-time day-care provision (Buttercups) for children aged birth to school age and this is managed by a private provider; Sunderland North Community Business Centre (SNCBC). Six local primary schools, Bexhill, Bishop Harland, Castletown, Hylton Castle, Hylton Redhouse, St John Bosco and Town End, with Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children over three years, are also part of the centre's remit. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections has been taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in this 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 the Bunny Hill children's centre on 9 and 10 February 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

One of the things that the centre is doing really well is supporting mums to breastfeed their babies, with many of you successfully undertaking training to help

other mums in your area do the same. As a result, there are now significantly more babies being breastfed than there was five years ago. However, more still needs to be done to encourage the youngest mums to breastfeed for longer. Your children's centre is also brilliant at making sure dads are involved with their children and families. It was great to see dads involved in the different activities that we saw during the inspection, and to hear lots of positive stories from them. Support for volunteers is also a real strength of your centre, and it was great to witness first hand all the excellent support and training received by this volunteer group and to hear how the experience has enhanced so many of your lives, particularly in relation to providing job opportunities.

Parents who spoke to us all said that your children's centre is a warm and welcoming place, full of staff who they feel they can trust to help and support them. We know that you love the new location of the centre on the ground floor and we are sure this will encourage many more families locally to get involved with the good range of quality activities on offer. Parents told us that staff listen to them and so make sure that they get the right advice. We found that the centre was excellent at helping people at times in their lives when they most need it; action was taken quickly and different people and organisations worked exceptionally well as a team to support both children and families. In particular, you said that you really appreciated the personal attention that you received from all staff.

We found that services worked well together as a team to provide help and support to families where a child has special educational needs and/or disabilities. In particular activities around messy play, parent craft, baby massage and the baby days post-natal clinics were well attended. Parents we spoke to said they had thoroughly enjoyed those activities that they attended and that they felt happy on the days when they had an activity to go to. You also told us that the 'bosom buddies' and 'stay and play' groups provided a much needed opportunity to meet up with friends and that these were very much at the heart of the community.

People in charge of running the centre are doing a really good job. The children's centre leadership team, have worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. We have seen that everyone who works with Bunny Hill children's centre share this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a real difference to your lives. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is seen in the wide variety of activities on offer as well as the number of you who attend them. Managers know there is still more to do if they are to fully meet the needs of your community, and we have asked them to make this a priority. For example, the manager knows there is still more work to do to ensure more people quit smoking when they are pregnant, and to reduce the amount of obesity in young children. The centre is working hard to encourage more young parents to try out the different activities on offer.

The centre has access to lots of detailed information to help them plan future activities. We have asked them to continue to develop the ways in which this

information is used so that they can continue to improve outcomes for you all. We know the centre is good at asking for your opinion on the activities and services you use. Some of you have used the 'Parents Group' to influence and change the way some services are delivered. However, the centre needs to increase the involvement and influence you have as parents in their work. We hope that this is something you might be interested in becoming a part of.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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