

Inspection report for Todmorden Children's Centre

Local authority	Calderdale
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY333341 Todmorden Children's Centre 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.

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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 manager, the designated lead for safeguarding, centre staff, three local headteachers, parents and carers, key partners and a principle local authority officer linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at activity sessions taking place at the centre and in the satellite sites. They also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and the centre's safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Todmorden Children's Centre is a Phase 1 centre which was established in 2006 and is co-located on the site of Todmorden Community College. The centre works in close partnership with Hebden Vale Children's Centre. The centre serves the wards of Todmorden and the majority of Ryburn ward. The communities of Ashenhurst, Longfield and parts of central Todmorden are ranked among the 20% most deprived areas in the country. Other areas of central Todmorden, parts of Cornholme and Walsden are ranked among the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The main social issues affecting the area include a growing number of lone parents and a rise in families on workless benefits. Health issues affecting the area include depression and some pockets of alcohol, drug abuse and domestic violence.

The centre's reach area has experienced a distinct demographic change since the centre was originally registered. As commuter links have become more accessible greater numbers of professional couples have moved into the district. As a consequence, the area has become more affluent and housing has improved. Nonetheless, some communities still remain where social and health needs make them more vulnerable. In the past, the centre opened its doors to everyone that wanted to use its services. The local authority has taken a strategic change in direction. They are now focusing the centre's resources to ensure that

the gap in outcomes between vulnerable families and the families considered to be less at risk starts to show signs of narrowing.

Family support, early years advice, education and childcare are offered at Todmorden Children's Centre. Health partners are based at Todmorden Health Centre. The social work team is based at Todmorden Community College. The local population is mainly of White British heritage with a small percentage of families from minority ethnic groups. The reach area is characterised by private housing, social housing and rural areas.

When joining the early year's provision, the majority of children have the social and physical development skills expected for their age. The centre operates a variety of groups and activities on site and at different designated sites across the community. Currently, 78% of families with children under five years of age in the reach area are registered with the centre. Of these, 61% are engaged with the centre and using its services.

A range of professionals are represented on the advisory board, including centre staff, Homestart, local headteachers, health professionals and users.

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 families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Todmorden Children's Centre is a welcoming place that offers a suitable range of services, quality resources and information materials which generally reflect the community's diversity. Barriers of isolation that some groups in the community have experienced are starting to be successfully broken down. All the parents and carers spoken to, such as the young parents group, were very happy and secure about the welcome and care that they receive in the centre. Typical comments which reflect the views of many are, 'This centre has helped build my confidence tremendously'. Outcomes for users overall within the area are satisfactory. However, there are services offered that have resulted in good outcomes for users' safety and welfare, such as the effective support offered to safeguard families in time of crisis, and the tailored support to help users' feel safe in the centre and in the

community. In addition, the concerted effort by centre staff and a wide range of early years partners, including local headteachers, has resulted in children, in the areas designated to be the most disadvantaged, starting school with skills and knowledge equivalent to their peers. However, adults have too few opportunities to learn more than basic training skills. As a consequence, they are not in a position to seek employment, or for those in work to gain the necessary skills to apply for jobs that pay higher salaries than the minimum wage.

Most of the partnerships in the area are strong, such as those with social services and Homestart. The links with the health visitors and midwives that work out of the centre are also good. However, the centre does not receive the essential information that it needs from the Primary Care Trust to identify all the families with young children in its reach area and, in particular, those children in target groups and those in most need of intervention and support. The large size of the reach area presents varied challenges, such as rural isolation and dispersed pockets of drug, alcohol misuse and domestic violence. The centre is already struggling to meet the demands that have been placed on them as they have a backlog of families waiting for an initial assessment by the centre staff. The centre has quite rightly prioritised these visits according to need. However, a key priority in their development plan, which has been agreed with the local authority, is to identify and assess the needs of all families who are considered to be most at risk and less likely to engage with the centre. The centre management team and staff have made a determined effort to achieve this aim and can already demonstrate some successes as data show that more of the families considered to be most at risk are starting to attend activities and groups at the centre. This is a positive indication that the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve. However, what is not clear is how well the local authority is fully supporting the centre to meet this agreed target when they are already stretched to capacity.

