

Inspection report for Darwen Children's Centre

Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	362463
Inspection dates	17-18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Joanne Smith HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Maria Nugent
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY246291, Darwen Children's Centre, Lord Street site EY272949, Darwen Children's Centre, Chapels site

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 additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the early years geographical manager, senior centre staff, front line workers, parents and carers, local authority representatives and partner agency representatives. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Darwen Children's Centre is a phase one centre based in the Sudell ward in the heart of the community. The children's centre also serves four outlying rural communities. It operates from two sites: Lord Street is purpose built and Chapels is a converted former nursery school. The centre was designated in 2004 to provide the full core offer. It provides a wide range of services including health, family support, employment advice and support, and both sites offer registered Early Years Foundation Stage provision.

The early years geographical manager leads the services provided by the centre and coordinates those provided by its partners. The local authority is responsible for the performance management of staff in the centre and the Primary Care Trust is responsible for its staff who deliver services from the children's centre. The strategic management of the centre is the responsibility of the Local Strategic Partnership through the local authority's children's services department, with local challenge from the children's centre local management board.

Within the community served by the centre the majority of children aged under four years old are living in families dependant on workless benefits. The large majority of families are of White British heritage with a growing South Asian community. Evidence indicates that the skills and knowledge that children have when they enter Early Years Foundation Stage settings is lower than those expected for their age.

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

‘The place feels like home from home,’ sums up how families feel about Darwen Children’s Centre. It is a warm and friendly place where children and their families feel safe and welcome. The highly effective way that the centre uses its resources means that families in the community whose circumstances have made them vulnerable receive enhanced levels of care, guidance and support. Staff are extremely caring and supportive; they appreciate that some parents and carers need small steps and ‘hand holding’ to grow their confidence. They thoughtfully help them through both times of crisis and with tasks such as buying affordable furniture at the local Church Stores, organised by the local churches working together. Consequently, the centre is making a positive difference to the lives of children and families. It is raising the aspirations and increasing the confidence of adults in the community by providing practical help and support for parents, children and families towards achieving better futures. Data held by the centre show the gap between children from very disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest is narrowing.

Strategic oversight of the centre is the responsibility of the local authority and this is delivered very well using the network geographical managers who oversee 13 children’s centres in the local authority. This effects a constant climate of reflection and improvement, underpinning the centre’s good capacity to improve further. Service users are involved in the evaluation of the centre at the point of service delivery and some are on the local management board. The centre is working hard to increase their involvement. Staff in the centre benefit from the clear and robust management structures that are understood by all.

Central to the success of the centre are the exceptionally well-developed partnerships that are capably coordinated by the geographical manager. The form of service delivery is taken from the model adopted by the Blackburn with Darwen local authority. It is designed to use the expertise of statutory and voluntary partners to the very best effect. The centre is particularly successful at employing this method and it brings about strong and effective work by staff to safeguard children. This leads to outstanding provision and the centre targeting its services where they are

most needed. Health promotion is very strong, leading to outstanding outcomes for service users, particularly in relation to preventative measures such as immunisation programmes. However, it is less clear of its impact in the immediate reach area, for example, on the rising childhood obesity figures. This is the result of data not being interrogated as closely as it could be to set quantifiable targets in the key indicators for children's centres.

The area served by the centre is growing in diversity and the centre is keenly aware of this. There is good representation of the local community in the Early Years Foundation Stage provision and resources around the centre. Centre users who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported very well to access the services on offer at the centre through use of services such as interpreters for the deaf. Parents are very well supported to work with professionals, such as physiotherapists, involved with their children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve action planning by using refined data that demonstrate where the centre has impacted on improving outcomes in the reach area and setting sharp ambitious targets for improvement based upon this.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Families are developing a very good understanding of how to keep healthy through using sessions such as buggy buddies exercise classes. Clearly targeted campaigns that run through the centre to address the take up of preventative health services, have been embraced by the community. This has resulted in a phenomenal improvement in the take up of immunisations for children in the 18 months to five-year-old age group and a significant reduction in the incidence of dental caries at the age of five years. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the opportunities offered to them through the centre. They say that the packages of support, such as Shop to Plate and Health Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY), have helped them to put the pieces of the parenting puzzle together to the benefit of their family. Breastfeeding training for all staff has helped struggling mothers to sustain breastfeeding with their babies.

