

Inspection report for Seven Trees Children's Centre

Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	384083
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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	EY272664 Seven Trees Children's Centre

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 management team, centre staff, representatives of the local authority, members of the management board, users of the centre and partner agencies. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Seven Trees Children's Centre was designated in 2007 as a phase one children's centre. The centre serves families living in one of the 10% most deprived areas in the country where families face high levels of social disadvantage. Levels of unemployment are high and many of the existing jobs are low paid. There is also a high level of long-term sickness.

The centre delivers health services, adult learning and employment support and guidance working in partnership with health professionals, Jobcentre Plus and adult learning services. The centre's early years and childcare provision is inspected separately and the report of this inspection is available to view on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre is accountable to the local authority and is governed by a local management board. The early years geographical manager has responsibility for three children's centres within the reach area. The operational manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre. The centre has undergone a re-structure of its services in the last year.

The population of the reach area is predominantly of Asian heritage with a low number of White British families. For many families English is an additional language. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills that are below those 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

The overall effectiveness of the children's centre is good as is the capacity to improve. The centre quite rightly sees itself as being at the heart of the community, offering information and support to those most in need. Cultural and language barriers have been broken down due to the commitment and determination of staff who treat all users with respect.

The centre successfully engages with the vast majority of its families, particularly the groups who are most vulnerable. For example, all teenagers who are currently pregnant or have a young child benefit from the services of the centre and the majority return to education or attend training courses to improve their parenting skills. The financial constraints imposed on the centre led to some difficult decisions having to be made in regard to both staff and commissioned services. It is to the centre's credit that throughout this period it was 'business as usual' and in what could have had a negative impact was turned into a positive through the development of staff into new roles.

The excellent care, guidance and support have resulted in good outcomes for most families, enabling them to be safe and less vulnerable. Users say how they now feel 'happy and safe' and 'it has made a real difference to my children'. A strong feature of the centre is the outcomes for children with disabilities and those with special educational needs; in particular those with speech and language difficulties. Support provided by the centre in partnership with the speech and language team ensures that children are well-supported and able to communicate through sign language and pictures.

A strength of the centre is the ability to work effectively in partnership. Services are fully integrated and a robust analysis of individual need ensures that each family is effectively supported within a short period of time. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and the centre exemplifies high-quality practice. As a result children and adults are protected. The centre recognises the need to improve the involvement of parents and carers in decision-

making and shaping services. Parents are now represented on the local management board but are not yet fully confident in their role.

Good self-evaluation, clear priorities and performance indicators are in place. These contribute to ensuring services continue to meet the needs of the community and to the centres good capacity to continually improve. However, they are not clearly identified in the action plan making the success rate difficult to evaluate over time.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the opportunities for the views of families to be heard and used to shape services and become involved with the centre's work.
- Ensure that the action plan enables evaluation to be accurate by clearly defining the priority groups and targets.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

In the previous year there has been an improvement in the outcomes for families. The importance of breastfeeding is a message the centre has worked hard to promote and the breastfeeding rates for children aged 6-8 weeks exceeds the government target. Staff becoming trained to offer support and advice alongside an infant feeding specialist negated the loss of the commissioned support service. The centre's hard work was justly rewarded when in 2011 they achieved the Unicef breastfeeding accreditation, 'Believing in breastfeeding'.

A good range of health-related services is available at the centre. These include a booking-in clinic for pregnant women and ante-natal care. All families registered with the centre have access to a local general practitioner and are registered with a dentist. To date only one child has had a filling. The importance of having a healthy lifestyle has been promoted through courses and advice on healthy eating and how to stop smoking. Children learn the importance of exercise as they have fun in the early morning 'wake and shake' sessions and there has been an increase in the number of Vitamin D drops distributed to families.

The centre is a safe place for all who attend. Home visits are undertaken to offer safety advice and equipment to help families understand the importance of safety within the home. The number of accidents due to falls in the home has reduced by 19%. Highly-effective support is in place to support families and there are many moving accounts of how the centre has helped families and brought stability to their lives. The centre effectively uses the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the number of children subject to child protection plans has reduced. 'I couldn't have done it without them' is a typical comment expressed.

Children are very well-prepared for school and tracking systems reflect that children who have accessed services make very good progress from their low starting points. As a result when children leave to enter school they have the knowledge and skills expected for their age and continue to make good progress. Parenting courses have enabled teenage mothers to improve their skills and due to the support given, many have returned to education.

The centre is well used by families and a father visiting for the first time stated how he would give it 'the thumbs up' and would definitely be returning. Several members of staff are bi-lingual and therefore well-placed to support families. The local management board is chaired by a parent who stated how well she had been supported as she settled in and was looking forward to her new role. Children play well together and adults are respectful and polite to each other.

