

Inspection report for Carlisle Rural Sure Start Children's Centre

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Local authority | Cumbria |
| Inspection number | 383593 |
| Inspection dates | 10–11 January 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | Dave Ellwand |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Centre leader | Julie Fletcher |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
| Centre address | Barnardo's Carlisle Rural Sure Start Children's Centre Mary Street Longtown Cumbria CA6 5UG |
| Telephone number | 01228 792130 |
| Fax number | 01228 792387 |
| Email address | julie.fletcher@barnardos.org.uk |

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Linked school if applicable | 133387 Longtown Primary School |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | EY344683 Pear Tree 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.

Report Published: February 2012

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



No.100080

© Crown copyright 2012

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.

An inspection of the co-located Longtown Primary School was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, senior leaders, representatives from the local authority, members of the advisory board, a range of partners, parents, carers and service users. They observed the centre's and partners' work, accompanied staff on a home visit and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Carlisle Rural Sure Start Children's Centre merges the reach areas of two formerly separate children's centres which were part of the Sure Start local programmes. It serves an area of Cumbria to the north of the city of Carlisle up to and along the Scottish Border, including the towns of Longtown and Brampton, as well as several villages and scattered rural communities, with one secondary school and 18 primary schools. The centre's catchment is not among the 30% most deprived super output areas, but it was designated in January 2005 as a phase one pilot centre, in recognition of its dispersed rural nature.

Almost all of the families are from a White British background. There are small and fluctuating numbers of Gypsy Roma families, mainly on three sites in the area. Children living in workless families in the area stands at 8.7%, which is much less than the 14.6% overall in Cumbria. Comparisons show that the Carlisle Rural Sure Start Children's Centre footprint overall is less disadvantaged than the rest of the county. There are fewer incidents of domestic violence and lower numbers of lone parent families. Health conditions are largely better with lower rates of childhood obesity, dental problems and smoking during pregnancy and higher rates of starting and maintaining breastfeeding. Generally, children's knowledge and skills by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are much higher than in the rest of the county with 63.8% recorded as good and improving year-on-year.

However, these include some smaller areas in the footprint with significantly lower levels and in five of the local primary schools, children's knowledge and skills on entry are significantly below those typically expected for their age.

The centre is situated in a complex of school buildings in Longtown, together with the current Longtown Primary School, the separately-managed Pear Tree Day Nursery, a Local Links centre and is adjacent to the Longtown Health Centre. The service offers services at many other school and community venues throughout its reach area. It provides the appropriate level of services with a wide variety of universal and specialised services to meet the needs of the community. The centre is open during the day Monday to Friday, regularly in the evenings and at the weekend. Recent reorganisations have led to changes in staffing and the formation of a new advisory group which also covers another children's centre at Carlisle North for which the centre manager also has responsibility. Governance is provided by Barnardo's, working closely with the local authority.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Carlisle Rural Sure Start Children's Centre provides a welcoming and trusted environment with outstanding care, guidance and support. Overall effectiveness is good as are outcomes and quality of provision. The centre has managed well a difficult period of reorganisation with changes in staff and in the way some relevant services are delivered, such as the school-based parent adviser roles. Some posts have been removed, such as the qualified early years teacher for the centre and area. The authority is making other arrangements to ensure that the centre has access to early years expertise. It is too early to say how effective these will be in enabling the centre to identify more clearly those children with levels of skills and knowledge significantly lower than those expected for their age and to make a better response to them.

The centre and Barnardo's work very closely with the local authority and have very effective partnerships with statutory, community-based and independent organisations. Managers use very well the data they have, but some is not up to date, or sufficiently precise. The centre is not fully able to establish baselines or evaluate the impact of some of its services. The

local authority and the centre's management recognise this issue and are working to improve the protocols for data-sharing. However, the centre and partners make good use of their local knowledge and networks to supplement the data they have. There is further quarterly monitoring by the local authority of the centre's commissioning, together with performance reviews by Barnardo's and through good professional supervision of managers. Overall, this provides an effective challenge to the centre and a thorough evaluation of improvements.

