

Inspection report for Poulton Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	336426
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Reporting inspector	Allyson Ingall

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Mr Fred Attwater
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY 341375 Morecambe Kindergarten

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.

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.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre senior leadership team and staff, members of the Advisory Board, representatives from a wide range of partners, local authority representatives and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Poulton is a Phase 1 Children's Centre providing the full core offer. It is governed by an advisory board which, although changing, has representation from a wide range of partners and users. The centre was designated in March 2006, opened in October 2006 and serves a predominantly White British community with high levels of deprivation. It is based in a traditional sea-side resort which has seen significant decline and neglect over time. Whilst there has been some improvement in recent years with the Neighbourhood Management regeneration project, the area still has significant poverty, high unemployment and child poverty, sub-standard housing, poor health and a significant migrant population. According to the Office for National Statistics, the Poulton Reach Area is classified as being most deprived in the areas of income, employment, health, education, crime and living environment. The area is rated at mid-point for barriers to housing and services deprivation.

Although statistics are not available at reach level for estimated population by broad ethnic group, the overall figures for Lancaster show the breakdown as being 94.7% White, 1.0% Mixed, 2.0% Black and 1.6% Chinese or other ethnic group. Smaller numbers of Eastern Europeans are now recorded in the centre's reach area as many have returned home. People's health in the neighbourhood is significantly lower than that of the national average. One area of Poulton falls in the bottom 5% of Super Output Areas across the country. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills that are much lower than expected nationally, particularly with regard to communication, language and literacy development and personal, social and emotional development. From April 2010, the centre reach area has been extended

bringing in the more affluent areas of Bare and the rural areas to the north of Poulton.

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 users and the wider community

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

This is a highly effective children's centre that serves its community exceptionally well. It provides a fully inclusive service with an appropriate balance of universal and targeted provision. It consistently provides above and beyond the core offer with a highly committed team of staff and partners and is led and managed extremely well. The centre is highly successful in assessing and meeting the needs of its reach area through regular and varied systems, excellent partnerships and a rigorous approach to evaluating provision. Equality and diversity at the centre is excellent: all groups are well supported and the centre is exceptionally good at supporting the high numbers of domestic violence victims, as well as users with disabilities and their families. They work flexibly to respond swiftly and effectively to crisis situations, irrespective of where the user comes from so that 'no child slips through the net.' Thus, the most vulnerable and hardest-to-reach are helped, including providing them with the skills they need to increase their independence and well-being. Safeguarding systems are continually evolving and go well beyond that which is expected, thereby ensuring that all users and employees are safe and well protected. As more than one user commented, 'It is not an exaggeration to say I would not be here today without their help and support.'

The centre was judged good in its pilot inspection in October 2009. It has implemented the key recommendations most effectively, particularly with regard to evaluation and use of qualitative data, which take full account of the views of users, staff and partners. The centre is now well placed to make effective use of increasingly accurate quantitative data as it becomes available. A key strength is its client-led targeted support which is both focused and effective. This is demonstrated by the numerous case studies and endorsement by all partners, with comments such as, 'PCC *always* meets the family's needs...achieving real outcomes that make a difference.'

Leaders and managers at all levels are highly effective and staff morale is very high as all work together with a 'whatever it takes' approach. Extensive partnership

working, including a highly supportive and effective local authority, is a key strength, which contributes significantly to the centre's successful outcomes. The changing Advisory Board is well supported in its developing role. The often innovative approach to the challenges faced by the centre, in terms of both funding and work-load, ensures that the centre is able to respond to the constantly changing landscape and emerging needs. The outstanding quality of the centre's work, the motivation of all staff to continue to improve and the highly effective collaboration with a range of partners, demonstrates an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- To increase the analysis and use of quantitative data to the level of analysis of qualitative data in order to impact more significantly on the Key Performance Indicators and National Indicator statistics.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Adults and children make good use of the centre's facilities and services and enjoy and achieve in all outcomes. The centre provides a wide range of innovative ways of helping children and their parents and carers develop awareness and understanding of health issues and ensuring outstanding outcomes in relation to being healthy. For example, during the 'Smile for Life' session, children's understanding was developed through age-appropriate language and effective use of props to engage their attention. Learning was reinforced during follow-up story sessions in day care. Here, children were able to articulate what they had learned and a follow-up leaflet was given to parents and carers to sustain the impact. The emotional health of children and adults permeates the centre's approach. Increasing support is provided for mothers with post-natal depression. In addition, specifically targeted after-school sessions for children with emotional difficulties have had a positive impact on their behaviour in school. Obesity rates into Reception classes are gradually reducing and breastfeeding initiation rates are rising steadily because they are both well promoted and supported. The use of peer supporters, 'Bosom Buddies', is helping to sustain this increase in breastfeeding which is gradually closing the gap with the national average. Participation rates for the variety of health-rated courses are continuing to increase. The strategy of keeping users within the system, for instance, through 'From Bump to Birth and Beyond', reinforces healthy messages and allows staff to signpost users to further provision.

