

Inspection report for West Allerdale Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	362417
Inspection dates	24 -25 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Sarah Quinn

Centre governance	Barnardos
Centre leader	Zoe Lenaghan
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY273826 Maryport Child and Family Centre EY260844 Flimby Child and Family Centre EY253264 Terrific 2's EY254673 Ewanrigg Junior School Crèche EY317845 Dearham Sessional Day Care EY251950 Crosscannonby Centre Group EY254691 Netherhall School Crèche

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with a range of users, staff, a range of partners, and representatives of the local authority linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work. They also looked at a range of documentation, including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

West Allerdale Children's Centre was originally designated as a phase one centre. This designation changed in April 2010 and the centre is now required to offer the equivalent services a phase two centre would offer. The centre has two main satellite centres at Maryport Child and Family Centre, Ennerdale Road, Maryport CA15 8HN and Flimby Child and Family Centre, Sand Lane, Flimby CA15 8QS and also uses a number of community buildings to provide crèche and occasional care. There are seven linked childcare settings that are registered with Ofsted, although only two are regularly operating. Five others provide care on an occasional basis to support the needs of the local community. All provisions deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage. The children's centre also coordinates breakfast club provision at a number of the local primary schools.

At the Maryport site is the pre-school, offering a 23 place childcare provision for children aged under eight years. The Flimby site also offers a 19 place childcare provision for children under eight years. Both of these provisions are subject to their own inspection and the reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Children entering the childcare have skills and levels of development below those expected for their age.

Overall, the centre serves a disadvantaged area, when compared with other parts of Cumbria. The centre reach area also contains parts that are both advantaged and significantly disadvantaged. It is within walking distance of Ewanrig housing estate, which is mainly social housing. Employment figures are relatively low, with many families having a variety of benefits as their main source of income. Qualification levels are low. Most families are of White British heritage, although there is an increasing range of ethnic diversity in the locality.

The centre offers a full range of integrated services for children and their families from the main hub or delivered as outreach services in the home or from the satellite centres. It has a very wide geographical reach which includes pockets of dense urban areas and dispersed rural areas. The centre is governed by Barnardos on behalf of the local authority and is supported by an advisory board.

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

West Allerdale children's centre is outstanding. The centre offers a fully inclusive service to a very diverse community. The staff effectively cover pockets of urban areas with high deprivation, and also widespread rural areas where families may not easily be able to access services. The centre is highly effective in developing a wide range of suitable and innovative outreach provision to meet the immediate and long term needs of the individuals and community. Safeguarding is prioritised at the centre and staff recognise that the safety and protection of children and their families are absolutely essential. The centre works hard with families and key partners to ensure children have safe and secure futures.

The health and well-being of children and families are very successfully promoted and outcomes for families are excellent. The centre is responsive and focused on the needs of families and children. As a result, families have improved prospects as they access a wide range of training courses, volunteer, and work hard to improve the health and well-being of their own families.

The centre is highly successful in assessing the needs of the users. This is because they have excellent relationships with key partners, the community and users and can quickly respond to changing needs. High levels of care, guidance and support mean that families feel safe and important and know that there is always someone in the centre who cares about their needs. As evidenced during the inspection days, the centre responds swiftly to times of crisis and no family is ever refused support. Giving families skills for the future is also a priority and users are able to change their prospects and the future of their whole family with the intensive support, and diverse and personalised learning and development opportunities provided by the centre.

Leaders and managers are highly effective and all levels of management operate with a common purpose. Staff morale is very high and passion for improvement and supporting the community permeates throughout the centre. Partnership working is a

tangible strength and the range of partners involved in the centre work together very successfully to meet the needs of individuals and the community. The programme offered by the centre is continually evolving and adapting to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the community. Highly sophisticated monitoring ensures the centre can carefully monitor the impact of their programme. This system is being improved even further to enable the centre to run detailed reports on their impact in a variety of different ways. The advisory board is in place and offers support and challenge. However, the newness of some members of the advisory board means that their effectiveness is currently compromised. Parents are only just beginning to join the advisory board.