Self-evaluation documentation is kept updated during the processes of ongoing review and involves fully the parents' forum and partner organisations in setting priorities. As a result, the capacity for further improvement is good. Safeguarding is given high priority and effective procedures are in place to identify risks and take action to prevent harm and to protect children. Staff and visual displays reinforce safeguarding messages. The centre promotes equality and celebrates diversity and works hard to reach out to vulnerable target groups, such as groups of young parents, males and Gypsy Roma community members. The level of registration of families at the centre is low, at less than 30%, although this represents a significant increase over previous years. The centre knows that its registration does not fully record the active contacts it maintains and that it needs to build on its success in attracting more hard-to-reach families. The centre makes innovative use of available resources and other projects, such as Barnardo's volunteers, to extend the work of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and health services to ensure it has reliable data about its community to enable the setting of more precise targets for areas of improvement.
- Work with the local authority and schools to better identify and target areas of slow progress in raising the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.
- Increase registrations at the children's centre by identifying areas of low participation and hard-to-reach families and plan effective ways of involving them in the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

| |
|----------|
| 2 |
|----------|

Outcomes for families are good and improving. Barnardo's most recent survey of the centre's performance shows over 93% of respondents demonstrating improvements in outcomes for children and families. Overall, the Early Years Foundation Stage profile is improving, but some areas of the footprint show lower levels of knowledge and skills on entry to primary schools and data are not sufficiently robust to support thorough monitoring and targeting. The centre works well with partners in maintaining and promoting healthy lifestyles. Recent work with schools in the area has strengthened the centre's contact with many children and their families in addition to those already registered and has introduced

them to activities and ideas to develop healthier lifestyles. One mother said, 'I was so proud when I learned to cook with fresh ingredients and truly delighted when my daughter joined in cooking with me.'

Centre staff work well with health visitors, nursery nurses, family support workers and centre volunteers, including 'community parents' providing support and encouragement at a level that best suits family needs. Staff and partners liaise effectively with training and support networks and signpost families to a good range of providers. There is good one-to-one support for smoking cessation. One parent commented about the understanding and help that she had experienced from the centre to help with depression and isolation. As another parent said, 'I couldn't manage without support from the family worker and the rest of the centre staff – there's always someone to talk to – I feel more confident to help my child.' The wide range of exercise activities, including walking, the vegetable allotment and forest school initiatives, promote health, social interaction and an understanding of the environment. Parents also comment positively on the success of the 'Nurture' groups and of the drop-in sessions for older children, which both support improvements in behaviour and help children explore issues in their emotional health. The centre is the first in the county to gain a 'Smile 4 Life' award that recognises its success in promoting oral health.

Families appreciate the priority given to safety and feel safe in the centre. One parent explained, 'It's also alerted us to the many ways we can be safer at home and in the street.' The centre also provides safety equipment for home use. The centre gives sensitive and well-planned help to families in fear of violence, so they can access services outside their home in safety and confidence. Safeguarding is very thorough and as well as meeting the statutory requirements is aligned to the high requirements of Barnardo's. The centre's strong commitment to care is clear in the way it approaches all aspects of safety and safeguarding. Volunteers and partners commend the sensitive way that the centre manager and her staff offer them emotional support after potentially stressful incidents. Staff conduct risk assessments of activities and venues thoroughly and they regularly review practice. Common Assessment Framework and 'team around the child' processes are used well by the centre and by most partners, enabling effective early intervention and targeted support with very thorough monitoring and supervision. Good partnerships and multi-agency working are very effective and ensure families with children on child protection plans, children in need and looked after children receive good support.

Support for children's transition to school is very good, particularly for children with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, where portage and early support teams are highly praised by families and partner organisations. Parents are very enthusiastic and active in supporting the centre, the parents' forum and the advisory group. 'The centre respects our ideas and listens well,' said one user, who described also the self-esteem and confidence she gained when she and other parents were given responsibilities for organising a Christmas event. Parents talk positively of improvements in their parenting skills. There is good partnership working with Jobcentre Plus and providers of training and learning for adults. The centre has recently appointed staff to support and guide learning for adults. Partners offer successful volunteering opportunities and users have access to opportunities to develop their vocational skills and apprenticeships. It is still too early to see changes in

users' economic stability and independence, but as one user said, 'I am learning willingly now for the first time, gaining basic skills and looking forward to training for a career.'

