

Inspection report for Kingsway Children's Centre

Local authority	Halton
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Reporting inspector	Priscilla McGuire

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Mrs Eileen Stein
Date of previous inspection	n/a
Centre address	Kingsway Learning Centre, Victoria Square, Widnes, WA8 7QY
Telephone number	0151 9078350
Fax number	0151 4717442
Email address	Eileen.stein@halton.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	n/a
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	n/a

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, a local authority representative, divisional managers and a team leader from the local authority information and communication technology (ICT) and performance management departments, parents, representatives from the centre's partners including from the Primary Care Trust (PCT), a voluntary organisation, the Citizen Advice Bureau and Jobcentre Plus. Inspectors also had discussions with parents, the children's centre qualified teacher and the speech and language assistant. They observed the centre's work and visited venues where some of the activities are delivered. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation report, key policies, the service delivery plan, case studies, evaluations, policies and data about users.

Information about the centre

Kingsway Centre is located in Widnes town centre and shares premises with the central library and other local authority services that operate from the same building. The centre is linked to Warrington Road Children's Centre and the staff team work across both Kingsway and Warrington Road centres. The centre manager is responsible for managing these two centres. Church halls and schools are also used to deliver services.

The centre is situated within a large urban area surrounded by an industrial belt of chemical works and manufacturing. Kingsway is one of the seven wards in the borough identified as a priority area due to high levels of unemployment, deprivation and life-limiting illnesses. Kingsway also has a high number of obese children. Unemployment within Kingsway is high and is in the top 4% nationally for education and skills deprivation. The population has a very low percentage of minority ethnic groups.

Kingsway was formerly known as New Steps Sure Start Local Programme. The centre provides the full offer of core services on-site and at other venues within the reach area. It also offers services delivered to targeted groups. The centre manager has been in post since May 2010. Governance arrangements are located with the local authority. Both the centre and the local authority have been through a period of restructuring.

The centre's full day-care provision is delivered by the Kids Planet nursery which is housed within the same building. The nursery was last inspected in February 2009. The inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Kingsway children's centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. It provides good support for targeted users and meets the needs of these users well. However, specific actions to analyse and meet the needs of the wider community are yet to be implemented. The environment at the centre is satisfactory but not particularly welcoming as users can only access the centre via the library and its reception staff. This aspect of the centre's environment has been recognised by the centre manager and accommodation is under review.

Inspection evidence demonstrates that outcomes for users are good. Users learn to improve their own health and that of their children through participation in a range of activities, drop-in sessions and courses offered at the centre or in their own communities. The provision is also good. The promotion of learning and personal development is central to the provision. Many users have benefited from courses they have attended and some have progressed onto volunteering, into further education and into employment. The centre is particularly effective at working with partners to assess the needs of vulnerable families and children. Relationships with partners are good and they share the centre's strong commitment to empowering

users and raising their aspirations. Staff also use information received about vulnerable children and families to provide appropriate support and guidance and to prevent personal and social problems from escalating.

The centre is particularly effective at promoting safety in the home with the HELPS (Halton Equipment Low Price Scheme.) The scheme provides low cost home safety equipment for users and has been recently enhanced to provide free equipment with a fitting service to help low income parents. The centre's approach to safeguarding, safe recruitment and child protection is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. Users have a good understanding of safeguarding. There is good promotion of inclusion and effective engagement of fathers and other groups who have not previously been users of the centre. There is good coordination of services for children with disabilities through the 'Aiming Higher for Disabled Children' project.

The process of improvement planning and self-evaluation is under development. The centre manager is new in post and has not yet completed a self-evaluation report for the centre. Target-setting and measurable success criteria have yet to be established as part of an improvement planning process. Much qualitative analysis is undertaken by the centre and local intelligence and work with partners are used well to assess the needs of users and targeted groups. However, there is insufficient use of quantitative analysis, performance targets and of comparison data to drive improvement and provide services for non-targeted groups. This area of development has been recognised by both the centre and the local authority and an action plan is in place to ensure the centre receives good quality data about its reach area. The capacity to improve is therefore satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Review use of resources in relation to the centre environment with particular focus on creating a welcoming reception area for users and the wider community.
- Review and implement strategies to engage the wider community and to assess and analyse their needs.
- Implement a rigorous and effective self-evaluation process which incorporates the regular and rigorous use and analysis of information and data.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Users improve their health and that of their children through participation in activities and courses which successfully promote healthy lifestyles. There is also good promotion of emotional health and social interaction through group sessions and

