

Inspection report for North East Copeland Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	362482
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Elaine Clinton HMI

Centre governance	Howgill Family Centre
Centre leader	Russell Norman
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY221560 Frizington Nursery EY284918 Two's Group

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one registered early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with volunteers, staff and senior managers from the centre, parents, grandparents, and their children, members of the advisory group and the Board of Trustees, and partners and practitioners including health, social care and Early Years Foundation Stage professionals.

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

Information about the centre

North East Copeland Children's Centre opened in April 2010 following the re-designation of children's centre footprints as part of the local authority's reorganisation. The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery is the responsibility of Howgill Family Centre as part of a three year contract awarded by Cumbria County Council in April 2008. North East Copeland Children's Centre is one of four children's centres that are led and managed by Howgill Family Centre. The family centre manager has responsibility for all four children's centres; all staff are employed by the Board of Trustees of the centre and work across all Howgill Family Centre settings. Families can access activities in all of the settings through this cluster model of provision that the family centre has established.

The centre serves a predominantly White British community; a small proportion of families are of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) heritage. The local area is characterised by high levels of social deprivation and unemployment. Local authority data indicate that a significant proportion of children in the reach area live in poverty, as defined by the Children in Poverty Indicator. The proportion of eligible families benefiting from working tax credit is higher than in other localities nearby. Levels of criminal offences in Frizington are higher than the Cumbrian average at 7.1% of population compared with 5.5% countywide. Over 11% of police callouts in

the reach area are for domestic violence, the great majority of which are alcohol related. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills that are lower than those expected for their age. The centre provides the full core offer and has its own parents' forum as well as an advisory group that governs both Egremont and North East Copeland Children's Centres. In the last year, the local area has been significantly affected by severe flooding, a major coach crash and a series of shootings that resulted in many deaths.

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

Main findings

North East Copeland Children's Centre serves its community particularly well, because it has an outstanding range of services, highly dedicated staff, volunteers and trustees, and is led and managed exceptionally well. The outstanding quality of all the work that the centre does, the commitment and passion of all involved with the centre, and the particularly effective collaboration across many agencies and partners, demonstrates that there is outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. 'It is the best place in the world to be'. 'They never judge, they always accept you just as you are'. 'If it wasn't for the volunteers and the staff I wouldn't have my life today'. These comments made by parents and many volunteers, which were overwhelmingly echoed by many others throughout the inspection, help to explain why North East Copeland is an outstanding centre.

The centre and the family centre are warm and welcoming environments, where there is a feeling of enjoyment and purposeful activity. Users' work is proudly shared throughout the centres through the extensive range of photographs and displays of their excellent arts and crafts work. The centre provides particularly high quality activities and support for children and families, including those who are vulnerable or are at risk of having a poor start in life. The work of the centre is making a very positive difference to the start children are making at school. It is raising the aspirations of adults, and providing inspirational and practical help and support for parents and families towards achieving better futures. Users are empowered to improve their individual and family circumstances and make a real difference to their

lives. All who are connected with North East Copeland are of the opinion that the child and their family are of the highest priority. The safety of all users at home, at work and in the four centres is a vital part of the centre's work. Equality and diversity pervade everything that the centre does.

Continuous improvement is a high priority for the centre; staff are highly ambitious to improve outcomes further. They are particularly effective at listening to what parents and children say, whether formally through the advisory group, parents' forum or Board of Trustees, and take prompt action to ensure improvements. They evaluate rigorously the activities and courses they provide. Assessment of need is excellent. Data are used very well to record the progress that children are making, although the impact that parental learning is having on children's development is not fully analysed. The centre staff recognise this as an area for further development and are currently working with consultants to improve this aspect of evaluation.

The cluster model that has been developed by Howgill Family Centre is ensuring that children and their families receive the very best provision possible. Through a highly effective team of staff, each with specialist skills, and each working flexibly as the need arises across the area, the complex and varied needs in the wider community are met exceptionally well. The excellent specialist skills of the bereavement counsellor, play therapist and art therapist are used very well to meet needs across the area and beyond. These skills were particularly valued during the tragedies of the last year. Support workers are highly valued by both centre users and partners. The extensive use of skilled volunteers effectively complements the outstanding work that the centre staff are doing to meet the needs of all users.