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 | 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 2 |
| 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. | 2 |

How good is the provision?

2

Quality of provision is good and is driven by an outstanding commitment to care, guidance and support for families. Centre staff have a good understanding of the families in their area and of the barriers that make it difficult for many to access resources/services, such as rural isolation. The centre maintains a good balance of universal and targeted provision for specific families and for the wider community. When it identifies groups in the area as most vulnerable, it responds well and is increasingly locating its activities to meet their needs. Participation in the centre has been increasing, with some successes in attracting in hard-to-reach families. The centre is both highly regarded and trusted. One user of the centre said, 'We know that there's always someone there who will listen to you and we feel very welcome if we drop in for advice or encouragement.'

The centre consults users widely and responds well to suggestions such as the 'Nurture' group, which was set up following family support sessions. Some groups of male parents and carers who came to 'Match' activities designed exclusively for men to become more active parents, have gained enough self-confidence to request that sessions are now extended to include all the family. Staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework and the 'team around the family' approach to provide thorough initial assessment, co-ordination and targeted support.

The centre has a wide range of provision for children's learning and play. All activities and assessments are linked to Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes. The new learning and development worker post is extending the centre's success in encouraging previously reluctant learners to gain skills and qualifications and provides very effective guidance and support. Adult and family learning is well supported through good partnerships and effective mapping of progression opportunities.

Care, guidance and support for all centre users are excellent. Very well coordinated teamwork with partners ensures families receive sensitive, personalised and professional care and support which lead to positive outcomes. A strong focus on empowerment of users and on their emotional support builds their self-esteem and confidence and has considerable impact on families' lives in times of crisis. As one parent said, 'If I hadn't had the help, the children would have been taken away from me.' Team support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is particularly strong and is valued by families for the good continuity it gives them through stages of transition. All users are made to feel valued and children and parents are actively involved in making choices and decisions in the centre. Children were pleased that they were able to choose the name of the mobile play resource and created the logos and rainbow designs which decorate it.

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 | 2 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups | 2 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups. | 1 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre's governance and accountability arrangements are clear and well understood by staff, partners and users and there is good communication with all of priorities and progress. The advisory board, Barnardo's and the local authority work closely together and provide a very effective challenge to the management of the centre. They all identify the high commitment and the passion for the centre's work shown by the manager and her staff. Quarterly reviews of the centre's work as part of the commissioning process, internal reviews and monitoring by Barnardo's and close monitoring by the local authority's early intervention section all provide very thorough and consistent support and challenge to the centre. The advisory board has been recently reorganised, but partners and users of the centre and of a neighbouring Carlisle North Children's Centre are fully represented and focus clearly on monitoring the progress of the service.

There is good management and supervision of staff at all levels and their caseloads are monitored thoroughly to ensure procedures are followed and that work is well focused. Throughout the many recent changes, staff remained highly motivated and continued to deliver good-quality services. Staff make good use of networking arrangements, creative sharing of resources and joint initiatives to minimise the effect of reducing budgets and to share and discuss good practice. The centre provides good value for money. Partnerships are strong and at a strategic level there is a review of service expectations which follows up issues identified at centres, such as gaps in data sharing and areas for improved collaborations, but it is too early to assess the impact of this.

The centre makes good use of evaluations of its work and there are good case studies and summaries of users' views that show better the outcomes achieved as well as user satisfaction levels. Internal reviews also illustrate the centre's impact and are used well with other evidence to inform development planning. Parents and carers are enthusiastic and active in the parent's forum as well as more informally throughout the centre. They are kept well informed by centre staff, who help develop their capacity to contribute to the centre's governance and enable their voices to be heard. The centre is welcoming, well maintained and has had several adaptations to improve its use, accessibility and safety.