Equality of opportunity for users is satisfactory overall. The centre can demonstrate the impact of services and activities upon the well-being of users that are engaging with its services. This is particularly the case for young parents, same sex couples and the wide range of services and activities that support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre manager and staff form a supportive team, committed to improving services and outcomes for users. All centre staff are held in high esteem by users who appreciate how much support is quickly available once their individual needs are known.

Governance is satisfactory due to the advisory board still developing. Membership is good and includes a wide range of partners and users. However, a chairperson has yet to be appointed and attendance by some key partners is variable. As a consequence, the board does not always have the required information, or a strategic lead to steer them in making important decisions or to monitor the work of the centre. A parent forum meets on a regular basis and includes representatives from all the groups in the reach area. However, the forum is yet to have a greater influence on shaping services at the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority needs to consider:
 - supporting the advisory board to improve their ability to evaluate and monitor the impact of the centre's work in meeting the needs of this community, particularly for the most vulnerable families
 - ensuring that the centre has the resources that it needs to engage and identify the needs of those families who do not currently access the centre's activities, particularly those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable
 - creating and securing agreement towards a clear and shared vision with the Primary Care Trust to improve the sharing of relevant data and a strategic commitment to integrated working.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents and carers appreciate the services that are provided and the good quality of the staff's care and support. As a result, all parents, carers and children accessing the centre's services enjoy the activities. This is particularly evident for families who attend 'Stay and Play' where children learn to play and interact with other children and parents and have the opportunity to socialise with each other and make new friends. Activities for fathers as well as mothers are provided at the centre. Fathers who attended the 'Den Building' summer activity typically commented, 'It's taken me back to my own childhood', and, 'I have had a great day with my child'. These activities also ensure that children are supported to take considered risks and learn about safety in a secure, managed environment.

Children and families who attend the centre make the most of an appropriate range of activities such as 'Cook and Taste' events, which give families not only a demonstration of healthy family meals, but also the opportunity to participate in the activity. While typical comments such as, 'Before attending this course my children would not eat vegetables', are positive, the centre is unsure whether these activities are reducing obesity, or improving poor attitudes towards healthy eating.

Sessions such as 'Yoga' and 'Reflexology' sessions are popular and are targeted at the parents and carers known to the centre who are dealing with complex issues. These sessions help parents and carers to cope with physical, mental and emotional stresses as well as maintain health and wellness. Centre evaluations include, 'It gave me some me time and made me feel wonderful and relaxed', and, 'I am more able to cope'. However, without relevant data it is difficult for the centre to know whether they are targeting all those parents and carers in the reach area who may benefit from this service.

Users of the centre say that they feel completely safe. This is a positive change in culture as some users, particularly same sex couples told the centre that previously they did not feel safe or confident and now they do. Parents know that they can trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. The centre works in partnership with Fire Safety Advisers who visit homes in the area where the staff have identified children may be at risk and signposts all the other families that are known to them to the fire service. This helps families understand the importance of how to make an escape plan in case a fire does break out. In addition, all homes visited by the fire service are provided with smoke alarms.

All children who access the centre's services behave well and develop positive relationships. Parents are well represented on the advisory board but their contribution to the governance of the centre is limited. The centre staff collect parents' views regularly at the end of group sessions and respond well to their ideas. For example, following a consultation survey in the Longfield community, activities are now offered in the school holidays. However, the centre is not as proactive as it could be in tracking the long term impact these activities have on improving outcomes for the families that attend.

Interviews with parents and carers and an examination of case studies provide some examples of how some previously vulnerable families have been helped to access training and future employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre is effective at assessing the needs of the children and families who use its services. Joint home visits are often made with staff from a referring agency ensuring that family support is carefully focused on parents' and carers' needs. Alongside good feedback from parents and carers who use the services, managers are now using this knowledge productively to develop their services more effectively and engage those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. This includes, increasing the number of 'Bongo

Bongo sessions' at outreach venues, most recently at Fernley Lee Primary School based on the Ashenhurst estate. During these sessions children and their parents develop communication and language skills, as well as learning fitness activities that utilize the large muscles of the body and provide them with fun and interesting exercises that they can do together.

The centre provides appropriate support for user groups such as childminders. They are helped to deliver quality provision for children through their attendance at a range of activities which are run by the early years team and the support they are given by the children's centre teacher. There is a good mix of consultation and training rooms which are used by a wide range of partners. For example, Sure Start Counselling sessions help those who suffer from postnatal issues, including depression and a wide range of other problems to talk to someone who will listen in a safe and confidential environment. The resources throughout the centre are of good quality. The centre ensures that good quality information about many aspects of parenting, including advice about how to keep children healthy and safe, is freely available to parents.

