

# Inspection report for Egremont SureStart Children's Centre

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Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	383435
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY317569 Open Gates Family Centre Playgroup

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](http://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 manager and deputy manager, staff, a range of partners, trustees, representatives of the local authority linked to the centre and users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Egremont Children's Centre is a purpose built phase two centre which opened in November 2009. The centre is based in a separate building located on the site of Orgill Primary School. It is situated close to the centre of Egremont and serves an area of approximately 180 square miles, including many villages and rural farming communities. The centre is the most recently-established of a cluster of four centres in the Whitehaven area which are managed by the Howgill Family Centre, an independent registered charity. The advisory board includes parents, senior representatives of partner organisations, local authority officers and elected members. The manager of the Howgill Family Centre is responsible for all four children's centres, with staff employed by the centre working across all family centre settings. The cluster model enables families to take part in activities and services in all the settings.

The centre offers a full range of universal and targeted services, either directly provided by the centre, its cluster partners or commissioned through the centre. A wide range of outreach and home based support is also offered. The centre signposts users to other services provided within the community and has links with a number of private childcare providers. Open Gates Family Centre Playgroup currently operates on the centre premises but is due to be incorporated into the Family Centre in the near future.

The vast majority of families within the area are of White British heritage, with about 2% from minority ethnic groups. National neighbourhood statistics show considerable social and economic diversity within the reach area with pockets of deprivation and rural isolation, with 20.6% of the overall child population living in the 30% most deprived areas. Deprivation and unemployment are highest in the area around the centre, where 25% of families live in social housing. Levels of criminal activity are higher than averages for the county, with 7% of police callouts being for domestic violence. Key social issues which affect families include substance misuse, high rates of teenage pregnancies and significant levels of debt. Approximately 33% of referrals for targeted services feature maternal depression. Children entering Early Years Foundation Stage have a wide range of skills and levels of development, with those in the area closest to the centre having levels well 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**

<b>2</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>2</b>
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## Main findings

The overall effectiveness of Egremont Children's Centre is good. The centre is committed to meeting the needs of those families with circumstances that make them vulnerable. Early identification of specific needs through 'newborn' visits and referral processes mean that personalised packages of care and support are put in place. Families are helped to access multi-agency services and engage in the centre's activities. Regular reviews and effective adaptation of support mean that families are gradually empowered to take control of their own lives. 'They're there to hold you up, and when they let go you find you can stand on your own' reflects how much parents value the centre.

Parents using the centre demonstrate that they have an increased awareness and understanding of how to keep their families safe and healthy. They learn new skills which increase their confidence as parents. An atmosphere of respect prevails throughout the centre and everyone feels valued. There are regular opportunities for parents to be involved in evaluation and they know that the centre takes account of their views.

Children and parents are helped to achieve through the centre's activities. Results in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile have improved overall and the gap between the lowest

achieving 20% and the rest has narrowed. However, the centre recognises the need to develop existing links with childcare providers and schools across the reach area in order to share expertise, monitor children's progress and promote good transition to school. Parents access a range of adult learning opportunities which enhance their confidence and self-belief. In many cases this has led to improved employment prospects or accredited training as volunteers.

The centre's work to promote equality of opportunity is good. The centre successfully identifies and removes barriers to access for all groups. Good safeguarding procedures with well established systems and links to other services ensure that concerns are identified and prompt action taken to support families in need.

Well-coordinated cluster working established through Howgill Family Centre is highly effective in providing access to skilled staff and a broad range of activities within the wider locality. A full range of services and activities are available to families in the reach area. However, long travelling distances to some group sessions deter some families from attending.

Leadership and management are good at all levels. This has enabled the centre to develop and improve the services it provides. Regular review and evaluation procedures, which include the use of some data, mean that the centre has a generally accurate view of its strengths and areas for development. The centre's action plan contains clear priorities, although these do not currently incorporate specific measurable targets for improvement. The centre has a good understanding of the reach area and is responsive to changing local need. Supervision and appraisal arrangements are clearly linked to professional development and ensure that all staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge to carry out their work effectively.