home visits, including for isolated parents. Women at risk of, or already living with, post-natal depression have been well supported through the 'Time for Me' sessions. These sessions use creative art therapy to provide emotional support for mothers. Evaluations of the set of sessions demonstrate the positive health benefits for women who attend. After attending sessions, one mother who previously had never left her child alone with others, felt sufficiently confident to leave her child in a crèche. Effective outreach work in communities also promotes healthy lifestyles. One outdoor event included input from a PCT trainer about the 'sun safe' campaign. One parent said after the event: 'My girls have really enjoyed today especially the picnic; they have eaten lots of fruit and veggies that they won't usually eat at home.'

Staff use the Common Assessment Framework and other data gathered from the social care team to identify and support children in need, looked after children and those with child protection plans. Since the HELPS scheme was started there has been a significant increase in the sales of safety equipment, showing families' growing awareness of safety at home. Staff and partners carry out safety checks during home visits. Vulnerable families and children are targeted for early support to prevent personal and social problems within families from escalating.

Parents contribute to planning, for example developing their understanding of safeguarding by being involved in risk assessments of activities. Users report that they feel safe. They know how to respond to safeguarding issues when raised. For example, one parent group identified a safeguarding issue within the community. They made a collective decision about what action they intended to take to ensure the safety of the children whom they believed were at risk.

Many users have been able to access educational opportunities through good links with adult learning services based in the same building. Partnership work between the centre, Jobcentre Plus staff, adult learning staff and other partners has helped many users to acquire the skills they need to become ready for work, to progress to further education or into employment. A dedicated adult learning tutor works well with the centre to engage hard to reach families. Parents also develop effective personal and social skills as volunteers. Through the Kings Cross community parents project, parents can become peer workers who support vulnerable families within their community. Vulnerable families are then referred for 'buddying support' from the trained parent volunteers.

A qualified teacher provides good support for on-site, day-care settings and other settings within the reach area. The nursery reports that children are making good progress. Transition for children attending Kingsway is good. Children enjoy play sessions and parents have learnt to recognise the importance of play in the development of their children through opportunities provided by the dedicated play worker team. Some children have also attended a sign language course and gained skills to communicate with deaf people. A 12 week parenting programme offering a combination of group and one-to-one support has helped parents improve their parenting skills. The same course for women in a refuge has helped them to develop the skills to manage and improve their children's behaviour.

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 assessment of the needs of vulnerable children and families is effective, as are outreach work and organised trips and activities. The work with partners, including the Citizens' Advice Bureau, the adult learning service and Jobcentre Plus, also helps the centre to respond appropriately to identified needs. A good range of services and activities promote personal development and learning for the wider community and for targeted users. The core provision includes a 'Bumps 2 Babes' weekly drop-in session which offers mothers the opportunity to socialise with other mothers and to be 'pampered' with facials and massages. The core offer also includes activities and sessions such as 'Toddler Gymnastics', 'Aqua Babes', 'Parentcraft', 'Messy Play' and a regular health clinic.

Some courses are linked to local priorities. For example a 'cooking for numbers' course promoted learning in numeracy. Some parents progressed from this course to a 'Skills for Life' assessment. One parent said, 'I have enjoyed this course – I feel more confident to cook more meals and it has helped me refresh my maths.' A progression route has been developed by the adult learning team to enable users to progress from an introductory course in supporting a child's learning and development to a Level 2 Diploma in childcare and education. Courses are evaluated but findings are not yet used systematically to inform the planning of programmes. Provision of crèche facilities is satisfactory. However, due to efficiency savings, places for the crèche are limited.

The family intervention team provides effective guidance and support for vulnerable families or families at risk of eviction. For example, work with one family led to reduced complaints from neighbours and reduced the risk of the family being evicted from their home. Parents also receive good support from family support workers. One young mother with behaviour issues has been supported to develop improved

parenting and behavioural skills and as a result, the home environment has improved. The mother has also progressed to being registered as an adult learner. Support is also good for parents whose children have speech and language problems. A speech and language assistant provides early and effective support for children with suspected speech problems. Partners from the health services deliver weekly clinics in the centre and offer good quality health information and advice. Health visitors report that users respond well to being able to access health care in a non-medical setting.

