

Inspection report for The Embankment Children's Centre

Local authority	Barnsley
Inspection number	362602
Inspection dates	17-18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Kathryn Gethin HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Claire Gilmore
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	NA
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY340904 The Embankment Children's Centre daycare

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre programme manager and acting centre manager, senior leaders, members of staff, parent representatives, local authority officers and partner professionals from other agencies. They observed the centre's work and looked at sessions in operation in nearby locations. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Embankment Children's Centre opened in 2006 in the centre of Thurscoe which was previously a mining village. It provides the core offer to a community in one of the 30% most deprived wards in the country. The area suffers from significant social and economic disadvantage, with high levels of unemployment. The large majority of families are of White British heritage. A health clinic and community centre are in close proximity to the centre.

Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority with support from the advisory body. The centre and associated partners provide a range of integrated services that include, health, family support, adult training and advice and guidance in relation to benefits, training, jobs and volunteering. There are links to four local primary schools. Full day-care provision is provided and is housed in the same building. Most children enter early education with a much lower range of skills than that expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

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

The Embankment Children's Centre provides a safe and welcoming environment for all its users. Users appreciate the hard work of the staff and feel safe within the centre. The number of users is increasing. Management are aware that the centre premises are currently underused and more activities could be offered. The centre has come a long way in a short time following a challenging period involving several changes within the management team and the impact of this on staff motivation and morale. The strong leadership team has worked hard to overcome this and are beginning to see the improvement in the strength of the staff team.

The centre is well led and managed by the centre manager and senior leaders. There is a clear vision for the centre and communication is good. Policies and procedures have been scrutinised and rewritten where necessary. Staff knowledge and understanding of safeguarding procedures are good and risk assessment is thorough. There is an emphasis on performance monitoring and involving staff in all aspects of the centre. There are highly effective partnership arrangements in place between agencies which meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups. However, the difficulty in obtaining locality data has resulted in improvement plans not being as effective as they could be. It is difficult to encourage users to become involved in decision making and for users to realise the importance their views make to the effective running of the centre.

The centre knows its users well and due to the strong link with the local clinic, staff visit every family following a birth. The day-care facility is integral to the centre and has a high number of children attending. Children behave well and users say they have gained new skills. Referrals to a range of services are highly effective and there are good partnerships with key partners. Adult training and education is limited and the service level agreement with Jobcentre Plus is not fully implemented with a reliance on signposting from the centre. Not all key partners are fully involved in the evaluation of services to monitor trends to ensure that the activity programme meets individual needs. The new management systems are not yet fully developed and their impact is not yet clear. Consequently, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory overall.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

Ensure services are based on a sound analysis of need by:

- tracking which families are using services and monitoring trends in service usage by different groups.

Improve the rigour and effectiveness of evaluation so that it has greater impact on meeting the needs of users by:

- ensuring key partners and parents make a significant contribution to evaluation.

Improve the extent to which users contribute to the management of the centre by:

- increasing the involvement of parents on the advisory board and parents' forum.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The centre café is at the heart of promoting healthy eating for low cost and is well used by the community. The centre received a healthy food award in 2006 and again in 2009. Through the 'Fit for the Future' course users are now aware of the importance of portion control and how to identify healthy food. Users say how their children regularly sing 'eat your five a day' which they learn at the centre. There are strong links with the local clinic and the breast feeding group is a particular success. Mothers who have struggled say how they would not have continued without support from staff. The immunisation programme is very successful with 92% of babies being immunised. Another success is the 'Be Active' 12-week scheme where free swimming for children is included in the adult gym membership. Other physical activities include 'Buggy Fit' and 'Get Walking' which have variable numbers attending. Data are not sufficiently robust at locality area to be useful at informing the services offered at this time.

The centre has very good links with social care and has been highly effective in working with families where a child protection plan is in place. As a result, the number of children on plans has significantly decreased. Referral is extremely robust and case studies show the success of good 'joined-up thinking' where users are now in a safe, stable and non-violent environment. Users say that they feel safe within the centre and speak highly of the excellent support received in particular from family support workers. The 'Two Steps Forward' programme is instrumental in supporting families through care and education. The building is secure with key pads and cameras in place. All policies and procedures have been recently reviewed and all areas risk assessed. Police Community Support officers drop in on a regular basis and give advice and support. Users frequently speak to the officers and the officers report that 'it had helped barriers to come down'.

'Bumps to Babies', 'Come and Play' and 'Messy play' are popular courses run either at the centre or at the local community centre. Users say that the sessions help them

make friends and give them confidence. Others comment on how they are 'not judged' and that 'if I need help I can ask'. Children and parents interact well together having fun with the activities. The 'Webster Stratton parenting course' is successful with users saying how it 'taught me to stay calm but be firm'. A new tracking system is in use and the centre teacher has close links with local schools and early years providers. 'Learning journeys' are shared with the schools and there is a focus on early language acquisition. As yet, the Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores cannot be directly linked to children who have used the centre. Systems to show sessions are reaching the most vulnerable groups are not yet sufficiently embedded.