The positive impact of the centre's work on outcomes for children and families, together with good leadership and management, indicate that the centre has good capacity to improve.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Strengthen self-evaluation and action planning by using data and other information that is specific to the centre's reach area to set clear measurable targets in order to demonstrate fully the impact of the centre's work.
- Improve outcomes for young children by strengthening links with childcare providers and schools in the reach area, sharing good practice and implementing consistent assessment and tracking systems to measure children's progress.
- Review the geographical spread of activities to reduce the need for families to travel long distances.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents' understanding of healthy living is developed well through the range of activities provided. The centre prioritises the engagement of new mothers through 'newborn visits'. Bonding and attachment are promoted successfully through one-to-one support and activities such as baby massage. The breastfeeding support group provides a relaxed and comfortable environment, particularly appreciated by teenage mothers. Rates of breastfeeding have doubled over the past two years. Parents receive helpful advice about all aspects of child and family health at well-attended drop-in health visitor clinics. Immunisation rates are high at 97%. Specific programmes provide opportunities for parents to learn about healthy eating and 'Baby Picasso' gives the youngest children tactile experiences of different foods. Activities such as the popular 'Sporty Families' increase awareness of the benefits of physical exercise for all and bring families closer together. The centre successfully raises the profile of emotional well-being through tailored parenting programmes and therapeutic interventions.

Parents appreciate the safe, secure environment the centre provides. They have no hesitation in coming to the centre and know that staff will listen to their concerns. Parents' understanding of how to manage their children's behaviour and keep their children safe is increased through specific parenting programmes. Outreach visits include home safety checks. Centre staff provide advice on car seat safety and the police and fire services provide safety guidance within group activities. Parents and children are actively involved in risk assessments for planned activities. Family support and multi-agency work successfully support families and safeguard children. The centre's work is effective in providing support where children are removed from child protection plans. Rates of re-registration are low.

Parents value opportunities to have fun together with their children. They enjoy seeing their children interacting together and developing personal and social skills. There have been improvements in outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage with the gap between the lowest 20% and the rest being reduced to 26.7%. Specific programmes and personalised interventions have led to measurable improvements in children's speaking and listening skills. However, links with childcare providers and schools are not developed sufficiently to ensure that children's progress is monitored in all parts of the reach area and that all of them are well prepared for transition to school. Family logs provide a comprehensive record of the learning goals and achievements of parents, many of whom have progressed through a range of courses and activities provided by the centre and ultimately to accredited training.

Those using the centre demonstrate positive attitudes and respect for one another. The centre is developing its role at the heart of the community and parents know that their views matter. Parents report how their confidence and self-respect have grown through activities such as adult art groups. They feel able to take control of their lives and many feel

highly motivated to 'give something back' to the centre through training as volunteers. Their increased self-belief means that they can offer focussed support to other families with circumstances that make them vulnerable. Parents have worked together to plan 'healthy awareness' days and were involved in decorating the centre. The Parents' Forum provides opportunities to contribute to decision making.

Parents feel well supported to attend courses and accessing training to enhance their employability. Financial advice provided through targeted family support has helped many families resolve debt issues and become more financially independent. Longer term support for financial management is provided through drop-in sessions at the centre. 'Houseproud' interventions have helped parents organise their lives and removed the threat of eviction. The second-hand shop, initiated and organised by local parents, is highly successful in reducing costs of clothing, toys and household goods and helping families manage financially.

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>2</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>2</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?**

<b>2</b>
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A particular strength of the centre is its flexibility in responding to need. The centre staff have a good knowledge of the extremely diverse needs of the local community and strive to ensure that those with the greatest needs receive personalised support. Early assessment through 'newborn' visits paves the way for family support, which fully include families in identifying personal goals. Weekly referral meetings ensure that services are targeted and adapted as necessary. There is evidence of increasing engagement of target groups. For example, the number of fathers accessing services has risen from 10.4% to 34%. The centre facilitates short respite breaks to support parents of disabled children and those with special needs. Cluster working ensures that a full range of services and activities, including specialist interventions, are available to families in the reach area. However, the need to travel deters some families from the reach area attending group sessions at other venues.

The centre's 'can do' learning culture and its readiness to celebrate achievement, for example through art and photographic exhibitions, raise aspirations of parents. They feel proud of themselves and admit to being surprised at what they have achieved. 'I never thought I could do things like this' is typical of parents' comments. Good opportunities are provided for users to progress to further training. A range of well-planned and purposeful activities, including individual targeted programmes, successfully promote the development and learning of young children.

A good range of information and advice is provided at the centre. Targeted family support is sensitively tailored to individual needs and parents appreciate the difference the centre has made to their lives. Parents expressed confidence in the support offered by the centre. Case studies and personal testimony demonstrate the wealth of emotional and practical advice and support which is available in times of crisis. As one parent said, 'It made me realise I wasn't on my own.' The centre has been particularly pro-active in providing timely and on-going support through bereavement counselling and play therapy to children and families affected by a series of shootings in the reach area. Specific outreach support is provided for those experiencing isolation in more remote parts of the reach area.

