

Inspection report for Colne Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	362954
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Tim Vaughan HMI

Centre governance	NHS East Lancashire Community Health Services
Centre leader	Elsie Brown
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not Applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Newtown Early Years Centre EY258620

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 an Additional Inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leaders, front-line staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory group, parents and carers and service users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Colne Children's Centre has developed from a Sure Start Local Programme and covers the wards of Waterside, Vivary Bridge and Horsfield which are in the top 20% most deprived areas in the country. The centre is a phase 1 children's centre providing the full core offer of services and is located in the centre of Colne. A high proportion of families are from White British heritage backgrounds with a smaller number of families from the Pakistani community. The number of children attending schools in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The local area has high levels of poor health, worklessness and poverty.

The centre's Early Years Foundation Stage provision is provided by Newtown Early Years Centre which is within easy reach of the centre at Newtown Nursery School and is managed by a voluntary management committee. The most recent inspection (November 2010) judged that it was good. Most children enter early education with a range of skills broadly in line with those expected for their age.

The centre is one of four local children's centres operating as a cluster with a combined management structure and a shared an advisory group.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

This is a good centre which is inclusive and welcoming. Through the dedication and integrated work of the staff and partners, the life chances of parents, carers and children are improving. 'Because of this centre we are still together as a family'; 'I've nothing but praise for this place. I don't know what I'd have done without it': these comments are typical of parental opinion and help to explain why the centre is effective.

The centre plays a significant role in the life of the local community and is reaching a high proportion of families and improving life chances. The wide range of groups available means that parents are very well supported in making choices and decisions about their lives. Relationships between staff and parents are positive and the centre works hard to ensure that those who are less confident in communicating their views are very well supported and listened to. As one parent said, 'They've given me my sanity. I can discuss things with staff and others. I always come away feeling that they've helped.'

A key strength is the excellent extent to which the centre meets the needs of users and the wider community. This is because provision is flexible, well-integrated and as adapted as possible to local needs. Staff are quick to support all children and their families whatever their circumstances. As a consequence the centre's commitment to equality of opportunity and diversity is good. For example, a practical English course has enabled minority ethnic families to access a wide range of other support from the centre.

The encouragement given to the wider community to engage with and influence services is excellent. For example, the centre ensures parents are involved in voluntary work and interviews of new staff. The wide range of child health clinics and home visits means that the centre is also identifying and meeting needs as early as possible. Parents' engagement in decision-making is outstanding. They feel listened to and as a result they express high levels of satisfaction with services.

The centre manager is a skilled and effective leader. She leads by example and has built a culture where staff from different backgrounds feel that their own professional heritage is valued and respected. The leadership team are reflective and have constructive debate with one another and the manager about developments. They have a clear understanding of the strengths in provision and where further improvement is still required. For example, they recognise that data for the centre's reach area about attainment and gaps for five year old children would greatly enhance centre planning and evaluation.

Opportunities for parents to play, learn and have fun together with their children are very effective. The advice and mentoring given to childminders has led to good quality provision across the local area including an accredited childminder network. The linked early years provision is good and improving; it benefits from the high quality expertise of the centre teacher.

Staff and other adults consistently give the highest priority to safeguarding. All procedures and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and their families are of the highest quality, up to date and meet statutory requirements. The centre places high priority on promoting the well-being and safety of users. As a result parents feel that the centre is a safe place for them and their children.

Partnership working across the centre is good and this is best demonstrated by the links with health including local health visitors and the provision of on-site dental services. Links with the voluntary sector, childminders and local nurseries are also good. Partnerships with local primary schools need to be improved so that there is a greater shared evaluation of outcomes and gaps in attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Considering that outcomes are improving and together with its other strengths, the centre has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority to look at outcomes and gaps in attainment for children aged five who have attended the centre by:
 - ensuring that data for the centre's reach area is available each year
 - building partnerships with each local primary school and exploring how to access data about outcomes and gaps.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for parents and carers are good and improving. Children and their families are provided with valuable support and detailed information to promote their good health. Parents and carers report that they are benefiting from the range of

opportunities that the centre provides to promote their health and well-being. These include: child health services; smoking cessation support and baby massage.

