

# Inspection report for Balladen Children's Centre

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Local authority	Lancashire
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Centre leader	Melanie Kendall
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Rawtenstall Balladen Community Primary 119280
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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/partner 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](http://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, representatives from the local authority and other external organisations, health services, local headteachers and parents. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Balladen Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. It was designated in 2007 and is housed in a purpose built accommodation attached to Balladen Primary School. It provides a wide range of services to local families. It makes a full core offer except for childcare provision. Its reach covers an area that is 15 miles long and ranges from Crawshawbooth in the north to Stubbins in the south. The centre is governed by the school and a committee of the school's governing body acts as an advisory board. It consists of representatives from health and social services, the voluntary sector and local authority.

The prime users of the centre live in two local estates although the reach area includes an area, which is in the top 10% of social deprivation. The main local population is of White British heritage and currently just under 10% of the reach area are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly of Asian Bengali heritage. A higher percentage of minority ethnic community is in an area of up to 30% highest levels of deprivation. Across the reach area, the levels of unemployment are above average and a high percentage of families rely on benefits.

Balladen Children's Centre had 687 children registered at the end of January 2012, which represented over 68% of all children aged from birth to five years in the reach area; 94% of

children living in the top 30% areas of deprivation within the reach area are registered with the centre. Over half of the children registered engage with activities and services the centre provides. There are seven primary schools in the reach area and one secondary school. The attainment of children into the Early Years Foundation Stage to the schools varies but overall, it is below expected levels. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals varies across the reach area but is above average overall. The centre is open for 50 weeks a year for five days each week and on some Saturdays.

## 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

This is a good children's centre. Much is being achieved and outcomes are good or outstanding. The centre makes a positive difference to the health, well-being and development of a wide range of users in a welcoming, friendly setting. There is a steady rise in new registrations. Data indicate that regular contact with target groups is good with over half of children in the most deprived target groups benefiting from services provided by the centre. Leadership is good and the centre demonstrates good capacity to make an even greater impact on the outcomes of the most vulnerable families within the community. The centre leadership and management are very effective and set high expectations for staff. Under strong leadership an effective staff team is established with everyone sharing the same vision for providing support to a wide range of users. A key strength of the centre is the high quality relationships between staff and users of the centre. These build a sense of trust between all parties. Parents who are experiencing change and challenging circumstances in their lives feel able to share their concerns with staff. The centre provides very good levels of advice and support about how families can access a wide range of services to develop parenting and life skills and improve their chances of employment. Increasing numbers of parents are attending the courses provided and the involvement of fathers is improving.

Outcomes are good in most areas and outstanding in some. Very good opportunities are provided for adults to develop skills in literacy and numeracy which add to their confidence

and expertise when seeking employment. Highly innovative initiatives take the centre's offer to the community. Excellent outreach strategies mean that parents and their children can access services such as baby massage in their local area without having to travel to the centre. Children known to be eligible for free school meals in schools aged from five to seven within the reach area, benefit from innovative and excellently led courses to encourage parents to engage with their children in their school work. This initiative contributes very well to the narrowing of the achievement gap in the performance between children known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are not. Regular courses develop parenting skills in a range of areas such as safety in the home, healthy eating and managing children's behaviour and are very popular. Excellent partnerships with local health services mean that support is available for mothers from conception to birth and beyond and give newborn babies a good chance of thriving. The centre is very responsive to the needs of the whole community through highly effective outreach work and comprehensive knowledge of the local area. Staff seek the views of parents, although there is scope for a more formal approach to this in order that their views are fully represented in areas for development. Many parents comment very positively about how the centre has successfully had an impact on their family and their own lives. For instance, one parent commented: 'I would be lost without this centre...it has supported me through difficult times and helped me to do the best for my children'.