Behaviour is good across the centre and staff lead by example promoting a sense of belonging and respect. Users enjoy their time at the centre and say their children 'look forward to coming'. Following user input, a 'Baby Boutique' has been opened and the parents' forum will decide how the money raised will be used. The parents' forum and advisory board are less successful in engaging users on a regular basis and in the general management of the centre. Those who use the centre on a regular basis see it as a major resource and say 'they wouldn't have a village without it'.

Participation rates at the centre continue to rise but there is room for improvement. There is a basic agreement with Jobcentre Plus with vacancies updated on a weekly basis and available at the centre reception. The Options team work closely with the outreach team to provide support to individual families and there has been some success with the volunteer programme. Access to computers and literacy and numeracy classes are available at the library. However, data in regard to education and training are not sophisticated enough to help the centre evaluate the success of this service.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and 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

Staff know the community well and assessment demonstrates that the services provided effectively meet the individual needs of families they are in contact with. Users appreciate how staff are aware of the history of the area and what it has been through. All families are visited following a birth and a welcome pack given. Family support and outreach are good and referrals are fast and effective. There are strong partnerships with the voluntary sector and staff are fully involved in reviews. Training from the centre teacher on planning and assessment has been well received and there are effective links to the local primary schools and day care. The local authority has established a 'Well-Being' partnership to encourage integrated work.

Verbal advice is good and literature is readily available but the presentation of the information and displays do not readily engage people. Unemployment is high in the area with many lone parents. Information on any take-up of employment is not fed back to the centre from Jobcentre Plus. Users who have attended courses say they 'love the group' and 'like meeting new people'. They gain in confidence and some engage in volunteer work and further training. However, the full impact of adult training on leading users into employment is not measureable at this stage.

Family support and outreach are good. Users are very well supported in times of crisis and say how their lives have improved. Case studies show how users have gained in confidence, improved family relationships and acquired better housing and living conditions. A user stated how the centre has 'changed her life' and how staff 'go out of their way to help'. Projects in the locality provide invaluable support for families with alcohol and drug misuse. Day care is an integral part of the centre and is used for crèche provision to support users attending courses. Outreach workers attend the health clinic and there are joint visits with health visitors and social care. The centre prides itself on having a strong presence in the community and workers ensure they are visible in the locality to promote the centre's services and this is gradually increasing the numbers of users.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre has undergone a challenging time in recent months which has resulted in several changes to the management structure. This has meant a return to fundamental principles and as a result, the management team now has strong and secure leadership in place. Governance and accountability is now good with secure performance management systems in place. Staff say that the team 'now pull together' and that management 'are fantastic' and 'listen to them'. The links with the local authority are good with weekly senior management meetings in place. New systems to gather data have been recently installed with a view to improving the quality of information available. The changes have been viewed as a positive process to empower staff and there is a focus on strong effective leadership. Partnership working is very effective in ensuring the needs within the community are met. The centre provides value for money through the quality and support for users with provision generally meeting need.

Staff morale is high with a focus on the importance of communication. Staff are clear in their roles and responsibilities and take a pride in their work. Strengths and weaknesses have been identified and understood but the full impact of the changes across all outcomes is not yet clear. The development plan has been rewritten with more challenging targets. However, not all vulnerable groups are specifically identified and targets are not always specific or precise about time scales to monitor progress. The centre has not fully engaged users in decision-making and their views are not routinely sought to develop provision to its full potential. The centre accommodation is underused with a lack of courses offered to meet the educational and training needs of adults. This is currently being addressed.

Equality and diversity are successfully promoted and children with special needs are integrated fully into the centre. Resources are adapted to meet need with specialist training for staff and the purchase of specific equipment. Safeguarding procedures are highly effective. A clear record identifies criminal record bureau checks and any issues arising are fed back to the local authority. All staff have completed safeguarding training with additional training on how to risk assess effectively. The highly effective links with partners ensure referrals are swift and thus families are supported promptly.

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	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	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	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The Ofsted reports for schools in the locality were taken into account in the provision and outcomes judgements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Embankment Children's Centre on 17 and 18 November 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. We really enjoyed chatting to you in meetings and in groups around and near to the centre. You expressed your views clearly and they were very helpful to us. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution to the inspection.

We are pleased to say that the centre provides satisfactory support that helps families to improve their lives. Staff work very hard to meet all of you by visiting you at home or when you come into the centre. They also work extremely well with the

local health centre, schools and voluntary agencies. We were delighted to hear how helpful and supportive you find the staff.

It was a pleasure to see the children enjoying the 'messy' activities and hear how the sessions had been of value to you. Many of you said you had made new friends and had more confidence. It was encouraging that more of you are using the centre and hopefully more of you will become involved in the parents' forum and advisory board.

To help the centre improve we have suggested that the managers find better ways to ensure that the centre is able to use your views and the views of some key partners to accurately measure what difference the centre activities are making to all families in your community.

I would like to thank you once again.

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