In addition, the centre places a strong emphasis on promoting the emotional health of all users, such as in the course 'From bump to birth and beyond'. Staff are proactive in providing individual support to families in times of crisis. For example, one parent described how the centre had helped her to deal with domestic violence. It had also helped her to develop better parenting skills, including about child safety. She valued the sensitive support that staff gave to her and her family. Key messages about healthy eating are strongly promoted through information and courses. Breastfeeding is also given a high profile and initiation rates have improved. However, senior leaders are not complacent and recognise that further work is needed on sustaining breastfeeding during children's first year of life.

All the centre's staff and partners see the safety and well-being of users and their families as a key priority. As a result, parents and carers feel safe at the setting, are confident to approach staff, trust them and feel involved. They receive a range of advice on safety. The number of children in the Nelson and Colne district killed or injured in road traffic accidents has reduced. Work to help users stop smoking is leading to earlier identification of risks and a decrease in smoking by pregnant mothers.

The most vulnerable children are recognised quickly and effective packages of support are put in place for the whole family. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively when specialist intervention is required. It is enhanced by good partnership working with wider health colleagues. Children who have a child protection plan are well-supported at the centre. Staff are keen to further develop work with social workers and recognise that the number of local children with child protection plans is increasing.

The centre teacher has established strong links with the early years setting where children make good progress from their starting points. Effective support from the centre to childminders has assisted all local childminders in achieving a good inspection outcome. Children in all activities at the centre, including the 'Explorers Group', enjoy their learning. This is because activities are well chosen and stimulating and are matched well to children's interests and stages of development. Senior leaders recognise that the next challenge is to look more closely at the Early Years Foundation Stage profile outcomes and gaps in attainment for children across the centre's reach area, so that the centre can evaluate its contribution to and plan how this can be improved.

Parents and carers and their children enjoy learning and playing together. Through training and support from the centre in developing their parenting skills, parents report that they have gained a better understanding of how to play with their children and how to manage their behaviour positively. As one parent commented, 'They are really good with young mums – they support with managing children's behaviour and support one-to-one.'

Parents and carers are encouraged to make an excellent positive contribution to the centre and wider community by becoming volunteers and suggesting how the centre can be improved. They feel encouraged to offer their views and suggestions on a regular basis through face to face meetings, evaluations of activities and frequent questionnaires. The active dads group has produced a booklet for other fathers in the community.

Parents report that low income is one of the biggest stresses and this is reflected in the locally high levels of worklessness. Support is provided by the centre with Job Centre Plus for example, by building parents' confidence, improving their access to benefits, support with budgeting, attending local training courses and in returning to work.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 users 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 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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is delivering its core offer well and provides a wide range of additional services. These include ante-natal clinics, outreach visits and a wide range of groups for parents to attend including 'Tiny Treasures'. The assessment of users' needs is good. There are strong relationships and staff are friendly and welcoming. The centre staff and leadership have a good knowledge of local families and the community, and strive to ensure that those with the greatest needs have highly personalised support. This includes tailored support for teenage parents and fathers, for minority ethnic families and for parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The use of the Common Assessment Framework is well embedded. Good partnerships with other agencies such as Portage ensure that assessments of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are robust. In addition, child health services target the needs of individual children with specific programmes of support including speech and language. As one

parent commented, 'They give you lots of ideas to do at home. They help as much as they can.'

Observations and a recent Ofsted inspection show that the linked Early Years provision is good. There is an effective partnership with the centre's teacher whose advice and guidance has supported improvement. A recent inspection of the nursery school showed that it was satisfactory. This matched the evaluation of the new headteacher, who has begun to strengthen links with the centre teacher and who values the high-calibre support. At the centre, families enjoy a range of activities including use of the sensory room and groups such as the 'explorers' play session. Learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage is promoted well.

The range and appropriateness of services provided is excellent. It is highly integrated and cohesive. A high number of local children aged 0–5 are registered with the centre and more than half have used services in the past year. More parents and carers are referring themselves for support from the centre. This is at the same time as an increase in referrals from a wide range of other services.