The centre has placed great focus on encouraging new mothers to breastfeed their children and have helped many mothers to become qualified breastfeeding peer supporters. The centre is quite rightly proud of the fact that over 53% of mothers are still breastfeeding their babies six weeks after the birth. However, the centre is unsure if this promising figure relates to all the target groups in their areas as they do not receive this data from the Primary Care Trust.

The centre staff have created an interesting and varied programme of activities and groups, not only at the centre but also in the satellite sites. However, despite these efforts and the increasing signposting of its services by partner groups, and even after initial home visits from health workers, the centre is acutely aware that some families remain 'hard to reach' and are not accessing services. While outreach and family support staff work diligently to reach out to families, gaps in data about the impact of services across the community mean that some vulnerable families may be missing out on provision that could improve their lives.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Operational management is satisfactory and financial resources are carefully managed. Governance is supportive but the role of the advisory board is still gathering momentum. There are regular performance management arrangements and supervisions in place for staff who feel valued and able to develop their own professional expertise through training opportunities. The centre manager acknowledges that the staff are the centre's most valuable resource. She has developed an enthusiastic and talented team that has benefited from a thoughtful investment in staff training and opportunities for sharing expertise. All staff are trained in all aspects of care and early education. This is a key strength, not only within the centre but also for the wider community.

Feedback from families indicates a high level of satisfaction and has, in some cases, influenced change and improvements to services that reflect the changing needs of the local community. While managers are not yet making best use of data to reach and tackle the needs of all families in need of support, staff provide good levels of care, are now targeting the right priorities and have a beneficial impact on those parents and children who using the centre's services. Therefore, the centre currently provides satisfactory value for money.

Partnerships continue to develop well with effective collaboration between the centre and most partners. The work with the social work teams and Homestart are particularly effective. Together they provide a real 'team around the child' approach to ensure that the most vulnerable children and families are protected and cared for. The centre's good safeguarding procedures, complemented by safe practice across the range of local authority partners, help children and their parents feel safe as they participate in children's centre activities. For example, risk assessment requires all staff and partners to carefully check play equipment to secure children's safety.

Staff are fully trained in respecting and sustaining equality and diversity. They are industrious in organising activities and resources to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the small number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

An inspection of the registered early years provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The provision was judged to be good. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Todmorden Children's Centre on 9 and 10 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We met a variety of users during the inspection and they are all strong supporters of the centre and its work. Our thanks go to everyone who shared their views. These helped us to appreciate how important the centre is to so many of you. We know that the centre has had to make some harsh decisions and have removed the 'access for all approach' that it has used in the past. This is because they need to ensure that their work is more focused on the families that really need their help, support and guidance. This change of direction has meant that for some of you the services that you used to enjoy have been removed. The centre is aware of this and wherever possible they have listened to your views and are working hard to ensure that everyone benefits in some way from what the centre has to offer.

Those of you that we spoke to told us about the very caring staff. You clearly appreciate the guidance and support on offer and you gave examples of how the centre has helped to change lives for the better. This caring approach by all the adults working in the centre is

reflected in the good safeguarding procedures that help local children and families to live and learn safely. It was really encouraging to hear that many of you feel less isolated in the community and have been able to socialise more by attending courses at the centre. We were particularly impressed by how much the centre has done to raise the knowledge and skills for children in your area as they enter their first year in school. This is a tremendous achievement and one which we are sure you are equally proud of. While some of you told us that you are learning new skills yourself, such as basic first aid and money management, we found that there are too few opportunities for you to build on these skills and gain recognised qualifications that will help you to find employment and improve your families economic stability.

We have said that some elements of the centre's work need to improve. We have asked the local authority to support the advisory board to become more challenging and ensure that it has all the information it needs to make good decisions on your behalf. We have also asked the local authority to ensure that the centre has adequate resources to identify local needs and better support those families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. While there are many good partners working with the centre, we found that the health partners do not always work together to share information and help the centre prioritise and identify where help is most needed. We have asked the local authority to work with the Primary Care Trust to address this. The reason that we have asked the centre to address these issues is that once these are in place the centre will be in a stronger position to see how well they are doing to meet all your needs.

Thank you to all that we met for your input into the inspection. We are very grateful and wish you every success in the future.

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