

Inspection report for Newton-le-Willows Children's Centre

Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	362533
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Reporting inspector	Eithne Proffitt

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Ann Paulett
Date of previous inspection	n/a
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Linked school if applicable	The District CofE Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	n/a

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 District CofE Primary School was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. 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 wide range of partners and with representatives of the local authority linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's operational plans, evaluations and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Newton-le-Willows Children's Centre is a phase one, purpose-built centre and is run as a 'one-stop-shop' model. It offers a full range of integrated services on site with an increasing amount of outreach provision to support families in their homes. The centre shares its site with the District CE Primary School. The school's Nursery class occupies leased accommodation in the centre's building. Most children entering the Nursery have skills and levels of development considerably below those expected for their age. The school's Early Years Foundation Stage provision is subject to its own inspection. This report can be found on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre has a wide geographical reach and its catchment area is varied in terms of deprivation. While there are some pockets of relatively advantaged families, deprivation levels are generally within the bottom 30% nationally. Employment levels are low and many families have a variety of benefits as their main source of income. Most are of White British heritage, although there are a stable number of families of Chinese, Polish, Asian and Traveller heritage.

Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority and supported by a partnership board consisting of parents, users and partners.

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

Newton-le-Willows Children’s Centre provides good support for children and families which has a positive impact on the lives of those who use the service. The overall effectiveness of the centre stems from the management team’s relentless drive for improved outcomes for the children, families and community it serves. Staff’s knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of users and the personalised support, care and guidance towards meeting those needs are outstanding.

The centre’s wide range of activities, opportunities and services are held within a welcoming, secure environment that promotes and values diversity and difference. Children’s learning and development are very well supported through planned, purposeful sessions. The fun, practical learning experiences support children’s development of key personal, social, language and communication skills. Parents and extended families are equally well supported and relationships are firmly based on mutual respect and trust. ‘They listen to what we have to say and never sit in judgement’, is a typical comment.

The duty to safeguard all children and adults is understood and acted upon by all staff. Procedures to safeguard the most vulnerable are particularly well focused and the centre’s child protection in action is very strong. All support services are fully integrated, with centre staff and other key professionals forming an effective team around each child and family. Close liaison and collaborative working ensures there are no gaps in this ring of support. As a result, children’s and vulnerable adults’ safety and well-being are well assured.

The centre’s engagement with a considerable number of health professionals, and the excellent links between these and the family support and link workers, are particularly effective in improving health and well-being outcomes for users. Carefully managed individualised support is having a notable impact for several groups: younger prospective parents; children with specific needs; those with child protection plans; and families that face considerable challenges.

Centre users and volunteers are confident in being accepted as part of ‘the team’ and

feel their contributions are valid and valued. Recognition of particular talents and close working with Jobcentre Plus and Starting Point have set a good number of users on the route to gaining qualifications. The Partnership Group that supports the local authority's governance of the centre is well represented by parents and partners, fully supports the work of the centre and is keen to drive improvement.

The centre evaluates its outcomes through analysis of a telling range of information from different users and this is used to identify particular strengths and areas for development. Currently, however, there is a lack of available statistical data from the local authority, and other valuable impact data are not transferred between the partner services and the centre. Consequently, the centre is, as yet, unable to set precise, measurable targets towards which they can focus their work and accurately record progress.

Planning for the future is high on the agenda of managers and appropriate, achievable, long-term objectives have been identified. However, action plans are not yet detailing the individual tasks that are needed for the centre to move forwards and measure its progress towards achieving these objectives.

The day-to-day running of the centre derives from the manager's heart-felt commitment and continual drive to match provision to need. To support this, the manager has established a system of devolved leadership where senior leaders work as a cohesive team and their particular strengths and those of the centre staff are utilised well to meet the centre's and users' needs. This shared vision of success and clear understanding of where to target resources are key to the centre's very good track record in bringing about improvements in provision, outcomes, integrated leadership and services and in safeguarding users' well-being. This together confirms the centre's good capacity for future improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In collaboration with the local authority and partners, develop data transfer systems that will accurately support the centre's evaluation of its work and inform appropriate, measurable target-setting.
- Revise current action planning to include individual, manageable, measurable steps that will drive the centre's improvement towards targeted objectives.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes of the centre's work are good and an increasing number of users are benefitting from its services. The centre records an increased uptake of targeted activities, suggested by users and provided by health professionals, to promote health and emotional well-being. Midwives are especially proactive in directing parents and prospective parents towards the centre's services. Case studies and interviews about ante- and post-natal support, yoga, baby and toddler clubs and PANDA (the post-natal depression support group for women and their partners)

verify their popularity, uptake and impact. La Leche classes, 'Breast Friends' and breast feeding and weaning support all contribute to an increased percentage of breast-fed infants. Baby yoga and massage, 'Little Learners', 'Stay and Play', 'Little Monkeys', the Share play group, the crèche facilities and cookery for parents are the most popular sessions. Many learning sessions are supported by crèche facilities, which are greatly valued by participating families. Parents speak of their increased confidence in repeating these activities at home for little or no cost and a great deal of enjoyment.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are able to attend all sessions and relish the opportunity to socialise and learn through play with their friends. Users say that they feel safe and secure in the centre. They place a high level of trust in the staff and are confident that any worries, concerns or challenges will be allayed or appropriately addressed. The centre helps parents to gain access to national home safety schemes to obtain equipment such as stair gates and fireguards and there has been a good uptake of this. At present, however, the centre has no statistical data from the local authority to measure the impact of this on reducing accidents in the home.