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>2</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?**

<b>2</b>
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Leaders and managers have a shared vision and sense of purpose. They have high expectations and constantly seek ways to improve the effectiveness of the centre. This has contributed to the centre's developing role within the community and the increasing numbers of users engaging with services. The centre benefits from an extremely dedicated and innovative team of well qualified staff who support the drive for improvement.

Well organised arrangements for governance include clear lines of responsibility. Information is shared effectively between parents, staff, partners, advisory board and trustees. Strategic decision making is based on a sound understanding of the centre's priorities. Systems for professional supervision, appraisal and training are well embedded.

Through various feedback processes, children, parents, staff and professional partners contribute well to rigorous evaluation. This enables the centre to respond to need and to set priorities. Some use is made of data to inform the centre of the impact of its work but action planning does not yet include clear measurable targets for improvement.



Resources are managed well. The centre is well maintained and good use is made of community venues. Review processes inform planning so that provision is well targeted and cost effective. Cluster working avoids duplication of services and ensures efficient use of staff expertise and skills. There is a commitment to the sustainability of services through staff development and the volunteer training programme.

The inclusion of all children and families, regardless of background, is central to the centre's vision. Clear policies are in place and discrimination is not tolerated. Parents comment on how they never feel judged. Diversity is celebrated through displays in the centre and across a range of activities. Staff work hard to remove barriers to access by providing crèche facilities and support with transport. Volunteer 'buddies' give other parents the confidence to access the activities on offer.

Safeguarding is a priority for the centre. Policies and procedures are effective and are regularly reviewed to ensure the safety, security and well-being of all those who use the centre and its services. All required recruitment and vetting checks are carried out and all staff and volunteers receive up-to-date training. They are alert to any signs of safeguarding concerns and are confident to take the appropriate actions. Multi-agency working, weekly referral meetings and the use of the Common Assessment Framework ensure that a wide range of professionals work together well to safeguard and protect children and their families.

A good range of partnerships is in place and users benefit from strong relationships with health services. Information is shared well and partners contribute to evaluating and planning services. Staff have extensive local knowledge, and are pro-active in engaging services in the community to meet identified needs. Good partnerships with parents ensure their contributions are valued. However, partnerships with the many childcare providers and schools in the reach area are not yet fully developed.

The centre adopts a range of strategies to increase user engagement, including home visits and open days. Staff are tenacious in reaching out to those most in need. Parents' high levels of satisfaction are demonstrated by their regular and long term use of the centre's services. The centre acknowledges that further delivery of services within the immediate community will enhance user engagement.

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>2</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>2</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>2</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>

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

When making their judgements, the inspectors took into account the findings from the coordinated inspection of Orgill Primary School.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Egremont SureStart Children's Centre on 23 and 24 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for contributing to the inspection by sharing your experiences and views of your children's centre in such an open and honest way. It was good to hear how much you appreciate all that the centre staff do to help you and how the centre has made such a difference to your lives.

Many of you told us how welcoming the staff are and how they are always there for you when you need them. You also told us how you feel that staff listen to you, value your views and opinions, and never make you feel judged or patronised. The staff always treat you as individuals and you appreciate how they help you to help yourselves. Some of you have been supported through times of considerable emotional difficulty and say how the centre has made you realise that you are not on your own. Several of you said that you now feel empowered and able to take control of your own lives again. Being able to share your experiences with others has helped you cope with problems and some of you have made really good friends since you started coming to the centre.

We could see that you enjoy the opportunities to have fun and to play and learn with your children, such as when you attend the 'Come and Play' sessions. You feel that the family activities help to bring you closer together. Many of you told us how the parenting courses have helped you manage your children's behaviour and how other sessions, such as art groups and relaxation classes, have made you feel much more confident. You are rightly proud of your achievements. Many of you feel that you want to give something back to the centre and have trained as volunteers so that you can help provide support for other parents, help out in the shop or with organising activities.

Staff take good care to ensure that you and your children are kept safe and are well looked after. Your centre works well with many partners to provide health advice, information about benefits and financial services, and a good range of learning opportunities. It is clear that the staff work very hard and want the very best for you and your families.

We know that the staff are committed to making the centre even better. They know that they need to make sure that there are more services provided at or near the centre itself so that it is easier for Egremont families to take part. We have suggested that they use data more effectively to set targets and measure improvements in the services provided and the impact of this work on families. We have also suggested that they work closely with all the childcare providers and schools to make sure that all young children are being really well prepared for school.

Thank you again for taking time to talk with us and we wish you and your families every success in the future.

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