The centre is focused on providing the best provision for individuals and for the community as a whole. They evaluate every aspect of their service and seek views from children, users and partners. They listen carefully to the opinions of all users and evolve their programme according to needs. Leaders and managers are innovative and responsive and fully commit themselves to the futures of the children and families in the community. They demonstrate excellent capacity for continuous improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the advisory board to enable them to offer support and challenge to the centre by:
 - ensuring all board members understand what the work of the children's centre entails
 - ensuring the advisory board is fully representative of the community.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Children who access parts of the childcare provisions happily tuck into tasty, healthy snacks and have access to well-resourced outdoor areas where they run and play with each other. They effectively learn how to stay healthy and demonstrate confidence and emotional security. Parents use the important skills they learn at the centre to keep their children and themselves healthy at home and they report that they really enjoy the healthy cookery courses and use recipes in providing food for their children. Breastfeeding is very well promoted from the antenatal stage and the percentage of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding is rising steadily. This is because the parents now understand the immense benefits of breastfeeding through workshops, peer support and drop-in support sessions held across the area. The number of children in the area classed as obese is now below national figures and the rate of immunisation is high. Initiatives to meet local need, like the 'Chrysalis' support group and 'Triple P' parenting group raise parents confidence in a supportive and nurturing environment, enabling parents to learn new methods and

share experiences. This has a very positive impact on children and families.

Looked after children and those with a child protection plan are closely monitored and supported. This enables the centre to target support swiftly to where it is needed. Use of the Common Assessment Framework is highly effective and staff have a thorough understanding of how to implement the process and of partnership working. This means that every child has swift and meaningful intervention to enable them to begin to reach their potential. Case studies show a high percentage of children are removed from child protection plans because of fast and effective intervention by appropriate agencies. Children and users state that they feel safe at the centre and the staff are vigilant in responding to unexpected events. For example, sudden damage to buildings is appropriately dealt with and buildings are quickly made safe and risk assessed. Many examples show that the centre responds quickly to the needs of families to improve their safety and well-being, for example, by providing a safety kit, through cleaning and the 'House Proud' scheme, and providing appropriate equipment, toys and food for families in dire need. Parents and carers state that they feel safe in the setting and say that they feel part of a family at the centre.

Users and children thoroughly enjoy their time at the centre and sessions are popular like 'stay and play' and crèche facilities. Every childcare provision uses the Early Years Foundation Stage and tracks children's progress towards the early learning goals, whether they attend every session or very occasionally. This means that children's next steps in development and learning can be provided for very effectively. Childminders offer an extension to Early Years Foundation Stage provision and are starting to accept support from the qualified teacher at the centre. Parents and carers speak of the wide range of different activities that are carried out at the centre that can then be transferred through play at home and there is a range of appropriate courses firmly focused on families learning and playing together. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision across all settings is effective in enabling children to raise their achievement and local schools report that they can see the attainment gap closing for the most vulnerable families. There is extended support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and vulnerable children and families and the area inclusion officer ensures that appropriate support is in place to enable all children to make progress. The centre has high aspirations and expectations for all its children and families. The centre encourages father involvement and services include 'Clown Around' and 'Splash Around' Saturday groups, which are popular.

There are many opportunities for adults to raise their qualification, enjoyment and experience levels. For example, Level 1 literacy and numeracy classes, 'Dazzling nails' nail technician courses, Christmas craft courses and many highly coordinated volunteer opportunities. The volunteer programme enables adults to make a purposeful contribution to the centre and community and Barnardos manage this programme carefully to ensure all people achieve well and make use of their strengths. Volunteers access safeguarding training within one day of being a volunteer in line with the centres excellent commitment to child protection.

Behaviour around all of the groups is exemplary and positive behaviour management strategies have obvious impact upon children and parents. There is an atmosphere of respect throughout all sessions and adults are always willing to listen to others and then confident to challenge, or express their own opinions. Users state that the centre plays a 'huge' role in the community and beyond and users say that they are 'listened to' and are given many opportunities to express their views and are confident that these will be taken on board. The parents and carers forum is building steadily and feeds into the advisory board and into all aspects of the centre. This is empowering for users and gives them a very effective 'voice'.

There is a very strong ethos of raising the confidence and self-esteem of children and users. Training take-up rates are excellent and evaluations indicate a positive impact upon attendees and children. Clear, established links with Jobcentre Plus further promote opportunities for adult learning, training and employment opportunities.

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	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

The centre is highly effective in meeting the needs of individuals and of the wider community through swift and appropriate assessment of needs. This assessment can begin through referrals made from other agencies or from families arriving at the centre themselves. Staff at the centre are innovative in their methods of establishing and maintaining links with families, particularly vulnerable families, and work extremely hard to build trusting and productive relationship with users. Staff are then able to quickly assess the needs of users and provide outreach services to match their needs. For example, the 'House Proud' scheme and 'Triple P' parenting courses. Users are also signposted to a huge variety of services including health workshops, training courses, childcare facilities, employment services and volunteer opportunities to name but a few. The centre ensures that all barriers are removed and enable all parents and carers to attend whatever they need to attend by providing crèche

