

Inspection report for Crackley Bank Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	383373
Inspection dates	29 February – 1 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Chanan Tomlin

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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Crackley Bank Primary School Chesterton Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Wigwam Educare EY292334

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 local authority, centre staff, health professionals, voluntary and statutory partner organisations, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Crackley Bank Children's Centre is a phase two centre in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire. The main site is that of Crackley Bank, located adjacent to Crackley Bank Primary School. A second site is located at Chesterton Primary School. In addition to these two sites, the Chesterton Salvation Army Community Centre offers an informal linked site in the heart of the community with the capacity and ethos to engage some of the most vulnerable local families. Wigwam Educare at Chesterton Primary School provides childcare for two-year-olds commissioned by the centre.

The Chesterton area is a predominantly White British ex-mining community in which a number of indicators show significant poverty and deprivation, particularly related to health, employment and education. On entry to early years provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age. The percentage of families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit is high. The centre is governed by a local children's centre partnership which oversees the work of three children's centres in the area.

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 centre is good. During home visits, adults feel at ease and are receptive to the advice and guidance that they are offered. Children enjoy the activities provided and quickly establish good relationships and bond well with facilitators. Activities provide parents with good opportunities to gain useful information and support on how to care for their children through relaxed interactions in a calm atmosphere. At the two centre sites and at the Salvation Army community centre, sessions effectively promote child development and bonding between parents and children. However, the centre does not do enough to help children develop literacy and numeracy skills, which are well below the levels expected when children join the Early Years Foundation Stage at local schools.

Most activities take place at different sites because the main centre at Crackley Bank is too small for many of the services that the centre offers. The centre does not make maximum use, though, of the facilities which are available at Crackley Bank. Uptake of the services offered by the centre is good and has more than doubled over the past year. However, there are still families within the area who are unaware of the services that are provided by the centre. This is because the centre does not publicise its services enough in order to raise its profile in the community.

Staff at the centre and affiliated service providers offer advice and guidance on all aspects of child rearing. Families that use the centre acknowledge that staff have a wealth of knowledge with regard to many aspects of homemaking and general living. The centre has good capacity to improve as it sets realistic and challenging targets which are grounded in an accurate analysis of families' needs and which are being used effectively to improve outcomes. It has developed very good connections with external agencies and service providers; these partnerships are at the centre of a drive towards ensuring that need is identified and appropriate support is offered. Systems are in place to identify how users feel about the centre and what it offers, and a parents' forum that contributes to the governance of the centre has recently been established. Staff act upon users' recommendations and provide activities that cater to their needs and preferences. They work together effectively to identify areas for improvement and amend services accordingly.

The centre has policies in place to ensure that users are safeguarded properly. Staff are well aware of procedures relating to child protection and all have attended the required training. Fathers take part in a limited number of activities at the Salvation Army site. They are particularly engaged in the 'Soccer Lions' programme that promotes confidence, literacy and numeracy through the medium of sport. This, and the ways that the centre actively assists families from different cultural backgrounds, indicates that the centre is addressing equality and diversity. However, many of the services provided do not actively celebrate other cultures or faiths.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Publicise the services available at the centre in order to engage more users.
- Maximise the use of the centre's main premises at Crackley Bank.
- Improve children's skills, knowledge and understanding in literacy and numeracy on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage through the development of sessions run at the centre.
- Further develop users' awareness of other cultures and backgrounds.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for users of the centre are good. Supporting children's health is central to the purpose of the centre and the focus of the activities and courses that take place. The number of obese children in Reception Year in the area is high and the centre conducts activities that have contributed to reducing obesity. These include 'Soccer Lions', 'Rhythm Kids', Shanti and Jai Yoga and 'HENRY', a programme that focuses on healthy eating, physical activity and emotional well-being. The number of mothers breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has been an area for concern in recent years as this figure was significantly lower than the county average. The centre has made good inroads into promoting breastfeeding among mothers who use the centre through a seamless transition from antenatal care to breastfeeding and weaning advice delivered through the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership. Appointments with the local midwife take place at the centre where the first steps are taken to engage with pregnant mothers; particularly the most vulnerable. Support in this area has had significant impact and the figures for breastfeeding have increased from 24% to 37% which is now higher than the county average and close to the national average. As a result of the centre's accomplishments, it has achieved Stage 2 of UNICEF's 'Baby Friendly Initiative'.