Adults who use the centre say they feel safe, and the welcoming and secure environment at the centre is central to this. Alongside this, very young children behave well and in ways that illustrate their feelings of safety when in the centre. Families receive a good range of information about how to keep themselves and their families safe. New parents receive a home-safety package and the toy library has safety equipment that can be taken out on loan by parents. Nevertheless, the incidence in the local authority of admission to hospital for children under four suffering accidental or non accidental injury has risen recently.

Parenting courses are having a positive influence on parenting attitudes and

behaviours. Those who have accessed these courses engage well with them and they say their improved understanding of children’s behaviour has enhanced their relationships with their children. Early intervention work with families, brought about by the registration form completed by health visitors (UF1) or discussions through the Common Assessment Framework procedure, means that families receive timely, appropriate and well-matched support before they reach crisis points. Families who do need more intensive support at a child protection level respond well to the support and services given through the centre’s work. This results in them moving down the continuum of need and reduces the level of outside intervention in family life. In addition, they have the confidence to use the children’s centre independently and to approach its staff or partners when they recognise they need help or advice.

Children and adults who access play and learning activities, either directly delivered at the centre or by other services in partnership with the centre, enjoy their experiences. Retention rates on courses provided via the Work Club are extremely high and some adults have successfully gained recognised qualifications, such as National Vocational Qualification at level 2 in catering, that provide a path to employment. The centre is very keen to involve service users in its governance and development. This has resulted in a third of the local management board being made up of parents and carers. The value of this is recognised and more work is being done to involve more parents across the centre’s Every Child Matters development sub groups. Children who have attended the Early Years Foundation Stage provision at the centre and those from the most deprived backgrounds are known to be increasingly achieving at the age-related expectations at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, it is less clear how well all children who have had some involvement with other services at the children’s centre are doing.

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	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	2
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?

1

The range of advice and support on offer at the centre is wide and varied in how it is delivered to service users. The environment is rich in information for users to access,

either first hand through leaflets they can read themselves, or by speaking to someone at the centre. The position of some information, such as how to get help if suffering from domestic violence or help with contraception, is sensitively displayed to allow privacy.

The centre is highly effective in how it assesses and reviews the needs of its services users. Referrals are taken from any source, including parents and carers themselves. There is a rapid turnaround following initial contact with the centre. This is done through an efficient, multi-layered process that starts with sifting at the children's centre level and moves through to the family support service, whose staff convene the family support panel at the centre. Extremely strong and robust partnership working with other agencies leads to individually tailored packages of support being put in place for children and families. The scope of this support starts with signposting to other agencies, such as Work Club for parents wanting to return to work, and extends right across the range to intensive family support and child protection work.

Health partners are vital to the work of the centre and their commitment makes much of the initial contact with families possible through their involvement with families ante- and post-natally. This leads to vulnerable families and families whose circumstances have made them hard to reach, being assessed and supported in precisely the way that they need before and after the birth of their child. There is, for example, a comprehensive teenage pregnancy referral pathway. The Common Assessment Framework is used especially well to tailor a package of support during the pregnancy and as a built-in early intervention safeguard for the unborn child. Staff put support packages together in a very thoughtful way. For example, family support workers help parents to put into practice what they learn from the Incredible Years parenting programme in a safe and non-threatening atmosphere.

The Work Club provides an excellent service of support, signposting and delivery of courses to up-skill adults and help them into education, training or employment. This is supported by the centre through the provision of crèches and practical support such as selecting and buying affordable and suitable clothes to wear to job interviews. Services offered through the centre are subject to review and quality assurance processes that successfully ensure they continue to be suitable for purpose and deliver to the high standard required. The centre's quality improvement team successfully supports the centre's own registered Early Years Foundation Stage provision, as well as childminders and private and voluntary providers in the reach area to develop and improve their services and practice.

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	1

meet the needs of users and the wider community	
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?

2

The geographical manager skilfully manages and coordinates the work of centre staff and their partners to deliver a highly cohesive package of services to families in the reach area. Robust procedures, with a built in renewal cycle, are in place to make sure that the adults working in the centre are suitable to do so; this includes partner agencies. Training for staff in safeguarding children is done routinely and is regularly included in their professional supervision sessions with their manager as part of a structured supervision agenda. Early intervention to prevent families from reaching high levels of child protection or safeguarding concerns are managed extremely well through the UF1 registration form and family support service panel referrals system. The centre has responded comprehensively to the high levels of domestic abuse within the area. Specialist training ensures that all staff recognise the signs of domestic violence and know what to do to take action quickly.