The centre's success in responding swiftly to improving families' safety and well-being is enhanced through on-site partners and a rigorous approach to evaluating the implications of serious case reviews. Support for adults in the high number of domestic violence cases is balanced with an overriding focus on the safety of children. Thus, users consistently report that they feel safe, a view endorsed by a quote from the Women's Aid coordinator, 'I'm not exaggerating when I say that this partnership has saved lives'. Effective use of the Common Assessment Framework is

well understood, with case studies showing outstanding outcomes for the most vulnerable families. For those with a child protection plan, intervention has been both fast and effective. Relationships between staff and users are such that users feel confident in sharing their concerns. 'Positive Parenting' programmes, including the 1,2,3 package for those with additional needs, drop-in support sessions and the signposting of services provided by other agencies all contribute to a highly cohesive approach to keeping children and their families safe and healthy.

The well-attended 'Messy Play' sessions show good interaction between parents and children. Sessions are effectively modelled and taught by staff which lead to confident, fully engaged children. Early intervention regarding children's social and emotional needs and targeted provision for those with additional speech and language needs, has significantly narrowed the attainment on entry gap into reception of the main feeder school. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision across all settings, including the childminder network, which was judged outstanding in the network accreditation inspection, is effective in ensuring that children make outstanding progress from their exceptionally low starting points. Children clearly enjoy their learning in the equally outstanding day care setting. It has been awarded Lead Practitioner status by the local authority and offers a welcoming and stimulating environment, both indoors and outdoors. Early and accurate identification of need contributes significantly to children's progress. Effective and regular liaison with a range of partners, including parents and carers, ensures all learning and development needs are met. The 'Every Child a Talker' initiative is improving children's progress, particularly for those with English as an additional language.

Provision for adult learning has increased with feedback from users frequently reporting increased confidence and independence in both work and parenting skills. The centre's innovative and strategic approach to adult education ensures that skills and qualifications offered match with the future economic needs of the local community, such as construction and retail. A rolling programme of accredited qualifications through the local college and liaison with other colleges to develop male-orientated courses is empowering users to break the cycle of worklessness. Introductory confidence building courses linked to the three priority areas of domestic violence, mental health and employment show excellent understanding of the needs of adults within the reach area.

From a position of hostility when the centre first opened, the trajectory of progress has been remarkable. Many users commented that it is now 'part of the community, not just serving it'. This is a reflection of the relentless approach of the leaders and staff to be active and visible within the community through events, such as multi-agency festivals for football and the seaside, skating and a pantomime. As a result, barriers within the community have been broken down as the centre brings different sectors of the community together. Users from all groups contribute to the work of the centre through a wide range of formal and informal opportunities, such as the Parents' Forum and a new parents' and carers' group. Partners, parents and carers are well represented on the advisory board and feedback is acted upon constantly to

improve provision further. Behaviour of all groups is exemplary and both children and adults are developing positive relationships

There is a very strong ethos of raising the confidence and self-esteem of children and users. Training participation rates are continuing to increase and evaluations show highly positive impact on both adults and children. Through the centre's extensive network of partners, users are able to access help and support on a range of matters which improve both their job prospects and their lives. An appropriate balance of support ensures that users increase their independence and effective transition arrangements, including home visits, ensure that children are well prepared for the next phase of their education.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

High levels of communication and a flexible approach to resources and work allocation mean that the centre is highly effective in meeting the needs of individuals and the wider community and overcoming barriers to access, such as childcare. Swift and appropriate assessment of needs can be made through referrals from other agencies or from families who arrive at the centre. 'Footfall' is high, and sometimes from outside the reach area. The centre leader's innovative approach to this regular occurrence has seen the centre taking a leading role in establishing a flexible, collaborative registration system with other centres. This ensures that no-one is missed and that users find it as easy as possible to access the services they need.

Continually evolving monitoring and evaluation of universal and targeted services, taking account of users', staff and partners' views. This ensures that provision remains primarily client-led and accessible. On-site provision of partner services ensures high levels of participation and low levels of non-attendance for crucial appointments. For example, paediatrician's report that non-attendance rates are

significantly less than usual because the centre provides a room for appointments. Outreach work is both appropriate and highly effective in responding to the significant challenges faced by users within the reach area. A rolling review of cases at regular team meetings, involving other partners, ensures that all are kept in the system. Progress with targeted families is reviewed and adapted with some being directed to more universal services and others, where appropriate, referred for more intensive, multi-agency support using the Common Assessment Framework. The extensive and well-understood engagement strategy, rooted in evidence-based research, includes an effective home visiting plan. This has ensured that the hardest-to-reach groups are provided for, particularly those with multiple disadvantage. The appropriate balance between preventative and responsive work shows how the centre knows the needs of its reach area exceptionally well.

The centre is always welcoming and displays many positive images of good lifestyle habits whilst providing a variety of facilities to meet every kind of need. Celebrations of achievement in a variety of areas are explicit and, coupled with local recommendations and some who become volunteers to sustain the services, increasing numbers of users are engaging with the centre's services. Attendance and retention rates are high and user feedback consistently reports high levels of satisfaction, empowerment and confidence.