Children who are subject to child protection plans, looked after children and vulnerable families that face struggles every day are particularly well supported. Teams of centre staff, social care workers and health professionals form a triangle of effective support and protection. Tried and tested systems, including use of the common assessment framework, successfully record and monitor this support and ensure the safety and well-being of these most vulnerable children and adults.

The centre is particularly successful in empowering and enabling users to become independent and to take on responsibilities. 'I wouldn't like to think where I'd be, or my kids now if it wasn't for this centre trusting me to have a go', was one of many positive comments from younger users. The centre actively encourages adults to volunteer in supporting activities, allows them to take a leading role and effectively guides them towards gaining qualifications in a relevant field. The MATCH group (men and their children) provides a particularly successful model of this form of professional development. The well-attended partnership board has a good complement of parents and partners representing interests. It provides good support for the centre in all its work and towards identified areas for improvement.

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	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?

2

The shared vision of the centre managers drives all actions and is clearly focused on providing exactly what each child, family and the local community need. Through appropriate, robust assessment, each user's needs are known and understood. Strong multi-agency partnerships ensure the needs of individual children and families are well met. Those who are identified by, or referred to, the centre are quickly assessed and high-quality, appropriate provision put in place.

The centre recognises that an increasing number of children have speech, language and communication difficulties. Effective liaison with the speech and language service ensures specialised, individualised support enhanced by interactive signed story sessions for babies and toddlers.

Families that have been, historically, difficult to engage have been targeted by the knowledgeable and persistent staff and an increase in engagement of these groups is recorded. In times of crisis, families are confident to turn to the centre for support. Comments such as, 'they are my lifeline', accurately reflect the users belief in the centre. Lone parents, mums and dads, of any age, 'never think twice', about turning to the centre at times of crisis, confident that someone will point them in the right direction for the specific help that is needed.

The centre provides quality support, effective coordination and integration of appropriate services so that parents feel empowered to take the lead and improve their own, their family's and others' outcomes. Men are equally well supported. Single dads, granddads and men who support their partner's children have been attracted to the centre's facilities through the MATCH group. The centre opens at weekends to accommodate the men and their children. Users are given rein to organise programmes, carry out risk assessments for off-site pursuits and are encouraged to take their volunteering through to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) accredited level with the on-site Starting Point provision. Partners of mums who are struggling with post-natal depression are encouraged to find a listening ear and effective support strategies through the PANDA group.

The centre works tirelessly to demonstrate improvement across the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda. The innovative 'Take Five' group is remarkably successful in promoting these outcomes. It provides a five-week course around the five outcomes, encouraging focus groups to discuss and share experiences as to how each outcome relates to their own and their children's lives. The parents' reflective,

honest, straight-speaking accounts of their experiences are impressive in their sincerity and further illustrate the centre's keen understanding of how carefully targeted, personalised support has a positive impact on outcomes.

Responses to questionnaires, evaluations of activities and specific case studies overwhelmingly report the difference the centre makes and users are passionate in their appreciation of this. 'They know where your head is at and give you all the help you could ever need', was a comment reflecting the impact of the centre's exemplary understanding of users' needs and its outstanding care, guidance and support.

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	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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 determination of the leadership team to ensure continuous improvement steers all its actions. Whole-staff review and action planning is an accepted and everyday part of planning and provision. Senior leaders are clearly focused on tackling weaknesses and improving provision and current priorities are recorded in the centre's action plan. However, this plan currently lacks sufficient detail to allow the centre to accurately measure its progress towards the broad objectives.

All staff undergo a wide range of relevant and extended training focusing on the learning, welfare and safeguarding of children, their families and vulnerable adults. Staff confidence therefore allows for continual improvements to be made based on the immediate needs of the users, best practice, new initiatives and creative thinking. This is reflected in the ever-broadening range of activities, learning experiences and opportunities on offer throughout each week.

Staff are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that users may encounter. Checks have been made on all adults who work as part of the centre and all required systems and procedures are in place to safeguard the users' well-being.

The governance of the centre by the local authority and the support provided by the partnership board are clearly understood by all centre staff. There are, however, concerns about the availability and transfer of key data that would allow the centre to work more effectively towards clearly defined, measurable targets.