The centre offers a number of services which are having a positive impact on promoting emotional well-being and resilience among families experiencing crisis. These include the bereavement counselling, family counselling and mediation. In addition, local support teams, Home-Start and family support workers guide and advise families that have significant needs. Families benefit greatly from guidance and counselling and appreciate the impact that the centre has had on their lives. Domestic violence has been identified as a real issue in Crackley Bank, more than other areas in the district. To combat this, the centre's counselling services provide essential support for those affected or at risk. The centre ensures that the individual needs of all families are addressed and adapts activities to support and include all participants. As a result, 84% of disabled children in the reach area have accessed the centre. The centre offers a number of opportunities for parents to enhance their parenting skills, including nationally recognised programmes of learning.

The centre's policies and procedures help to ensure that children are safe and protected and staff see safety as a priority. Staff work closely with Newcastle Borough Council and Newcastle Children's Centre to deliver the home-safety scheme, including the distribution of health and safety equipment through health visitor referral. Within the last year, 225 families have accessed the home safety scheme across the district and homes are safer as a result.

Communication, language and literacy scores for the reach area are low and the centre promotes an early intervention programme for children identified as making poor progress with speech and language development. Therapists work with parents and children to encourage development through 'Baby Bounce and Rhyme', 'Chatterkids' and home visits to provide parents with tools to encourage speech and language development. Scores for children who have benefited from these services are high. Children entering local schools have low attainment compared to national averages. Those who have attended the centre are well grounded in communication skills and sociability and, although their literacy and numeracy skills are still below those expected, they make better progress on entry to school than those who haven't. Babies and toddlers enjoy their time at the centre, behave well and are always carefully supervised by their parents and staff.

The Jobcentre lone parent advisor holds appointments at the centre once a week because it is seen as a welcoming relaxed environment and the centre signposts to the Jobcentre and related services effectively. Parents who participate in activities organised by the centre are enabled to make a positive contribution to society in very significant ways. For example: two centre beneficiaries who attended the 'Gingerbread Group' for lone parents are now volunteers in the kitchen at the Salvation Army; and, a service user now runs the centre's booking system and is a volunteer at the One Stop Shop.

The centre offers a range of training opportunities for parents, including the delivery of both accredited and non-accredited courses. These include paediatric first aid, cookery courses and food hygiene. As a result of these courses, attendees have gone

on to further education and purposeful employment. Service users have plenty of opportunities to express their views through questionnaires and informal discussions with staff and providers. A recently established parents' forum gives centre users opportunities to contribute to decision making and to be involved in the centre's governance.

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 is effective in the ways that it assesses the needs of children and their parents. This is done through systems to encourage them to voice their opinions, informal discussion and a parents' forum. Staff draw in potential users that are hard-to-reach and health sector workers ensure that families in need are aware of the services that the centre has to offer.

The centre has a good range of sessions and activities that support child rearing and development. Parents enjoy these activities and acquire the necessary skills to raise their children. Children are prepared well for their entry into school in terms of language and speech development; this enables them to make good progress in literacy and numeracy because they are equipped with the confidence necessary to succeed. The centre works with existing links within the community to enhance the support offered to families. It uses well-established community venues such as Chesterton Salvation Army and the One Stop Shop to deliver activities in venues that the local community use.

The centre is small, as are its resources and staff numbers. Although there is some scope to maximise its use, it is mainly used for small group activities and is seen as a base to facilitate the engagement of families in the many activities that it offers. The centre is exploring ways to maximise its use even further. As a result of the engagement of services that often take place at different sites, the centre has made

significant inroads into supporting those who are particularly vulnerable, especially lone parents, families with disabled children and families from minority ethnic groups.

Sessions provided by the centre are very well attended and uptake has doubled over the last year. Parents and children are encouraged to celebrate their achievements and certificates are issued to parents once they have completed short courses. This promotes self-esteem and encourages users to take further advantage of the services offered.