Most parents and their children achieve highly, gaining significantly in confidence as a result of the outstanding range of provision that the centre offers. The excellent progression award, delivered by a highly talented teacher from the local college, is having a significant impact on the outcomes for parents. Many parents move from user, to volunteer, to staff member. As volunteers, their skills and interests are carefully matched to the work of the centre, which enables them to move into employment. Parenting courses and a wide range of provision to enhance family life and relationships have high levels of attendance. The Every Child a Talker project has had a significant impact on raising the number of children who reach the national average in communication, literacy and language by the age of five. Programmes such as Houseproud, Baby Picasso and the Care Index are effectively improving lives; national data show that the number of re-registrations of children subject to a plan is reducing.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that data are used even more effectively to analyse the direct impact of parental learning on children's development.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The centre provides a very wide range of excellent activities to promote healthy lifestyles of its users and staff. Children eat healthy snacks and fruit at the centre, parents attend healthy cooking sessions and speak highly of staff and how they have helped them to change the eating habits of the whole family. This is beginning to have an impact on obesity rates both in the North East Copeland footprint and the wider area. The impact of the courses has been so significant that parents are setting up a food cooperative to sell fresh and inexpensive healthy food. To ensure that all families benefit, parents are establishing a delivery service so that the most rurally isolated communities can also access this service. A high number of parents and children attend the child health and Bumps to Babies parent-craft classes. Immunisation and dental health are promoted particularly well through early visits to new mothers and the Parenting Plus programme. Local health visitors run an immunisation and well-baby clinic at the local library to encourage parents to experience the range of facilities that it has to offer. High priority is given to maternal mental health and detailed data analysis demonstrates that targeted support work is very effectively having an impact. These mothers and those with anxieties about bonding with their child are particularly well supported by the innovative Care Index assessment and referral process, which provides mothers with a digital video recording of how they are relating to their baby combined with targeted support to develop this where necessary.

All staff, volunteers, trustees and partners see the safety and well-being of users and their families as of the highest priority. The centre knows its families well. Processes related to the Common Assessment Framework are firmly embedded. These, combined with weekly referral meetings, regular team meetings and ongoing liaison with parents, result in prompt intervention and support. This often negates the need for more intensive social work support. Information from case studies and parents about children who are subject to a child protection plan illustrates that, as a result of excellent and ongoing support through the centre, children's safety is enhanced. Data show that the rate of re-registration of children who are subject to a plan is significantly lower than in the rest of the county, and nationally. Home safety is introduced in the antenatal and post-natal clinics, through all the sessions that the centre offers and through the highly effective Parenting Plus and Triple P parenting programmes. The impact of the centre's home safety work is best illustrated by the Royal Society for the Protection of Accidents (ROSPA) data which show that, contrary to all other areas in the region, the area does not meet the threshold criteria for free safety equipment.

The centre provides excellent support to parents, and grandparents. As a result, children achieve exceptionally well in their personal, emotional and social development. Children involved in Every Child a Talker and the Two Year Old Funding Entitlement Project are achieving exceptionally well. The centre is effectively narrowing the attainment gap between children with different start points. Carefully planned individual and integrated support is enabling children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to achieve well and to participate in all activities.

'I can't believe the progress he has made. The staff here have made all the difference. They have really helped me to cope too', is how one parent talked about the progress her child was making. Data confirm a steady trend of improvement in children attaining the expected level by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre recognises the importance of capturing the impact of this work and matching it to the impact of their parenting programmes to evaluate the outcomes for all families even more effectively. Headteachers record higher levels of communication and language development and better social skills for children starting in school.

Users' views are valued highly at the centre and feedback is always sought following participation in the centre's activities. This is used very effectively to inform strategic direction and helps to inform future events. As one parent reported, 'They are always asking me what I think and if anything could be better. If I suggest anything, they always try and do it.' Many parents provide support to groups as volunteers, such as peer breastfeeding support and parenting skills. Parental involvement in the governance of the centre is strong through representation on the advisory group, the Board of Trustees and the parents' forum.