facilities and even transport when necessary. Users enjoy 'Rattle and Drum and Mini-Movers' which is open to all children up to the age of four and their parents and carers, and encourages playing together. Fathers groups are very popular as is the 'Grandtots' session. Users say that these sessions are far more than playing with the children but are opportunities to meet other dads and grandparents and to share experiences. The toy library is also popular enabling families to loan a wide selection of toys, games and books. New mothers and fathers can enjoy baby massage, teenage parents groups as well as 'Mini Movers' and 'Rattle and Drum'; music and movement sessions for mothers, fathers and carers to join in with their children. There are well-regarded breakfast clubs where children play extremely well together and staff show an excellent understanding of their individual needs.

Case studies show families who have been in dire need and supported by the centre, eventually find themselves in a position to give something back to the community. All staff work incredibly hard to meet individual needs. For example, by providing innovative resources and encouragement for the development of children's toilet training and bed wetting, through highly effective books written by staff at the centre to support the programmes in place. The tailoring of services to meet individual needs is very effective and the impact is evident. Unique and creative outreach work is a key area of work for the centre and has the most immediate impact.

Staff work hard to maintain excellent links between Family Support Workers and health professionals and as a consequence of this strong partnership working, there is evidence of improved health outcomes. Strong multi-agency partnerships between the centre and key agencies ensures the needs of individual children and families who are identified by, or referred to, the centre are assessed quickly so that interventions and support can be appropriately and rapidly targeted.

Knowledgeable and persistent staff effectively encourage the engagement of users. Robust assessment of individual cases and effective use of the Common Assessment Framework assures that the right teams are gathered swiftly to support vulnerable families that are experiencing considerable challenges and significant difficulties in their lives. Early intervention, and which agency drives this, comes from clear targeting of vulnerable groups. For example, the strong liaison with speech and language workers, and support for families to work with children at home, ensure children make swift progress in their communication skills. Hard-to-reach groups are identified early through excellent relationships with midwives, health visitors and other professionals who complete registration forms for the centre. This ensures no family is overlooked.

User satisfaction surveys and evaluations evidence obvious satisfaction with the provision and the range of services provided by the centre. The centre provides services that are very appropriate to the needs in the reach area and very responsive to the requests and opinions of users. Services are continually adapted to need and the centre is very clear and objective about discontinuing services that fail to meet identified need. Community links ensure provision continues to meet specific requirements and sustainability is a priority of the centre. For example, by forging

productive links with the community and giving parents the tools they need to help them to stand on their own.

The centre effectively promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment. This is mainly focused on how well the centre enables individuals to improve their educational and/or personal development. Users are encouraged to build on their achievements continually and the quality of the learning and development for adults is excellent. Users enjoy highly purposeful learning experiences and high quality information provided to parents and centre users.

The centre provides exceptional care, guidance and support to all users and the provision is highly personalised to the needs of families and children. Although the centre is now only required to signpost users to appropriate services, the centre is not content with signposting and continue to provide personalised support to match provision to needs. Feeder schools speak of the superb behaviour and skills of children who move to school from one of the childcare settings. In times of crisis, families are confident to turn to the centre for support and comments such as, 'They are my lifeline', are common. The centre provides quality support, effective coordination and integration of appropriate services so that parent's feel truly empowered to take the lead and improve their own and their family's lives. Parents say the centre, 'listens to what we have to say', and, 'never sits in judgement'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

The safeguarding arrangements at the centre are excellent. Staff attend regular training events, thorough induction, and they have clear and effective strategies to address concerns quickly and effectively. All staff, relevant partners, volunteers and members of the advisory board, have Criminal Records Bureau checks and staff have ongoing suitability monitoring. Needs of children and families are swiftly identified and early intervention and multi-agency working ensure children are safeguarded quickly. Risk assessments are thorough and the settings visited were safe and secure. Staff also role model and promote safety in the home for parents. The child protection procedures in action are effective and children on the child protection

register, and those who are vulnerable, are monitored closely. Family support is strong and effective and enables families to move away from intensive support and to take better responsibility for their children. Interagency working is extremely effective and there is a 'team around the child' approach which rapidly provides the most appropriate support for children.

Inclusion is a high priority for the centre and monitoring and evaluation are sophisticated and highly influential in ensuring services are matched to the needs of the community. All staff are appropriately trained and qualified to meet the diverse needs of the reach area. The professional development opportunities inspired by the centre leader ensure that all staff are able to maximise and expand their skills rather than limit themselves to one area of work, for example, childcare workers support family support workers in the home. This means that their skills are used in a wide range of areas and their capacity is increased, providing improved value and maximised potential. The centre gathers specific information on minority ethnic groups, as well as other groups of users, and whether their needs are being met. There are signs around the centre to promote the eradication of discrimination and prejudice and in the childcare settings children have the benefit of pictures, posters, books, dolls, toys and equipment to promote a variety of cultures.

