

Inspection report for Carr Children's Centre

Local authority	York
Inspection number	367538
Inspection dates	16-17 March
Reporting inspector	Steve Isherwood HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leaders	Paula Richardson and Susie Gridley
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Ostman Road York YO26 5 QA
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Linked schools if applicable	Carr Infant School St Barnabas Church of England Primary School Poppleton School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Rainbow Pre-School Carr Infant 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 reports on 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 an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leaders, front-line staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, parents and carers and service users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Carr Children's Centre is a phase two centre. It provides the full core offer. The centre is located on the same site as Carr Infant and Junior Schools. The area served by the centre is in the 70% of the most deprived areas nationally and has pockets of 30% social disadvantage surrounded by areas with less need. The vast majority of families is of White British heritage with a small number from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of children who live in out of work and benefit households is above average. A large number of children enters the Early Years Foundation Stage with a lower range of skills than those expected for their age.

The centre is governed and managed by the local authority and a locality-wide advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, including parents.

The centre shares its site with Rainbow pre-school. This is privately-managed and is subject to separate inspection by Ofsted. It was last inspected in 2008. 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

This is a good children's centre that provides effective support for children and families in the area. Under the present leadership, it has made rapid improvement in a short period of time. Staff are committed to inclusion and strive to improve the life chances of all users that are known to them, particularly those most at risk. As a consequence, outcomes for users are good and improving. This has come about because partnership working is strong, relationships between agencies are productive and services are well-integrated and cohesive. In addition the centre works effectively to keep users engaged and increasing numbers of parents and carers are taking advantage of the wide range of opportunities to improve their parenting, vocational and academic skills successfully. Considering the advances made over the last year, together with its other strengths, including the work of senior leaders and effective partnership working, the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

Senior leaders are not complacent and are very aware of the direction the centre must take to sustain its progress. For example, there is clear agreement that the centre's procedures to evaluate its effectiveness lack rigour. Not enough information is currently available to show the impact of the services they provide. Detailed knowledge about the proportion of potential users in the community including those groups who are not currently accessing the centre has yet to be fully clarified. This means that senior leaders are not yet totally sure that they are targeting the right users and those in greatest need. Furthermore, the centre's plan for improvement is not sufficiently well-focused on local or national targets or set against outcomes and measurable criteria. Some of the evidence, although useful, is anecdotal and not yet reliable enough to enable leaders to judge with accuracy whether some of the activities are as effective as they could be.

Safeguarding arrangements are clear and understood by staff. All required procedures are in place to safeguard the health and well-being of all users, including the most vulnerable.

Parents and carers hold the centre in high regard and are unanimous in their praise. 'The centre has been invaluable'. 'It has made a big difference to our lives'. 'I don't know where we would be without all the courses'. 'The staff know us personally and know our particular situations', are typical of their views.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen self-evaluation and improve action planning by:
 - developing evaluation procedures that 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
 - improving baseline information of the reach area which clarifies the proportion of relevant groups in touch with the centre and those not currently accessing the centre's services.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Evidence through case studies and discussions with other professionals and users reflect the strong impact of partnership working on children's and families' health and well-being. Parents and carers are provided with invaluable support and detailed information to promote a healthy lifestyle. These include: breastfeeding and weaning, speech and language, smoking cessation, domestic violence, parenting and general health and child development. In addition the centre places a strong emphasis on promoting the emotional health and mental well-being of all users including those most vulnerable and works very effectively to support families with children who have additional needs on a one-to-one basis. Overall, this means that contacts and engagement with all groups are increasing, breastfeeding rates are on an upward trend, services for disabled children are expanding and work to increase access to psychological therapy is improving. Furthermore, support and initiatives such as 'time to play', 'first steps' and the Sure Start 'portage provision' are having a strong impact on improving outcomes for all users and making a difference to their lives. As a consequence, one parent commented. 'As a new mum the centre has made me far more confident'.

The centre works effectively in ensuring that parents and children keep themselves safe and free from harm. This is demonstrated by a wide range of preventative measures and advice including the home safety scheme where families can gain access to stair gates, fireguards, socket covers and safety harnesses. In addition, child safety is regularly promoted at the highly-popular 'Lidget Gems' drop- in for families with children under five years of age. The most vulnerable children are quickly recognised and effective packages of support are put in place for the whole family. 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.

Children make good progress in their learning from their starting points. Staff are aware of how young children learn best. The centre has established good links with the early years setting. There are increasing opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together and a range of good information and advice is given to parents on all aspects of child development. This is demonstrated through the 'Toy Bus' where parents can borrow quality toys, books and equipment and through courses which develop parents' and carers' understanding of how children learn through play and exploring their senses. As one parent commented, 'I am now better at understanding my child's behaviour and how she learns'.