Through the centre's extensive network of partners, parents are able to access excellent help and advice on a range of matters such as income and welfare benefits, employment and further training. Skills that will enable them to progress in the future are developed through the very wide range of provision that the centre offers. Strong links with Jobcentre Plus is enabling many parents to find work. Innovative actions such as the creation of a youth work apprenticeship are enabling a father to move from volunteer to employee. Close links with the local college are enabling parents, carers and staff to access a range of accredited courses.

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 referral across the children's centre and Howgill Family Centre enable staff to make high quality provision for users' health, welfare and social needs. Referrals are carried out through weekly meetings of multi-agency teams at the family centre. At the heart of the referral process is a detailed conversation with the parent to identify what it is that they most need. As one parent said, 'They find out what you want and need and do everything they can to work with you to help you get there'. The centre's support workers play a key role in these assessments. They support families very effectively, using their knowledge and influence to make a positive difference. The cluster model of working ensures very efficient use of resources and expertise within the centre and the wider community. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation, taking into account the users' views, ensures that where needs are not being met services are changed and adapted to meet requirements.

Programmes and services are delivered across a range of settings so that parents can access them at a time that suits them best. The centre provides a very wide range of courses and activities for the community to meet the full core offer. Programmes such as Houseproud are effectively supporting parents and their children to engage with other families. As one child said, 'I can now have friends back to tea'. The centre is highly successful in engaging users from across the community, in particular, it is effectively engaging with teenage parents and pregnant teenagers. Importantly, these young people are supported not only to attend tailored provision for themselves, but also to access the full range of services that the centre offers, such as Baby Picasso and baby signing. Courses take place at the centre, in the wider community, and on the play-bus. This excellent mix enables even the most isolated parents to access provision. For example the play-bus meets the needs of a small group of mothers from the BME community, by offering a discrete service on a weekly basis in the heart of their community, within the cluster. Parents and their children thoroughly enjoy the courses and glow with pride when talking about their achievements. One parent commented, 'When I first started the course at college my support worker went with me, otherwise I wouldn't have got there. Now I am supporting other parents attending the course. How amazing is that?' The centre's services are also offered in school settings to enhance the curriculum and support social and emotional development. Schools confidently refer children and families to the centre if they have concerns about them. Older children are supported to access the self-funded girls' and boys' clubs for 8 to 13-year-olds. The wide-ranging activities at these clubs are playing their part in reducing teenage pregnancy rates and also improving behaviour and personal responsibility.

Excellent links with health and social care professionals and partner organisations, and comprehensive information systems, ensure parents are made aware of what the centre offers at an early stage. The specialist skills of staff are used particularly well to support the whole community. For example, during the significant tragedies of the last year the excellent skills of the bereavement counsellor were used to meet the needs of all of those in the wider community. The highly specialist skills of the play and art therapists are used particularly well across all centres and also to support schools and other organisations that need their specific skills.

The outstanding care, guidance and support provided for adults and children have a very positive benefit on their well-being; for example, the centre signposts parents to high quality activities such as Dad's Swim. Excellent and wide-ranging information is readily accessible to inform parents on sexual health, budgetary management, dealing with domestic violence and job applications.

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 driving improvement. Staff understand their roles well and have very high expectations of themselves and others. The Board of Trustees works very closely with the senior managers and the advisory board, setting high ambitions for the centre. Trustees bring a vast range of expertise to the centre; they are enthusiastic about the centre and give their time freely. This close working supports long-term strategic planning, particularly in relation to service provision, development planning and sustainability. Development planning shows a clear pathway from the local authority's Children and Young People's Plan and is fully aligned with local priorities and national indicators for children and families. The family centre's cluster model is ensuring flexible deployment of staff and highly effective integrated provision that meets the needs of the whole community exceptionally well. Prudent financial management ensures that the centre makes very good use of a range of funding sources to ensure the continuance of provision. Consequently, the centre provides outstanding value for money. The developing parents' forum is enabling parents to take an active role in the development of the centre.