The clear and effective management of the centre is enhanced by the geographical manager's high expectations of its provision and its staff. She has a clear vision which staff say they feel empowered and invigorated by her to deliver. The constant process of evaluation uses information from service-user evaluations, sub group meeting minutes and staff supervision and appraisal. The geographical manager has an accurate picture of where the centre needs to develop and a clear vision for the future. The centre action plan is displayed and used very well as a working document to track the steps taken towards the desired outcomes. However, within this system there is an absence of sharp, measureable targets linked to the data that is available to the centre. This limits the geographical manager's ability to demonstrate clearly and build on any success the centre has.

Very close working at a strategic level ensures secure partnership working at a local level. The management structure is extremely clear and well understood by all partners. The local management board serves the centre very well, acting as a critical friend, and challenging the centre to work more effectively for the benefit of the community. The partnership working with the extended schools team, statutory partners, work club and other commissioned services is a real strength of the centre and these are said to be invaluable by the extended-school coordinator. These partnerships enable the centre to connect effectively with the more rural parts of its reach area as well as the increasingly diverse population closer to the centre. They also allow more services to be made available to the community through shared commitments to projects and creative use of the funding available. This illustrates the centre's ability to deliver services that are good value for money.

The centre has a very clear understanding of the differing needs within its reach area. For example, health visitors feed into the being healthy sub group at the centre

to ensure that action planning matches local need and it is not just a 'copied across' process from local authority-wide need. This understanding has also developed through the centre's involvement in community activities, such as the record breaking community picnic, and promotion of the centre in the community. The centre is viewed by many as a hub of the community and is known as a place where advice and support can be gained.

The centre has a strong commitment to promoting equality and diversity through inclusion. This is reflected in the displays and resources but the Chapels site is somewhat more representative of its local community than the Lord Street site. It has taken an exciting approach to working with fathers and male carers that goes beyond dads' groups. A commissioned piece of work has helped centre staff, mothers, fathers and male carers to look at how men are included in the life of their child, the family and the centre. It has challenged the thinking of all groups, for example, about how men are involved in breastfeeding, with the result that a simple, informative booklet has been produced for them containing photographs of local fathers.

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	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which 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	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	2

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

None.

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 Darwen Children's Centre on 17 and 18 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that your children's centre provides a very safe and welcoming environment for families to go to for outstanding care, guidance and support. The agencies involved in supporting and guiding families with young children work extremely well together at the centre. Their staff are very skilled at recognising when a family is in need of help and they quickly plan and provide individual programmes of support to help those families through their difficulties. This work is making a positive difference to the families who receive it.

The centre is working hard to improve how well the children are doing when they start school and the information they have is that this is getting better. However, it is not clear whether the children who have improved are the ones that have been using the children's centre with their parents. Centre staff are also working hard to improve the health of children and their families through activities such as promoting breastfeeding, and to reduce the number of children who have to go to hospital because they have been injured either by accident or on purpose. They do not know how well they are doing with this because the information they have covers all of the local authority, where it is clear that these things are not improving. We have asked the centre manager to find a better way of finding out how successfully the work staff are doing at the children's centre is helping the children and their families to be healthier, safer and to improve their learning and social skills.

We spoke to people who work with the centre, such as the extended schools team and Work Club. We found that the way the centre works with partner agencies such as these is excellent. It means that the centre delivers very good quality activities, advice and support in a very cost effective way. Those of you we spoke to said that the work the centre does has made a positive difference to your lives. Some people have gone on to gain more qualifications and get jobs.

We saw that the parents, carers and children who go to sessions at the centre enjoy them and that they help them to be active. Some parents we spoke to told us that attending the centre had helped them to become better parents. We found that the courses and sessions provided by the centre are extremely well matched to the needs of the children and families in the community. The centre manager is very good at finding out what people think about the centre and what it provides. She knows what the centre does well and what it could do better, for example, that more parents working with the centre to review and develop the services on offer could make it even better.

We found that the centre is very good at contacting families with young children, particularly through their work with health visitors and midwives. Alongside this the centre is very involved in the life of the community and uses events such as record-breaking picnics to tell more people about its work and how it can help them. The community café at the centre is a service that is also used by members of the community who don't have young children and its healthy eating menu is benefitting all of their health.

We found that the centre is accessible and that there is a lot of work done to make sure that all members of the local community feel welcome and are able to access the services on offer. We were very pleased with the work that the centre has done to involve more dads in the lives of their children and of the centre.

Thank you very much for your welcome and talking to the inspectors. We enjoyed talking with you and wish you all well for the future.

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