The group for lone parents and programme for those suffering from domestic abuse are especially popular. Staff are seen as caring individuals who want the best for the families in the area; they are approachable and are often the main, viable link between families and statutory services. The centre operates a referral system to ensure that targeted families are able to access activities free of charge. It offers outreach services and home visiting to the hardest-to-reach families. Wigwam Educare at Chesterton Primary School provides good quality childcare for two-year-olds commissioned by the centre. Places are allocated to families identified as in need of additional support. The centre's family support worker provides one-to-one family support. She provides well-accepted advice on areas such as smoking cessation, sexual health, substance misuse, postnatal depression and healthy eating.

The centre provides good support for families in need or in times of crisis. The centre's link with the local support team offers targeted families parenting support and advice on housing, benefits and debt. Information, advice and guidance for parents accessing benefits and seeking work are available through Jobcentre, Job Enterprise Training (JET) and the Family Employment Initiative.

Centre staff take an active role in supporting children subject to child protection plans and those who are looked after. Local support teams use the centre for their weekly allocation meeting and teams that are based at the centre use it for Common Assessment Framework (CAF) meetings. Parents are very positive about the support that they receive. One parent, for example, commented, 'I think the care and service that is offered is really good. Always on hand if needed.' Another asserted, 'The group has been really good for my child as he had very limited speech and now he really tries to communicate. He also understands how to play and how to share.'

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

Leadership and management of the centre are good. The local children's centre partnership ensures robust partnership working and cooperative development. The centre is good at identifying need and adjusting services accordingly. Safeguarding arrangements are good with all policies in place and effective arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff. Staff work closely with families both in the centre and at home. As a result, they gain clear insight into the needs of users and are well placed to identify when early intervention is required. Outreach workers and centre staff have developed very good relationships with other agencies. Both statutory and voluntary agencies signpost users swiftly and effectively. Centre staff are keenly aware of the support available and they ensure that users receive the assistance that they need.

The centre understands the need for promoting equality and an appreciation of diversity. All members of the community feel welcome at the centre. Family support workers accompany those whose circumstances make them vulnerable to centre activities until they are ready to attend on their own. Signs and cross-cultural toys are prominent within the centre. However, few of the activities offered by the centre actively promote and celebrate cultural diversity.

Clear lines of management at the centre ensure that it runs smoothly and that the needs of users are met well. The centre provides good value for money through providing a good range of services in a variety of venues. It evaluates the services provided and the impact on families in the reach of the centre well. Parental engagement is integral to the services provided. As part of monitoring, the centre asks service providers to report on any feedback, compliments and complaints. It is considering ways of publicising its activities and the ways that it encourages families in the reach area to engage with its services even more.

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 secure 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	3
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

Inspectors discussed findings regarding the Early Years Foundation Stage with the lead inspector who carried out the inspection of Crackley Bank Primary School on 28-29 February 2012. This revealed that judgements regarding provision and outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Crackley Bank Children's Centre on 29 February and 1 March 2012. We judged the centre to be good overall.

Much of our time at the centre was spent observing sessions and speaking to centre staff. We also spoke to representatives of agencies connected to your centre about the work that it does and how it signposts families to relevant agencies. We greatly appreciated the opportunity to speak to many of you, because this, more than anything else, gave us a keen insight into the workings of the centre.

As you know, the main aim of your centre is to support families with young children. The centre does this well through a good range of activities and professional staff. It supports parents and carers through all of the stages of early child rearing, from before birth until children are well into the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is effective in the ways that it promotes health during pregnancy, breastfeeding and child development. Centre staff also work hard to help you ensure that you provide a safe environment for your children at home.

We found that the centre is run well and that the good relationships that exist with the staff ensure that you are guided and signposted well. We were especially impressed with the relationships that exist between centre staff and the many agencies that are attached to it. Staff at the centre know exactly which services are available and how to access them. As a result, they are well placed to support you whenever you need assistance.

We have identified a few areas that the centre could improve on. Children who join the Early Years Foundation Stage of the adjoining school enter with skills, knowledge and understanding below those expected for their age. We have asked the centre, therefore, to explore more ways of promoting literacy and numeracy through the sessions and activities that it offers.

The main centre at Crackley Bank is small and underused. We have asked the centre to maximise its use and to publicise its activities more. We have also asked the centre to organise more activities and events to promote multicultural awareness amongst users.

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