

Inspection report for Eastham Children's Centre

Local authority	Wirral
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	136056 Millfields Church of England (Controlled) Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY319683 Buddies at Millfields

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.

An inspection of the co-located 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 the centre managers, partners, members of the advisory group, representatives of the local authority, front line staff and with users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Eastham Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in September 2008 in the Eastham area of Merseyside. It is co-located with Millfields Church of England (Controlled) Primary School in a single storey building, and gives users access to the appropriate level of services, including family support, child-development sessions, outreach sessions, home visiting, play, crèche and access to advice and guidance. Additional health services are provided at a newly-built clinic very close to the centre. A private provider runs a breakfast- and after-school club on the children's centre premises called 'Buddies' which is subject to a separate inspection under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. It was last inspected in 2010 and the report can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Approximately 1100 children aged from birth to four live in the reach area. Of the 14 super output areas 12 are amongst the 70% least deprived areas. The remaining two super output areas are amongst the 30% most deprived areas. There are 200 children, with 41% of families dependent on worklessness benefits. Nearly all families are of White British heritage.

The local authority provides the strategic management and direction of the centre. The advisory group provides the governance for the centre and for Bebington, Bromborough and

New Ferry Children’s Centres, which together form the South Wirral cluster. The manager was appointed in April 2008 and she is responsible for managing all the centres in the cluster. Most of the other centre staff are very recent appointments following a reorganisation and include an outreach co-ordinator, family support, early years and support workers. Additionally, some staff work across all centres in the cluster, including development workers, a co-ordinator for the childminder network and an Early Years Foundation Stage consultant, who also acts as co-ordinator for special educational needs. On entry to early years provision, most children’s skills, knowledge and abilities are below those normally expected for their age.

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

Eastham Children’s Centre provides a good level of service. Management, staff and partner agencies work together well to provide a welcoming and co-ordinated service leading to good and improving outcomes for children and their families. Users of the centre praise the staff for their commitment to providing a good service and comment very positively on their approachability and wealth of advice and support. Typical views expressed by users are, ‘Without a doubt, it’s a brilliant service that has built my confidence’ and, ‘Before attending the course, I had no self-esteem, no routine and no way of managing my child.’

The manager gives clear leadership to the centre and is well supported by an effective staff team with a very clear view of local needs. Good partnerships extend the range of available services and, with the highly-effective outreach and early years support, provide well-integrated services to users. The centre has increased registrations in the last year, and has been especially successful in registering hard-to-reach families in the 30% most deprived target areas. However, there are still insufficient outreach activities to engage some of the families who have not used the services of the centre previously. The centre has identified a priority to build on its outreach work, and has recently added to the staff team, although it is still too early to see the full impact. Staff supervision is good and is supported by effective training, professional development and team-working across the centres in the cluster.

The advisory board and local authority managers provide effective challenge and support for the centre. They ensure that the centre's provision reflects the priorities of improving the health, safety and well-being of the local community. The advisory board also co-ordinates and plans the provision with other nearby children's centres, so ensures good value for money and avoids duplication. However, there are currently no users of the centre on the advisory board and the centre is not yet succeeding in creating an effective parents' forum. This has an impact on users' ability to be involved in key decision-making and in offering support and challenge to the centre at a strategic level. Communication with users of the centre is good, with many adaptations to the centre's programme in response to users' suggestions. The local authority is providing thorough and accurate data received from partners, the registration system and through recording the impact of outcomes. This is enabling the centre to set more detailed targets, monitor its progress and plan further for improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate. Development plans for the centre effectively reflect the main areas for improvement. Key health and education indicators are improving. Accordingly, the centre's capacity to improve is good.

Health, safety and safeguarding arrangements are good, as are the procedures to promote equality and diversity. Clear and informative information, advice and guidance about adult learning programmes are available. Centre staff support users in accessing information and guidance about employment opportunities from Jobcentre Plus, and further arrangements with an independent provider are enhancing the centre's capacity for improving employability, although it is too early to see the impact of this.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outreach work to increase the take-up of services by vulnerable families in target areas.
- Ensure the centre has an active and effective parents' forum and builds on parents' capacity to participate on the advisory board.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre promotes healthy lifestyles well in all its activities. Staff give effective guidance and support and use family support drop-in sessions and 'tea and toast' sessions well to pass on advice and resources. Outdoor play and activities are promoted well, including the 'Big Toddler,' and guided family walks around the local woods. Regular play activities and family sports also support children's physical development well. Case studies show successful support given to families to reduce morbid obesity, and overall there is a slight decline in the proportion of children who are obese as they start primary school in the area. The 'Preparing for parenthood' course, run jointly between centre staff and health workers, give expectant parents practical help to prepare for their new baby. This includes a good introduction to exercise and yoga for parent and baby. The centre manager has developed innovative support programmes with the neo-natal unit at the local hospital which is