Parents and children are safe because of excellent safeguarding procedures. The centre is very welcoming and homely. It is a base for a variety of agencies to work with families and to provide information that they may take advantage of. Governance arrangements meet requirements well, although the advisory board is not yet working closely with the children's centre leader to support and challenge decisions. Data are regularly gathered to inform the monitoring of provision and accurate self-evaluation. Information regarding outcomes of courses and the impact of outreach activities are not systematically analysed to identify further opportunities to match future support to the needs of the most vulnerable and hardest-to-engage members of the community.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Ensure that the centre strengthens its systems for recording its activities and their outcomes to add given greater precision to targets for shaping the centre's development.
- Provide greater opportunities for parents to influence the provision and direction of the centre.
- Ensure that the advisory board is more closely involved in supporting and challenging the management of the centre.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>2</b>
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The outcomes for users are good overall. Arrangements for promoting awareness of health issues among the target groups in the reach area are very good and are starting to tackle the recent rise in obesity by the age of five. The healthy cooking sessions such as 'Cook and Eat' are greatly valued by parents and they contribute to developing good attitudes towards eating at home with their children. Evaluations from attendees of these courses are full of praise about the confidence it has given them to cook from scratch. Health personnel and centre staff provide high levels of guidance, support and information about children's health through regular baby developmental sessions at the centre. Baby massage is very well received and offered in venues throughout the reach area. The number of mothers still breastfeeding at six weeks is increasing because of the good guidance provided by professionals at the centre. Initiatives to discourage smoking and support for individuals wishing to stop by referral to the 'Stop Smoking' service add to children's chance to grow in smoke free environments.

Children using the centre facilities are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their learning and are well behaved and form good relationships. Personal and social outcomes are excellent and many children and parents grow rapidly in confidence as a result of attending activities at the centre. This has led to some being trained as volunteers supporting the centre. The economic futures of a few younger mothers of school age have also been boosted. They have gained support from staff in the centre in liaison with the school and this has enabled them to continue in full-time education after giving birth. Good social networks develop among parents, which reduce the isolation experienced by some. 'Tweenies' sessions, for example, brings parents together, with their children, to make new friendships. Parents who speak English as an additional language respond very well to the outreach support offered in their community by very talented bilingual members of staff. Some of these parents have been encouraged to further their knowledge of English as a result of this good provision with a view to seeking employment.

Very effective action by the staff of the centre, coupled with excellent links with Children's Social Care and Lancashire Care Foundation Trust ensures that effective support is provided for children on child protection plans. The centre is a hub for many agencies involved with common assessment framework processes and looked after children. Parents receive consistent messages from a range of health professionals about the importance of living healthy lifestyles. Parents demonstrate very good levels of understanding about safety issues as a result. Children who attend sessions at the centre settle very quickly and respond very positively to the care and support of the childcare worker and other adults. These children understand well about behaving safely and sensibly and learning to take risks in a safe environment. The extent to which children are safe and protected is outstanding. Systems for identifying children and families who are vulnerable or at risk are effective, and support for these families is helping to keep children safe. Childminders in the area receive good support and professional development to support their work through attendance at regular sessions at the centre with the local childminding network coordinator.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

Staff know the families using the centre very well and use this knowledge to tailor support to their needs and when necessary signpost parents to services available from other agencies. The range of services is rapidly increasing, particularly related to health and education. Highly effective outreach work takes services to every part of the reach area. Provision is extremely cohesive because of highly effective integration with a wide range of professionals. Activities are of good quality and promote purposeful learning among a wide range of children and their families. Innovative strategies such as 'Best Start', which is used well to narrow the achievement gap between some groups of children, are available to all of the seven schools in the reach area. Parents value this provision greatly and one commented that, 'It gives me a chance to be with my child and begin to understand how I can help her at home with school work'. Specific programmes for promoting language and communication among young children struggling with aspects of speech give parents the skills of signing to widen their children's vocabulary. Very high quality courses are offered in the centre and outreach and instil in families the confidence to tackle on new challenges in their lives. Sessions such as the 'Baby Massage' and support at home from conception to birth and beyond instil a sense of well-being in mothers and babies. Breastfeeding advice is carefully tailored to individual need and very well received by new mothers; data indicate rates are rising. Access to free Vitamin D tablets, toothbrushes and toothpaste, and delivery of sessions such as 'Cook and Eat' combine to improve the health of many users.