The centre leader and his deputy are highly experienced, skilled and inspirational. They lead a team of highly qualified and motivated staff who are passionate about their work. Senior managers lead their teams particularly well. Each senior manager has a particular expertise, teamwork is excellent and morale is very high. Staff development is highly valued; all volunteers attend extensive training which they report is 'the best training' they have ever attended. Senior staff quickly recognise the specific skills of their team and carefully nurture them to develop those skills. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Local authority procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed rigorously. All staff have been subject to an enhanced

Criminal Records Bureau check. They work in partnership effectively to protect children and vulnerable adults.

Staff know their communities well and have developed excellent relationships with statutory and voluntary sector organisations. They know their families' needs and wishes and provide an excellent link between other professionals and volunteers. They have secured the trust of the whole community, including the most needy, who depend on the staff for support and advice when they are at their most vulnerable. In the words of one centre user, 'They have saved my life; I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for them'. Users' views, supported by robust evaluation, data analysis and rigorous challenge by the Board of Trustees are used well to influence provision.

The centre makes an excellent contribution to community cohesion with its celebration of different cultures within the community. A bonfire party in the centre of one of the local villages has effectively brought two communities together. The involvement of a local vicar in the work of the centre is supporting a celebration of songs at the local church. Translations by multilingual staff, the use of sign language and picture cues, and support to develop literacy skills enable all users to communicate effectively. The inclusion of all families and their children is promoted very effectively and discrimination tackled rigorously. As one user commented, 'Whoever you are, whatever you have done, you are welcome'.

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 North East Copeland Children's Centre on 8 and 9 December 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding in all aspects.

Thank you for your help and contribution to the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you about all the things you are involved in. My colleague enjoyed her time spent at the farm park with you and she was delighted that you were so willing to talk about how good the centre is. You told us that you could not praise the centre enough for the support they have given you and the difference it has made to your lives. We visited some of the sessions that are offered at the centre, watched many of the DVDs that you produced, and read the comments and feedback about the courses you have attended and the services that you use.

The sessions we saw at the centre, and the excellent work that you produce, are of an exceptionally high quality. You told us that you really value the time that health workers and family support workers spend with you, and that they give you very helpful information on healthy eating, budgeting and keeping your children safe. You also told us that you enjoy the many activities that the centre provides such as Baby Picasso and Dad's Swim. You said that the staff delivering these sessions always have time for you and make the sessions fun. If you can not get to the sessions, you told us that someone from the centre will collect you. Importantly, you told us that being able to attend any of the sessions that Howgill Family Centre offers is particularly useful as it means you never have to wait to attend a course, because there is always one available somewhere in the area. We agree with you that North East Copeland Children's Centre and Howgill Family Centre provide you with excellent care, guidance and support because the needs of every parent and child are of the highest importance.

The centre provides excellent opportunities for new mothers and fathers to receive very helpful information and advice about how to manage children's behaviour through the Triple P parenting programme. The centre supports those of you who want to move into employment through its links with Jobcentre Plus and the local college, as well as providing many of you with good opportunities to work as a volunteer at the centre.

Senior staff, together with the Board of Trustees, lead and manage the centre extremely well. All staff and volunteers are very well trained. They ensure that you and your children are safe both at the centre and in your own home. Arrangements

for child protection and safeguarding, including safe recruitment and use of staff are exemplary. Staff model safe practices in all the work that they do. Everyone is welcomed at the centre and all staff and volunteers go out of their way to ensure that you feel included and that your culture and beliefs are respected and celebrated. Senior staff are always wanting to improve things further. They listen carefully to your views to ensure that the provision meets your needs and make changes quickly when things don't work. Managers know what the centre needs to do to improve even more, and are working with consultants so that they can make sure that the work that they are doing with you and your children is carefully evaluated. They want to use these evaluations to ensure that the effect of programmes are reported to you, and then used to develop more provision. The Parents' Forum is successfully engaging parents in its work, and is beginning to challenge the centre and the trustees to ensure that it continues to deliver work of a high quality.

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