effective in providing intense support for particularly vulnerable parents and children. The Wirral Early Communication Programme, 'Baby Babble' and 'Talking Tots' sessions ensure the development of good early language skills. Partnerships with health staff have improved screening and early referrals when more extensive language support is needed. Overall, there have been good improvements in outcomes, and typically one early years setting in the area demonstrated a 5% reduction in the number of children at risk of language delay over the previous year. Effective support for disabled children has helped identify suitable specialist provision. One mother explained how the centre gave sensitive help and referral to enable early diagnosis of her child's autism. 'It was explained thoroughly, in layman's terms, and they prepared me well, so it didn't come as a shock.' The advice and encouragement provided by staff help parents to develop their skills, knowledge and confidence, enabling them to understand and support their children's development and behaviour. As one parent said, 'By the end of a session I've learned a lot, feel a million times better and I come out smiling.' There is a good range of parenting courses, with particular attention given to children's emotional health.

Users of the centre feel safe and have good access to activities, advice and equipment for improving safety in their homes. The centre has made steady improvements each year in reducing numbers of children experiencing injuries, particularly in the two most deprived areas. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is used well to co-ordinate services. Systematic reviews and supervision ensure good outcomes for families, with very effective support for children in need and those on child protection plans. Family support workers provide very effective home visits and outreach work and work well with those families who are hard to engage.

Multi-agency work has enabled those experiencing domestic violence to have good access to specialist services and the centre provides a trusted and safe point of contact for them. Users enjoy attending the centre and taking part in the activities provided. Good use is made of individual education plans and 'Learning Journeys' to guide children's progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage. The proportion of children reaching the nationally-expected level at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving overall and significantly in the target areas. The attainment gap between the lowest-attaining children and the rest is similarly closing.

Overall, parents are effectively involved in the development of the centre and their comments and suggestions are used well in planning activities. However, there is no parents' forum to provide formal input into the advisory group, which has no parents from this centre as members. Those families who are vulnerable and those on low incomes are supported well in accessing childcare provision and there is good information, advice and guidance about adult learning which can lead to training and employment. As a result some users have gained valuable experience as volunteers in the centre which has helped them undertake further training and find 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	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

Good partnership-working, thorough reviews and professional supervision, ensure that assessment is robust and that services adapt to meeting the greatest needs. Partnership working has been very successful overall in increasing registrations, especially in the most deprived areas, where almost all families are included. However, there are still insufficient outreach activities aimed at engaging families who have not previously accessed the centre’s services.

Activities are purposeful and well-planned to focus clearly on the learning and development of parents and their children. Provision is of good quality and held in high regard by centre users. Sessions help children to become familiar with making choices and build effective trusting relationships. Parents feel that the confidence staff have in them develops their ability to improve the outcomes for their families. One parent said, ‘The sessions gave me really sound stepping stones. I’ve gained so much confidence and I’m a different person now.’ Users are encouraged to build on their successes and they receive certificates when they complete courses.

The care, guidance and support provided by staff are good. Many users comment on the very positive welcome that they get from the centre and how important that is in establishing trust when they are vulnerable or when they experience crises. One young couple described the very extensive support they had in coping with multiple difficulties in the early months of having their first child. ‘We came through a lot and had such help; it felt like we lived in the centre.’ Users also comment that the support is personalised and that staff are very sensitive to their needs. Staff give very practical support, for example in helping users to attend meetings or complete application forms, but there is also considerable emotional support and encouragement for them to gain confidence and self-reliance. Users of the centre praise very highly the care and support from staff and they are

very conscious of the progress made and the growth of self-esteem. As one expressed it, 'I'd still be a bag of nerves at home, without their help.'

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.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements for the centre are good and are well-understood by staff and partners. Service provision is clearly linked to strategic planning, with clear targeting to meet national and local priorities. Overall, outcomes are good and improving and are well-supported by detailed action-planning. The local authority provides good leadership for the centre and ensures it is held to account. The authority provides high-quality data about the area and about the centre's performance. This data are used well to identify local needs and to enable very effective monitoring of the centre's progress.