The excellent care, guidance and support for families is highly personalised to the needs of families and significantly enhances their wellbeing and stability, as evidenced by outcomes for specific case studies and numerous quotes from both users and partners .

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leadership and management of the centre are very clearly focused on providing high quality services and continuous improvement. The relentless attention to detail, which sees no aspect of the centre's work untouched, has led to outstanding judgements across all areas. Excellent team working, constant and varied monitoring and evaluation and a rigorous approach to ensuring the needs of all users are met, mean that the centre functions at a high level all of the time. It responds to users' needs even when the timing or conditions are difficult. All staff understand their roles

well and have high expectations of themselves and others. As articulated by one member of staff, 'We know what we need to do. It's just getting the right parts of the jigsaw in place'. The centre's excellent systems and ethos are ensuring that this jigsaw is always completed whilst constantly evolving to take account of both changing needs and wider political developments.

The needs of all, including the hardest-to-reach, are exceptionally well met through a coordinated approach to provision, which is both responsive and preventative. In particular, the centre is especially effective in meeting the additional needs of children with disabilities and their families. Parents report significant changes in their children's social skills and confidence, whilst having increased access to activities previously denied to them. These same principles apply to other vulnerable groups that the centre serves so well, such as victims of domestic violence, those with emotional needs, teenage mothers, lone parents and fathers. Many users report significant changes in the lives of themselves and their children as a result of the centre's work.

The flexible deployment of staff and resources is exemplary: prudent and creative financial management ensures that provision is maintained and extended and therefore represents good value for money. The inclusive approach to provision contributes significantly to community cohesion and the centre is rapidly becoming the focal point of the community. The absence of vandalism on the premises, even whilst unattended, is testimony to the high regard afforded by the community to the centre.

The centre leader and deputy are highly skilled, experienced and empowering of the rest of the staff. Staff safety and professional development are highly valued and all members of the team feel their contributions are valued. The 'hands on' approach modelled by the leader and deputy, who have been known to take up shovels on occasions, is reflected elsewhere in the centre as different members of staff were frequently observed responding to whatever was required at the point of need.

Highly regarded by the local authority, the centre serves as a model of exemplary practice with other centres and, in particular, with its work on safeguarding, disabilities and partnership involvement. Safeguarding systems are over and above that which could be expected, constantly anticipating the implications of wider issues, such as the Vanessa George serious case review. All staff are well briefed and the centre leaders ensure that the policies are evident in practice without being overly bureaucratic for staff. The centre's environment is exceptionally well maintained, both inside and out, with an excellent caretaker on site and a continual review of its safety and fitness for purpose.

In the past year, the Advisory Board has become more involved in monitoring and evaluation arrangements and has operated with an appropriate balance between challenge and support. They have been involved in strategic planning with the centre staff and there is a clear and regular cycle of planning and review. The mix of partners and users on the Advisory Board reflects the views of as wide a range of

groups as possible and the challenge they face now is ensuring that new members are sufficiently trained and supported in their role.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Poulton Children's Centre on 13 and 14 January 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you for help and contribution to the inspection. We enjoyed talking with some of you and your children, reading your feedback comments and joining in with some of your sessions. My colleague particularly enjoyed her time in the day care centre and was especially grateful to those of you who allowed her to join in your home visits. You all told us how much you valued the services the centre provides and many of you told us how it had been a lifeline for you at your most difficult times.

The work that we saw around the centre and the sessions we observed are of excellent quality and we were able to see how much you had gained in confidence and skills, all of which are helping some of you to gain qualifications and employment as well as improving things for your children. It was clear how much you trusted the staff at the centre and how they always provide the exact support you need, often by working with other organisations. Most importantly, we agree with you how helpful it is that you can meet with other professionals, such as midwives, hospital staff and women's refuge, at the centre as access and travel to some of these services are often too difficult. We know that the biggest barrier to you accessing some of the courses is having someone to look after your children and we agree with you that the centre does an excellent job in making sure you can attend the courses you need by arranging childcare.

We could see how well the centre works to make sure no-one is left out and how they try to meet everyone's needs, even when some of you were unable to approach the centre yourself. We know how much you value this. We were especially impressed by the centre's provision for those of you who have children with additional needs. The local school told us how much better prepared for school your children were as a result of the work they had done with the children's centre beforehand and for the work they continue to do, for example, with after-school sessions. Those of you who have children with disabilities were pleased that the centre had recognised that you also needed support and it was good to see so many of you who are now able to offer support to others. This was also the case with support for new mums who might want to breastfeed and your help in being 'Bosom Buddies' is helping more mums to start breastfeeding.

We were really pleased to see how much notice the centre takes of your views, whether you complete feedback forms or just tell them what you need. We can see how your comments have been acted upon and how much they value your input. We think the new parents' and carers' group and Forum is a brilliant idea and hope more of you can become involved and maybe even join the Advisory Board. We'd like the centre to look more closely at numbers of people in your community so that even more people can be helped, for example, to gain qualifications and jobs, to have a go at breastfeeding or to cook healthier meals for their children so that they do not become overweight at a young age.

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