Care, guidance and support are good overall and there are examples of high levels of support given to individuals. For instance, excellent liaison with support agencies such as those from health and social care enables suitably adapted support to be available for individuals. In times of crisis, the skilled team based at the centre takes swift action. An example of such support is help given to users who are given regular support for over a year to help them to adjust to becoming lone parents. Success is gained when new and

secure living situations are gained benefiting the families' stability and self-confidence. Outreach work successfully engages teenage groups who are identified as vulnerable. Initiatives such as 'Speak Easy' encourage these young people to talk together and with their parents about sensitive issues such as sex and contraception. This is one reason why teenage contraception in Rossendale is lower than the county average. Effective strategies for publicising the centre keep the community fully informed and target the most vulnerable and deprived in the reach area. Leaflets are available in shops, schools and all public buildings and advertising is regularly placed in the community publication 'Scally Wags'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Leaders and managers have quickly established this centre as a highly valued part of the community. Governance arrangements are secure and the advisory board has firmly established lines of accountability with clear terms of reference, although it does not currently do enough to directly support and advise the centre leader. Day-to-day management is highly effective. Centre leadership has successfully instilled a sense of teamwork and purpose among a small, dedicated staff team. Roles and responsibilities are very clearly understood. The local authority plays a full, strategic role in developing the centre as part of a cohesive package of childcare and support for families. The effective improvement plan provides a structured approach to further development in line with both local authority and centre priorities. Good progress is underway to use data to support accurate self-evaluation and develop the range of services further. Monitoring reports for each service are detailed and clearly link to set targets and users' outcomes. However, record keeping for some of the centre's activities is not sufficiently precise to enable the centre to evaluate the impact of the services. This sometimes prevents the sharpest possible areas for improvement to be confidently secured. Value for money is good. Effective commissioning arrangements are rigorously applied to ensure best use of limited financial resources. Staff are deployed well to provide a growing package of good quality services for users. The quality, range and use of resources are good overall, with excellent decisions to extend services to local primary schools enabling a wider engagement of more families. Equality and disability legislation is meticulously implemented and highly effective policies are in place. This ensures the centre is highly inclusive and staff are focused on enabling all families to make the best possible progress. There is an excellent culture of respect.

All requirements related to recruitment and safeguarding are extremely well applied, with excellent procedures for risk assessment. Staff are trained in all aspects of safeguarding and



first aid and fire regulations are secure. Highly committed staff work closely with a range of professionals to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are effectively monitored and actions are taken to help and support children and families in crisis. Excellent partnerships exist between the centre and a range of other agencies and local support networks. For instance, the centre has established very strong links with other local organisations to support the development of a good range of services for a growing number of users. Strong and productive links exist with the school on the shared site.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>2</b>

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Balladen Children's Centre on 1 and 2 February 2012. It was judged to be good overall. There are some excellent features as well. High quality support is provided in the outreach centres throughout the area so that more of you can use the services offered. Some excellent partnerships with health professionals such as midwives and also with care and welfare services add to you and your families' chances of healthy lives. You have many strong opportunities to develop a healthy way of living and help expectant and new mothers.

Many of you said that staff are very caring and supportive. Our findings show that this is a real strength of the centre. The staff are there for you and often take swift action to support you in times of crises. We were impressed with the good leadership of the centre and the way the leaders and managers engender a strong sense of teamwork between the staff. Together, the staff team work hard to support both your children's development and your own skills and confidence. Excellent information is provided about how to be healthy and safe and how to get extra help for your family. Initiatives such as from 'Bump to Birth and Beyond' give your children every chance of a healthy start to life. The steps to encourage healthy eating, avoiding smoking and taking regular exercise add to the potential for all of you to live happy and healthy lives. Activities, such as the family literacy and numeracy sessions leading to qualifications, give you more confidence in yourselves and increase your chances of getting into work. The cultural heritage of families using the centre and staff is valued and links with families and children are promoted through the actions of talented members of staff who speak many languages and can communicate with parents.

Balladen Children's Centre is an extremely secure and safe place for you to bring your children. It is welcoming and allows your children to play and learn happily. The centre provides a good place for you to meet other parents/carers and people who can help you and your families. Staff provide a warm welcome to all who use the centre and are increasingly providing activities that fully reflect the diversity of the local community to ensure that everyone feels welcome. The staff use information well to plan activities for you and your children. However, we have asked them to record and use information even better to make sure that your opinions and evaluations are used more in shaping the centre's development. We have also asked that the advisory committee provides challenge and support to the centre leader to help with the shaping of future services.

It was a pleasure to meet some of you during the inspection and to learn about the ways that the centre benefits you and your families. Thank you for contributing to our evidence base by sharing your comments and views so openly.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).