The centre prioritises the inclusion of all children and families and fully promotes equality and diversity. Staff and users respect and value everyone regardless of their background or status. The issues and barriers making participation difficult for isolated rural communities are well understood and the centre makes good use of local trained volunteers to support and help with transport. The centre also offers provision for the Gypsy Roma groups in the area with positive consideration on how to make services acceptable and to enhance community cohesion. A parent from the Gypsy Roma community has been trained and supported through the Barnardo's Volunteering Pathway, to act as ambassador for her community and she has been able to contribute to equality and diversity training days for children's centres. There is particularly good support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including tailored play activities. The centre supports the local childminders' network and their practice is improved by good training in the centre.

Risk assessments and fire-safety procedures are conducted thoroughly on a regular basis. All staff, partner agencies and users have a good understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding and are clear about the procedures for reporting concerns. The centre ensures all staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and implements rigorously safe recruitment procedures, including full Criminal Records Bureau checks. All staff and volunteers have up-to-date safeguarding training relevant to their roles and regularly review best practice in this.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes | 2 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose | 2 |
| 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. | 2 |

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

The children's centre inspection findings were informed by a parallel inspection of the separately managed Longtown Primary School on 9 - 10 January, 2012.

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 Carlisle Rural Sure Start Children's Centre on 10 - 11 January 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff at the centre and a wide range of partners from services and parts of local authority which work with the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

Carlisle Rural Sure Start Children's Centre is important in the life of the community and serves the needs of the area well. The centre is a place where everyone is welcomed, included and valued. It is a trusted environment with outstanding care, guidance and support. We found that quality of provision and the outcomes of the work are both good. The centre has recently had a difficult time of reorganisation, when there were changes in staff and in the organisation of some of the services linked to the centre and its partners. The centre no longer has the same arrangements as before for a qualified early years teacher to work in your area. We judge that, although most children make good progress with their development and learning, there are many small pockets in your large area where progress is not as good, so the centre needs early years expertise so that the right extra help is given. We recommend that the authority makes sure that its new arrangements give the centre the full early years expertise it needs.

The centre has good partnerships and it works well with Barnardo's, with the local authority, with health and education services as well as many community-based and independent

organisations. This helps bring more activities and resources into the centre and the centre is very innovative and creative at a time when budgets are shrinking. The centre uses available resources well and attracts in other projects, such as Barnardo's volunteers, to extend its work. The partnerships also support the centre in measuring its progress and this contributes a great deal to the centre's management. We recognise that a great deal is done by the local authority and Barnardo's to review and monitor improvements in the centre's work and that this is done very well. It uses information about the health issues of the area, the numbers of families who might need services and information about children's development and learning as they grow up. However, we recognise that not all information that the centre uses is sufficiently up to date, or sufficiently precise. We recommend that the centre and the local authority, together with partner organisations, take a look at the information they collect and share, so that it gives the centre and its advisory board a better idea of its starting points. This will also help the centre to evaluate the effects of the service it provides.

The centre and partners have a good understanding of the community and many of you spoke of how you add to this and how your views and ideas are taken into account in planning the centre's work. We see that the parents' forum is important in this and that it helps the centre and the advisory board to set priorities, identify improvements and review progress. The centre uses the processes of self-evaluation well and is good at discussing its progress with centre users, for example, by showing how well it responds to suggestions with the 'You asked, we did' displays. We judged overall that the centre has a good capacity to improve and become even better at meeting the needs of families.

We saw how the centre gives high priority to safeguarding children and their families and that staff effectively identify risks and take action to prevent harm and to protect children. Safeguarding messages are displayed around the centre and staff are good at reinforcing these. The centre takes seriously its duty to promote equality and celebrate diversity. There are many of the target groups for the centre's services who are hard to attract into using its services. The centre has worked well to provide activities to do this. It is succeeding by putting on work such as 'Match' for male parents and carers and with sessions for groups of young parents, for families of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for members of the Gypsy Roma community. The centre staff put a great deal of thought into finding ways to get people involved in the centre and recognise that there are barriers for many, such as travelling in the area covered by the centre. We feel that the level of registration of families at the centre is low, although this is still an improvement over previous years. The centre has contact with many children and families who are not recorded in the registrations, but we recommend that the centre does more to increase its registration rate and builds on its success in attracting more families to participate in centre activities.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. Your comments and ideas helped us greatly in the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed visiting your centre and we send you and your families our best wishes for the future.

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