There is good engagement with parents through the parent forum and parents are well represented on the advisory board. They evaluate services and activities and this has led to positive changes to the way some activities or services are delivered. Although the needs of targeted users are served very well, there is insufficient analysis of wider community needs. Data are not yet used systematically to measure participation rates of different groups such as children from workless households, lone parents within the reach area or to measure trends or identify barriers to use of the centre. Some parents interviewed reported that they, 'didn't know what the children's centre had on offer', and had little knowledge of the centre's services.

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	3
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?

3

The centre manager, her staff and the centre's partners have a good knowledge of the needs of the centre's users. The manager is relatively new in post but is supported well by the local authority divisional manager for locality services. Staff are highly committed and work well together as a cohesive team to support users. All staff contribute well to the overall strategy of providing early intervention and early support to vulnerable families. This helps to prevent any escalation of social and personal problems.

Support and supervision of staff is good. Resources are managed effectively in line with guidelines from the local authority. However, recent changes to the management team and within the local authority have led to changes in the way some aspects of services and functions are delivered. For example, marketing and data analysis were previously located within the centre but have been centralised within the local authority. The centre and the local authority are working together to manage these changes. A framework to monitor the performance and outcomes of

the centre is being developed by the local authority. This is planned to be in place by December 2010.

Staff are managed well within the centre and within partner organisations to integrate provision and offer good quality services to users. However, the reception area is not welcoming because users can only access the centre via the library and its reception staff. The reception desk in the centre is part of a large office and not a distinct reception area. The manager recognises the challenges this presents particularly for vulnerable users or potential users and accommodation at the centre is under review.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory and statutory requirements are met. Policies are satisfactory and staff have received appropriate training. There is good promotion of safeguarding to community groups. A lone working policy for centre staff contributes to their safety. However, the centre policy in relation to managing allegations against staff is insufficiently detailed. There is also insufficient awareness of the requirement to have a written agreement in place to confirm PCT safeguarding arrangements. Immediate action was taken during the inspection to resolve both these issues.

The views of parents are actively sought and contribute towards developing services. The needs of targeted groups and users are met well. However, analysis of the impact of services through comparison of centre data with national performance indicators is still being developed. There is insufficient use of clear and ambitious targets to improve provision and insufficient analysis of data to inform the service delivery plan.

As a result of a determined strategy to engage more fathers, an increasing number of males access services offered by the centre. The inclusive strategy has also been successful in engaging hard to reach groups such as women in a local refuge, Travellers and parents of disabled children. One parent said, 'It's good to have a group specifically for children with additional needs.'

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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
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	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
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	3

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Kingsway Centre on 29 and 30 September 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Those of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoy learning at the centre or out in the community through activities and sessions organised by the centre. You also told us about the amount of good support you receive from staff. Some of you really appreciate being able to attend sessions or become involved in activities within your own community. We recognise this sort of 'outreach' work as a key strength of what the centre offers. The centre is very good at understanding the barriers many of you face and has a good team of staff who understand these barriers and know how best to help you overcome them. The nursery at the Kingsway centre in town also offers good learning and development opportunities for your children.

Although the centre understands the needs of the people who use it, more work needs to be done to get to know the wider community and to understand the needs of the people who have not yet benefited from what the centre has to offer. Work also needs to be done by the managers and the local authority to find out whether there are any particular reasons why certain people do not use the centre or its services. The managers also need to be more precise when reviewing the work of the centre and identifying what works really well or needs to be done to improve the quality of the services offered.

We recognise the opportunities for you to be able to learn and gain qualifications as another key strength. After gaining qualifications, some of you have progressed even further and gained employment.

We could see from our visit that getting into the centre via the library is not an ideal situation. We also recognise that the reception area is not particularly welcoming. The managers also recognise this as a problem and are going to think about how best they can use the accommodation to ensure it is welcoming to parents and children.

We know that there have been changes in the way the centre is managed and also changes within the local authority. The managers are doing their best to deal with these changes. We also know that there will probably be more changes in the future but we are confident that the centre will continue to do its very best to ensure you receive the support and help you need and to provide you with the services and activities that you want and need. Thank you for your help with the inspection and we wish you the best for the future.

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