Parents and carers take part in a wide variety of courses, some of which lead to employment. A practical English course for speakers of other languages is popular and helps users to develop their confidence as well as their communication and social skills. Parents are supported in their pursuit of NVQ Level 1 and 2. Effective work with the Citizens Advice Bureau supports families regarding benefits and wider concerns. In addition, good information and sign-posting is provided on a range of topics including parenting, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual health, adult training and breastfeeding.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is led and managed well by an extremely dedicated and passionate team of staff. As a group they demonstrate a huge commitment to equality and improving the life chances of all families in the community. The leadership team are an effective support to the centre manager, of whom the staff speak highly. More than

one member of staff commented that she is an enabling and democratic leader, committed to the work of the centre and to staff and their professional development. Staff state that they feel valued as individuals and that their contributions are recognised.

Decision-making and the effectiveness of the centre are enhanced through good support from the centre advisory group. They give regular support and challenge to the manager and help to shape priorities. Regular updates mean that the group is clear about the strengths of provision and the areas of development.

Evaluation is a priority shared by centre staff, which means that there is a shared understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. The centre's development plan includes clear priorities and activities and is informed by the 'annual conversation' with the local authority although it sometimes lacks sufficient detail about how progress will be measured.

The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the work of the centre. Positive images, resources and tailored programmes highlight the centre's determination to support groups who may be subject to discrimination. Artwork displayed around the centre is inclusive and reflects a range of cultures, ages and abilities. The new sensory room is well-used and has enabled the local special school to build links with and access the centre. The attractive centre environment and good use of space reflect the centre's good value for money.

Safeguarding is excellent because it is given such a high priority. Staff are well-trained and the leadership team have had additional training. Individual staff and groups of colleagues can access regular supervision. All line managers are trained in supporting staff. Policy, procedures and links with key agencies on safeguarding are effective. All required checks, systems and procedures are in place to safeguard children and parents, and to keep staff safe during home visits. The centre aims to build the emotional health of local people and this is addressed in many of the courses on offer. One parent said, 'The centre has made me a different person – it has built my self-esteem and given me the "I could" feeling.' Parents also reported that the support on domestic violence has led to improved personal security and better strategies to cope with difficult situations.

Partnership working with most partners is strong and well integrated. These relationships are well established and effectively managed. There are good links across agencies. The centre has already identified that they need to work with local primary schools to look at the outcomes and gaps in attainment of children by the age of five years. Although the centre has worked hard to initiate this, not all local primary schools are willing to share data with the centre. This is limiting the centre's ability to further improve services and narrow the gap in attainment. This demonstrates that partnership with schools is an area for development.

User engagement is excellent. This is because the centre works relentlessly to reach out to the whole community and routinely seeks the views of users including

children. As one parent commented, 'They're always doing questionnaires.' The information that the centre gathers is then used well to improve courses and adapt to parents' needs, for example, broadening the range of topics covered in an English language class, thus enriching the participants' experience.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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

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

This inspection took account of the findings of the inspection of Newtown Early Years Centre (24 November 2010).

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

Thank you for your help when we inspected Colne Children's Centre on 8 and 9 November 2010. We spoke to many of you about the centre's work. We really enjoyed chatting to you in your activities, around the centre and on a home visit. You expressed your opinions very clearly and they were very helpful to us. We were delighted to hear your positive views and how helpful and friendly you find the centre staff. I am writing to say what we found out about the centre.

Firstly and most importantly, we are pleased to tell you that we judged the centre as good overall. You told us how much you value activities on offer such as the 'Explorers Group', 'Tiny Treasures', the sensory room and the practical English group. The centre meets your needs and those of the wider community exceptionally well. You said that coming to the centre has given you more confidence and has helped you make new friends. As a result, we were pleased to hear that many of you feel more confident as parents and that your children have enjoyed opportunities to develop and learn.

It was pleasing to see that the centre involves you in improving services and offers opportunities for you to be volunteers and to help in recruiting new staff. We know that you appreciate the fact that staff listen carefully to your and your children's views. We can see how the centre is making a positive difference to your lives.

The centre staff take great care to ensure that you and your children are kept safe and that the centre is a safe and welcoming place to be. This is excellent. We particularly liked the comment from a parent who said, 'When I'm finding it difficult they give me support.'

The staff work really hard to make the centre as good as it can be. To help them we have suggested that they look more closely at how they measure whether the activities they provide are making a difference to children by the age of five years old. This means they will then be in a stronger position to see how well they are doing. We have also asked that they do this by working more closely with primary schools to look at the progress of all local children.

Thank you once again for your help.

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