Adult users frequently access higher education courses to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The 'job club' is well-attended and the decrease in the percentage of families claiming benefits and the increase in families claiming childcare tax credits suggest that some families are gaining employment. Many families are improving their economic stability as they access support and advice on how to save money and manage a budget.

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

The centre knows the community well and recognises the importance of early intervention. The multi-agency panel affords a rapid and comprehensive assessment that is personalised to meet each family's needs. The centre offers continued support and frequently provides a 'hand-holding' service where staff will accompany any user who feels they need this extra support, be it a first visit to the 'job club' or viewing accommodation.

The role of fathers is a priority for the centre. A male worker within the centre delivers 'father-friendly' training to staff and successfully engages male carers. Photo evidence showing how dads make a difference and booklets showing the importance of their role to

support breastfeeding demonstrate the importance of their involvement. Fathers say how welcome they feel and that they had assumed it was normally 'just for women' and 'never thought it would be like this'.

The 'Play and learn' sessions have been an invaluable link between the mother and baby unit and the centre. These sessions are well-attended and frequently have a waiting list. The 'Think Family' six-week programme has been a resounding success. Families are enabled to draw up their own personal plan and identify the changes they wish to make. They work alongside an advocate and have found the process very empowering. The achievements of adults and children are recorded through individual learning journeys. These have been so well received, and are very effective, and the centre has promoted them within the private and voluntary sector.

Care, guidance and support are exceptional as the centre provides a safe haven for families who have grown in confidence and share their concerns with staff. Women who have previously suffered from domestic violence say 'they are no longer scared' and there is 'light at the end of the tunnel'.

A wealth of information is sensitively displayed and time is taken to fully explain the services to users and potential users. This ensures that families receive the best possible care. The need for continuity for children with more complex needs is recognised by the centre and the aptly-named 'Birds of paradise' group was established at a local mosque to provide care over the summer period. Intensive support is also available for children with speech and language delay. An 'early stage' sign language system is successfully used with young children, enabling them to communicate through sign language and become more confident.

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

Leadership and management are consistently good at all levels. The collection of data has significantly improved and provides a sound base to ensure that priorities and targets reflect the needs of the community. There is a clear link between strategic planning and service provision. However, this is not as precise in the action plan and makes evaluation more difficult to monitor. The local authority is very much 'hands on' and provide an appropriate level of challenge. The early years geographical manager and the operational manager drive the improvements and morale is high. Accommodation is used well with many activities taking place in the adjacent community centre and the centre provides good value for money. The large majority of families are engaged with services and there is evidence of

some involvement in decision making. However, too few families take the opportunity to become more involved in how they can help develop the service to best meet their needs.

Services are fully integrated and partnerships are superb. The centre sees itself as one aspect of the community and actively seeks advice from partners, effectively promoting inclusion by signposting families to relevant services. Neighbourhood meetings are well attended and the opportunity is taken to share what is happening within the community and give support where possible to other schemes. The 'market place' held every six weeks demonstrates how effective true partnership is. Different partners come together at one venue every 12 weeks to provide advice and support on health, business and adult learning.

Keeping families safe is at the forefront of the centre's work and safeguarding procedures are rigorous. Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place and clear notices and information reminds families of their responsibilities. The police play an important role in identifying any possible tensions and the police community support officers are frequent visitors to the centre adding an invaluable layer of support helping families feel safe and more confident to share concerns.

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	1
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	1
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

Children's behaviour and interaction with staff was observed within the nursery setting.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Seven Trees Children's Centre on 8 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke with us. Your views were very helpful to the inspection team. You told us how much the centre means to you and how when you come in there is 'always a smile and a friendly face'.

The early years geographical manager and the operational manager work very well together and they clearly know what they need to do to make the centre even better. They are aware that there are times when many of you feel isolated and lack confidence in how to improve your lives. They understand the needs of your community and can demonstrate the success of the centre in including you in its activities and services. Many of you have taken advantage of the parenting courses on offer and the opportunity to gain qualifications. You told us that you feel safe at the centre. A high priority is given to safeguarding yourselves and your children. Due to the involvement of the centre your homes are now safer and you have gained more understanding of the dangers both at home and on the roads.

The centre staff are good at assessing your needs and ensuring they provide the support that is right for you. This may be directly from the centre or from one or more of its partners. Your children in the childcare provision are well looked after. They are progressing well and are well-prepared for school. We very much enjoyed watching the children join in with songs and action rhymes in what was quite a lively session.

We were pleased to hear that a number of you have become involved in the centre by joining the management board where you have a strong voice to shape improvements in the centre. We have asked the centre to encourage more of you to become involved and share your views to help the centre become even better. The centre has an action plan and we have asked them to make it clearer so that they can demonstrate more easily how their contribution has made an improvement to your well-being.

It is important that you continue to achieve and we wish you all the very best for the future.

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