

Inspection report for Accrington Road Children's Centre

Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	367030
Inspection dates	2-3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Gillian Bishop HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Cathy Reilly
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Accrington Road Children's Centre, Accrington Road, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 2HR
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Linked school if applicable	Intack Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Accrington Road Children Centre Nursery

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 year's geographical and operational managers, representatives of the local management board, front line workers, parents and carers, local authority officers and partner agency representatives. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Accrington Road Children's Centre is a phase one centre based in the Whitebirk ward of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. The centre serves a community that is ranked within the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. The centre operates from a two storey, purpose built building attached to the existing community centre. The centre works closely with Shadsworth Children's Centre, and takes a campus approach to the delivery of services and activities. The majority of children aged under four years old within the reach area of the centre, are living in families dependant on workless benefits. Most children enter childcare and early education with a narrower range of skills and abilities than that expected for their age, particularly in their communication language, literacy and social skills. The large majority of families in the reach population are of White British heritage with a small South Asian and East European community.

The early year's geographical manager leads the services provided by the centre and coordinates those provided by its partners. The operational manager manages the day-to-day running of the centre. The local authority is responsible for the performance management of staff in the centre and the Primary Care Trust is responsible for the work of its staff who deliver services from the children's centre. A local management board is responsible for the governance of both Accrington and Shadsworth Children's Centres. A multi-agency team that includes health visitors,

midwives, outreach and family support workers, Credit Union and Jobcentre Plus provide services across both children's centres.

The children's centre gained designation in 2005 and provides the full core offer. The children's centre provides a wide range of services, activities and family adult learning across the two children's centres, a community building and local college. The early year's childcare is provided by Accrington Road Children's Centre. This nursery is also managed by Blackburn and Darwen Borough Council and is subject to separate inspection arrangements.

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

Accrington Road Children's Centre provides good quality services with several outstanding aspects. This well-led centre is friendly and welcoming to all users and is seen as being at the heart of the community. 'My child is well cared for and so am I', is typical of the comments made by parents and carers. Excellent care, guidance and support empower parents to overcome a wide range of difficulties in their lives. Centre users develop a strong sense of identity and a willingness to become actively engaged in a full range of activities and decision-making processes. The extent to which parents, carers and children are consulted about centre business is exceptional and leads to their full contribution in monitoring, evaluation and the future development of the provision.

The centre's approach to safeguarding is robust and ensures families are protected and engaged in an appropriate range of services that improve their safety and well-being. Centre staff and partners have developed a highly cohesive approach to reducing the risk of harm and preventing difficulties from escalating. This, and the successful implementation of the Common Assessment Framework ensures the children and families most at risk receive packages of care in a very timely manner. Provision is good overall with some examples of outstanding practice relating to the effectiveness in which the holistic needs of families are assessed and acted upon.

Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are central to the work of the centre. Staff do their utmost to provide a fully inclusive environment where everyone is valued and everyone has a voice. This is particularly well reflected in the development of the Men Friendly Initiative and the priority given to addressing barriers to the full engagement of fathers. The Healthily Child Development programme provides a holistic approach towards both early intervention and effective health promotion strategies to create a very strong foundation for the centre's work. As a result, the centre can demonstrate good outcomes for improving obesity levels and dental health.

The strong sense of ambition and drive is built upon outstanding leadership and governance. The geographical manager provides strong and effective leadership that places high expectations for the community at the heart of the centre's work. The senior leadership team work collaboratively across a cluster of 13 children's centres in order to meet the requirements of the strategic plan and share expertise and good practice. Plans for improvement are well defined and in some cases are driven by ambitious targets. Where targets do apply, the centre can easily measure the impact of their services and show demonstrable outcomes for centre users. However, strategic and local targets are not always applied consistently and this is preventing the centre from being able to demonstrate the full impact of its work across the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Centre leaders, the local authority and the local management board have a firm understanding of the centres strengths and areas for improvement, hence the accuracy of their self-evaluation, their drive to continually improve and the centre's good capacity for further improvement. The local management board is highly effective in offering both support and challenge ensuring that it undertakes its joint managing arrangements with Shadsworth Children's Centre without impeding its role within Accrington Road.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the collection and analysis of data to monitor the effectiveness of all the centres services and activities and link development planning more robustly to outcomes.
- Update the children's centre service plans to include challenging targets against local and strategic priorities so progress towards these targets can be effectively measured over time.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for centre users are good overall and outstanding in relation to their positive contribution, which is helped in no small part by parents and their children's

involvement in the decision-making processes. 'Staff listen and respond to everything we say' reflects the strong sentiment clearly felt by users. Activities such as Taste for Life encourage new parents to provide appropriate food when weaning their babies and parents report that their children have responded really well to the healthy eating campaigns as 'they now eat lots of fruit and vegetables'. The priority given to getting children and parents physically active, has begun to have a positive impact on obesity levels and the Smile for Life programme has helped to raise parents' understanding of the links with poor diet and dental decay. As a result, parents are requesting Vitamin D drops and new toothbrushes from the centre, as they want to protect their children's teeth. Effective signposting to the breastfeeding team and the peer support group enables new parents to maintain the prevalence of breastfeeding when it is likely they will give up.