There are many examples where parents are given opportunities to make a positive contribution to the centre and the wider community by becoming members of the parents' forum and through their involvement on the advisory board. They feel that their views are listened too and acted upon by staff through face-to-face meetings, evaluations of activities and satisfaction surveys.

Good support provided by Job Centre Plus helps to promote users' economic stability, for example in accessing local training courses, gaining qualifications and 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 effectively. This is because staff are proactive and have a very good knowledge of the families who access the centre. Effective partnership working with health and family services ensures that assessment is increasingly accurate and families benefit from the wide range of activities on offer as a result. In addition, the Common Assessment Framework is well-embedded and staff are fully involved in multi-agency working.

Project- planning and reviews are of a good quality. This ensures that activities are well-chosen and are tailored well to meet the needs of families. For example staff, are routinely asked to justify what they do and how they do things by responding to key questions such as: How does this session meet the needs of users? How will the activities improve their outcomes? What went well? What could you do better next time?

Opportunities to promote purposeful learning are promoted well and activities are of good quality. There are clear programmes to promote the health and social well-being of users, including a strong focus on providing emotional support to raise their confidence and self-esteem. As a consequence, many parents report that they feel less isolated in the community and are confident to ask for help. In accessing the centre they value the contact with other parents in similar situations. Partner agencies too hold the centre in high regard and talk positively about the strong multi-agency working arrangements. Outreach workers are experienced in breaking down barriers and working collaboratively to target different groups of users. This work is showing success in increasing the contact with teenage parents, expectant mothers, families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, fathers and families from minority ethnic groups.

The level of individual care provided by staff is of good quality because of the centre's commitment to enable families to succeed. This is also evident in the good range of support and guidance available through leaflets, drop-in-sessions, targeted support and signposting to other services. For families in crisis, such as those suffering from domestic violence, support is flexible and life-changing and has had significant impact on improving the confidence and quality of life for those concerned.

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 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	2
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How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Over the last year there have been significant improvements in the work of the centre, most noticeably in strategic planning, the engagement with families and in the range of activities provided. This is because of the drive and commitment of senior leaders to improve outcomes for users by enhancing the centre's provision. Together, they set the tone and work with energy and enthusiasm to ensure that the centre is effective in improving the life chances of all users. They are well-supported by an equally committed team of staff and other professionals who share their vision and sense of purpose. As a result, value for money is good, teamwork is strong and staff are forward-thinking and reflective. There is clear commitment to equality of opportunity and the inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's work. For example, staff are very careful to remove barriers for all users to the activities and services on offer by varying the time and venues of courses and providing crèche facilities.

There is clear agreement on what the centre does well and where further improvements can be made. For example, senior leaders are well aware that at present, systems to evaluate the impact of the centre are not as effective as they could be. This is because further work is required by all partners to identify who all potential users in the reach are, including any groups that may find it difficult to access services. In addition, the centre's plans are not sufficiently well-focused on the outcomes for users or set against local or national targets. This means that targets for improvement require a sharper focus on measuring success.

Members of the advisory board play an increasingly effective role in supporting the centre. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. As a group, they are committed to see the centre improve further and are developing their confidence to act where necessary to support improvements or to question proposals.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Local authority procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed closely. All staff have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check and are trained appropriately in child-protection procedures. They work effectively in partnership to protect children and vulnerable adults through early intervention, close co-operation between all agencies and through the Common Assessment Framework procedures.

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
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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

None

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 Carr Children's Centre on 16 and 17 March 2011. Thank you for your help. We spoke to many of you about the centre's work. You expressed your views very clearly and they were very helpful to us. This is what we found out.

We judged the centre as good overall. It provides good support to you and your families and everybody works really well together to make things better for you and

to improve your lives. You told us that you and your children are very well supported and looked after. We could see this for ourselves. It was very pleasing to hear that you have great faith in the staff when you leave your children in their care. We were particularly pleased to hear that more of you are coming to the centre and getting involved. You told us that the centre is providing you with activities that are just what you need and how the staff go out of their way to get to know you and your families.

We were delighted to see that the centre is really important to you and to hear how much more confident you are as parents as a result of all the courses you attend. It was encouraging to learn from you also just how much the centre has helped you cope in times of difficulty and that many of you feel less isolated in the community by simply popping into the centre and making new friends. We were very pleased to hear that some of you have been helped really well to gain qualifications, get back into employment and find jobs.

The senior leaders and centre staff work effectively to make the centre as good as it can be. To help them we have suggested they improve the information they have to 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 be clearer in their own minds to know how well they are doing.

I did pass on your views about trying to get more Dads to get involved other than at the breakfast club. 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.