The overall leadership and day-to-day management are outstanding and the local authority and Barnardos hold the centre to account very well. There are strong links between strategic planning and service delivery because regular and rigorous monitoring meetings ensure that the centre carefully considers the effectiveness of each service offered. The local authority also provides the centre with clear and strategic guidance linked to what they expect the centre to deliver. The governance of the centre is supported by an advisory board. The advisory board is relatively new and, although there is very good representation by key partners on the board, the centre has found it difficult to recruit users to the group. Some users have recently been vetted and are able to join the group, but the new chair recognises that the purpose of a children's centre is not fully clear to all board members. This means that they are not yet in a strong position to offer challenge and support to the centre.

There is a shared vision that drives all the actions at the centre and actions are clearly focused on expected outcomes for children and families by all staff. Leadership truly is inspirational and no member of staff ever sees a barrier but a challenge to overcome. This means that the centre has an unrivalled reputation for success when it comes to meeting the needs of all users.

Focused management ensures there are focused priorities with no duplication of services and provision across the centre reach area and this supports excellent value for money. The highly targeted use of resources and staff also supports value for money and the fact that the centre is currently working at a higher level than it needs to and striving to provide the core offer in most areas. Achieving value for money is a challenge because of the area covered by the centre. Much of the resource is taken up by outreach work and travelling to ensure the centre meets all

the needs of the community. The centre looks carefully at a variety of funding sources and is creative in the development of provision and use of resources and equipment. They forge excellent links with the community and local businesses who recognise the centre's worth in the community and support a variety of events. For example, recent repair work was completed by a local craftsman who donated his fee to the pre-school Christmas party. The accommodation use is maximised and some activities are open on Saturdays to ensure that specific groups, such as fathers and their children, have access to provision at convenient times.

Evaluation methods are continual and users are consistently approached for feedback on all aspects of the provision. This enables the centre to have a full awareness of its strengths and areas for development. The impact of the centre's work with individual families is explored in detail through a range of evaluative meetings, supervision activities and feedback sessions. Managers and leaders have high expectations of the centre which are well communicated to staff at all levels. Action plans are in place and identify priority areas for improvement and clearly outline success criteria and resources needed for success. Service delivery plans show clear and traceable improvements and the evolution of services to meet the needs of users and to remain sustainable.

Partnerships are excellent and links with midwives, health visitors, speech and language, adult learning, family support, social workers, schools, and the community are all effectively integrated to improve outcomes. Engagement with partners is excellent and staff at the centre work hard to promote the centre and its worth in the community. As a consequence, feedback from key partners is incredibly positive and states that the community would not function without the children's centre. Health partners state that their job would be very difficult without the support of the centre.

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	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	1

and activities	
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

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

The pre-school, EY273826 Maryport Child and Family Centre, was inspected at the same time as the children’s centre and was judged to be good overall. The child care, EY260844 Flimby Child and Family Centre was inspected in May 2010 and was also found to be good overall. The reports of these inspections are available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

We inspected the West Allerdale Children’s Centre on 24 and 25 November 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

The centre responds extremely well to the changing needs of the community and to individuals needs. Under the careful guidance of the leaders and managers, staff provide excellent levels of care, guidance, and support for all those who use the centre as well as enabling users to access training courses and fun activities. Parents and carers reported to us that they felt the centre was a ‘huge part of the community’ and helped improve their lives. The extremely positive staff team has passion and commitment; its members meet regularly to discuss the centre’s work and plan for improvement and are continually trying to make the centre even better. All staff place the upmost importance on you and your families and always provide a listening ear for you. They are passionate about creating an extremely warm and welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly.

The centre offers a good range of services and activities for all families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. They are helping you to keep

yourselves and your children healthy and safe. Your children have plenty of chances to play outdoors, which helps to keep them fit. The children's behaviour at the centre is very good and you and your children are safe there. Staff provide you with access to safety equipment and advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your home to keep your children safe. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by encouraging mums to breastfeed and by promoting healthy eating through exciting cookery courses.

The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Sunny Smiles' and 'Rattle and Drum'. We could see how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

To develop further the work of the centre we have asked that the advisory board be trained in aspects of the children's centre work to enable them to support and challenge the centre effectively. We would also like to see more parents and carers on the advisory board.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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