Premises and resources are safe and well-used. Management of the centre is good, with detailed financial control and regular review of budgets. The staff work effectively with a wide range of partners, including other centres, to make the best use of resources and increase the services available. Therefore, value for money is good. Staff are deployed well, with very good training and development support and inductions for new staff are thorough. Partners are active on the advisory board, including representatives of the authority, schools, private, voluntary and independent providers, faith and community groups, Jobcentre Plus and health services. This is effective in co-ordinating the work of all the centres in the cluster and in developing integrated provision. However, parents from the centre are not currently represented on the advisory board and there is no active parents' forum. The advisory board is in the process of setting up sub-groups for each individual centre in the cluster, but it is too early to determine if this will succeed in enabling users of the centre to play a more active role in its management.

Inclusion of children and their families is central to the centre's purpose. It is very welcoming to all and it promotes equality well. The centre celebrates cultural diversity with appropriate displays and activities, such as using Chinese New Year themes throughout the centre. The centre works consistently to improve the involvement of target groups in the community. Recent consultations with the local autism support group identified improvements in the centre's layout and lighting to remove barriers to young people being comfortable in the centre. Action has been taken to address the recommendations and has enabled greater participation.

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 fully implements safe recruitment procedures, including enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks, to ensure that all staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults. All staff and volunteers have undergone up-to-date safeguarding training. The centre rigorously uses comprehensive health and safety risk assessments for all venues and activities.

Partnerships are very effective and have enabled centre users to access a wider range of support and expertise. Good-quality assurance processes and the monitoring of partnership-working, effectively supports the development of an integrated service.

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.	3

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 Millfields Church of England (Controlled) Primary School on 25 and 26 January 2012.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Eastham Children's Centre on 26 - 27 January 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who came to talk to us when we inspected your centre. You told us that Eastham Children's Centre is a supportive centre with good-quality provision. We heard how you appreciate the welcome that you receive from the centre and how important this is to you, particularly in times of crisis. Many of you praise the staff for the support they give, often going the extra mile to be helpful, with a wealth of advice and support. We saw how the centre's staff and management work well together with partner agencies to provide a good service and how this leads to improvements in your lives and those of your children. We heard two typical views expressed by users, 'Without a doubt, it's a brilliant service that has built my confidence' and, 'Before attending the course, I had no self-esteem, no routine and no way of managing my child.'

The centre manager gives clear leadership and is well-supported by a highly-effective staff team. Partnerships, such as those with health visitors and colleagues, extend the range of services. There are good home visiting and outreach activities, with the some highly-effective support for play and early years work. We heard how the centre helps explain children's development and behaviour so that parents are encouraged to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge to support them. As one parent said, 'By the end of a session I've learned a lot, feel a million times better and I come out smiling.' There is a good range of parenting courses, with particular attention given to children's emotional health.

A lot of effective support helps children make good progress in their communication and social skills and prepares them well for going on to primary school. We heard how programmes like 'Talking Tots' help children with their speech and listening skills and how this is improving every year in your area. We also heard of how the health of children and families in the area is improving with support for play and exercise activities and good advice about healthy eating. There is clear information, advice and guidance about adult learning programmes and good support for improving opportunities to find work.

The centre has been successful in registering more of the families in your area, especially in those parts where there are the most difficulties for families. We are recommending that the centre does more outreach activities to better meet the needs of those families who have not made use of the centre before.

There is good management of staff and they receive effective training and professional development. Many of the staff have come to the centre only recently, but they have a detailed induction to the centre and often work with the support of teams in other centres in South Wirral.

The advisory board and local authority managers challenge and support the centre well. They keep the centre working on the priorities of improving the health, safety and well-being of your community. The advisory board also co-ordinates and plans provision with other nearby children's centres, so ensures good value for money and avoids duplication. Many of you share your views and ideas with the centre, to suggest ways to improve the activities. However, the centre is not yet succeeding in setting up an effective parents' forum and there are currently no users of this centre on the advisory board. We are recommending that the centre finds ways of involving you more in making decisions about the centre and we hope many more of you can play an active part in this.

The centre makes good use of statistics about the area to set more detailed targets and measure its progress. It has an accurate view of how it is doing and can effectively plan for further progress. We saw that there are important improvements in the health and education in the area. Accordingly, we feel that the centre has good capacity to improve further.

The centre gives high priority to health and safety and has good systems for ensuring the protection of your children. It promotes equality and diversity well. It provides a centre which helps all children and families feel included.

Thank you for your help in this inspection and we wish you every success in the future. The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.