There is a keen sense of community within the centre and leaders strive to embrace all that the local community has to offer. The centre staff attend local events to promote its work and to reassure, advise and engage current and new users. Parents recognise this, stating that the centre is effective in, 'taking itself out to the community, not just bringing the community in'. The universal contact service reaches out to all families including those who face the most difficulties and challenges in their lives. Integrated services work tirelessly to ensure that the needs, wants, security and well-being of the most vulnerable children and adults are effectively safeguarded.

The centre has started to evaluate specific, diverse needs, such as minority ethnic groups, families of offenders and families with disability, within their reach area . It has begun assessing which services are already in place and, more recently, which services are still needed. The centre strives at all times to promote and celebrate the increasing diversity within the community through themed activities, celebrations and a range of positive resources. The local childminding group are keen to explore this community diversity. The centre has readily loaned its resources and successfully guided the group towards relevant funding opportunities.

The centre is keenly focused on the sustainability of the site and also the services it provides. There has been considerable investment in the well-resourced outdoor areas including opportunities for users to grow their own fruit and vegetables, plants and trees; to collect food waste for the compost bin and to recycle resources. Evaluations of services and provision inform their appropriateness, success and viability. Activities that fail to meet users' needs are abandoned so as to not waste valuable resources. Focused management ensures that there are clear priorities that are met with no duplication of services or provision across the setting or within the local community. These actions effectively support the centre's ability to provide good value for money.

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	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	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	2

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

Information from the recent inspection of the Early Years Foundation Stage at the District CE Primary School has been taken into account when writing this report.

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 Newton-le-Willows Children's Centre on 6 and 7 October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall. We talked with parents and carers, staff, a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

Some aspects of the centre's work are outstanding. These include how well the centre knows each and every one of you and exactly what help you may need, and the quality of the care, guidance and support it offers to you all. It was a privilege to talk with so many of you and to hear how much you value the work of the centre staff and never hesitate to call on them. You told us they are hard working, approachable, never judgemental and often a lifeline in the tougher times. We found this too. Led by a knowledgeable, compassionate manager, the centre and partner staff have a high level of expertise. They work exceptionally well together and offer outstanding practical and emotional support to children, families and vulnerable adults.

This exceptional care not only takes place in the centre. Increasingly, the centre reaches out into the local community, seeking out those families who face complex and sometimes overwhelmingly difficult times. As one of you told us, 'It's like wrapping you up in a blanket'. This inclusive practice extends to everyone who uses the centre, regardless of age, ability, gender or cultural background.

The centre provides a wide range of carefully planned activities to help with your children's learning and development. It was a joy to see the little ones and their mums and dads, up to their elbows in messy 'gloop', exploring how it feels and changes and to watch the tiniest tots sharing quiet stories and one-to-one special times. These activities prepare the children well for their future days in school.

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 safe and healthy. You told us that you feel safe at the centre and are happy to leave your children in the care of the staff. This reflects the good work the centre does to promote safety and welfare and its good safeguarding arrangements. You told us that the centre was a good place to meet up with other parents, especially if you feel alone but, more usually, to catch up and see how each of you are doing. Your open, frank discussions during, for example, the Take Five sessions were particularly moving and enlightening. It is good to note that the centre provides parents with this open forum and to see that you feel secure and confident to speak so candidly with each other.

The centre works well with health professionals to keep you and your children healthy. The carefully planned outdoor spaces allow the children freedom to run, climb, slide and roll. It also provides them with healthy food options such as the home-grown tomatoes. The tiniest tots also benefit from relaxing yoga and massage sessions. Your good health and well-being are further promoted through the wide

range of services on offer to support you right through each stage of pregnancy and beyond.

The centre makes a good contribution towards improving the futures of its families. We spoke with a number of volunteers who are gaining a great deal from opportunities for further training, work experience and qualifications provided in partnership with Starting Point and Jobcentre Plus. The thriving MATCH group provides excellent opportunities at the weekend for men to use the centre and its resources and to have valuable one-to-one quality time with their children. It is good to see one of the dads taking on a leading role in the running of this group.

More and more of you are keen to be involved in the centre's activities and some are giving their time to sit on the partnership group. Your views and opinions are held in high esteem by the centre and your evaluations of activities, training and courses contribute to the centre's overall evaluation of how well it is meeting your needs.

Under the manager's experienced wings it is clear that there is a strong team of talented, committed staff, all of whom have high ambitions for everyone in the community and the enthusiasm, commitment and energy to keep improving the provision and to improving families' lives. Their successes to date demonstrate that they have a strong capacity to keep making things better.

In order to further develop the work of the centre, we have asked staff, partner organisations and the local authority to work together on data-gathering systems so that the centre has a clearer picture of how well it is doing and where it needs to go. We have also asked the centre to break down their plans for future improvements into smaller, more manageable steps.

Thank you very much for your welcome and your open, honest discussions with the inspection team. These helped us immensely in building up a clear and accurate picture of your centre's work and the difference you feel it has made to your lives. We wish you and your families all the very best for the future.

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