Parents and carers feel safe and they state the centre has 'a warm and good feeling about it'. This, they say, is because 'you can trust the staff here'. Parents understand the safeguarding procedures because they know they are in place to help and protect them. This has resulted in many parents engaging well with the Common Assessment Framework and has helped to reduce the number of families on the higher levels of the Continuum of Need Response Framework. These early intervention pathways are highly effective in preventing difficulties escalating and provide intensive support for children on child protection plans, looked after children and those engaged in contact visits within the centre. Parents describe how their homes are safer for their children due to home safety advice and a significant number have signed up to the 'smoke free home' initiative in their eagerness to quit smoking. However, it is not clear how many have succeeded, nor is it clear, how road safety promotions have reduced the high rates of road accidents within the community. The collection and analysis of data is not used systematically to monitor the effectiveness of activities in relation to user's outcomes.

The extent to which children enjoy and achieve is good and this is confirmed by the centre's Early Years Foundation Stage profile data. The necessity for high quality play and early learning is well promoted during activities such as Rhyme Time, Play and Learn and within the monitoring of children's development in the centre nursery. Parents state that positive parenting courses have made them more aware of the need to read, talk and play with their children in a more meaningful way. Furthermore, parents are developing a clearer understanding about how to support their child's speech and language development due to a number of initiatives supported by the centre staff, outreach workers and the speech and language therapy team. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress. They have access to specialist staff who can support them and their needs are assessed and planned for during progress review meetings with their parents. Transitional arrangements are well organised due to close links with schools combined with the Early Start programme.

Parents, carers and members of the extended family are actively engaged in the strategic development of the centre and they make key decisions about how to reduce inequalities and improve the life chances within the community, by helping to

shape services for the future. As a result, users from a range of backgrounds are actively involved in developing centre action plans, and parents and children have helped to design a new outdoor play area. Parents who have accessed the Incredible Years programme describe how they have introduced boundaries and routines for their children and that they feel more confident when managing their behaviour. This, coupled with the centre's innovative approach to 'solution focused practice' empowers users to make positive and long-term changes to their lives.

Users develop a secure understanding of their welfare rights and learn positive strategies to improve their financial stability, such as adopting Credit Union saving and loan schemes in place of doorstep money lending. Parents state that their involvement in both family and adult learning programmes positively impacts on their self-confidence and willingness to seek further education and employment. In fact, many parents go on to achieve level one and level two qualifications in literacy and numeracy and this has supported some parents back into the workforce. The teen pregnancy support team and sensitive hand holding by family support workers has also enabled younger parents to access an increasing number of activities and has improved both their parenting skills and raised their aspirations for the future. Jobcentre Plus provide benefit advice and regular updates about job vacancies in the community and some parents have been signposted to the Work Club at Shadsworth Children's Centre which has enhanced their preparedness for employment. However, the lack of consistent evaluations of these services and interventions prevents the centre demonstrating longer-term impacts for users.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has firmly established procedures for assessing the needs of children, parents and families and this is complimented by the excellent care, guidance, and support families receive. The centre provides a considerable amount of easily accessible literature and information about services, public health guidance and

events. Information about domestic violence help-lines and sexual health promotions are more discretely accessible. The centre's 'we can, we will' culture, is extremely effective in motivating and supporting parents to take small steps and overcome barriers to their engagement, for example, by providing transport to courses or a familiar face when joining groups or attending medical appointments. That is why, state parents, 'this centre is a special place to be'.

Excellent inter-agency work with children's social care, health services, schools and particularly outreach work provide a secure bridge between support and formal services. The Think Family Initiative and the referral pathways for family support ensure the assessment process is rigorous and highly effective in ensuring families receive tailored packages of care applicable to every member of the family. Early intervention from the teen pregnancy team and the intensive support provision within midwifery services and family support ensure very young parents benefit from sensitive nurturing into groups and sound advice about parenting and sexual health. The centre is very responsive to the high levels of domestic violence in the community and ensures that these families are provided with a designated worker. Close links with the Wish Centre and the attendance at the MARAC meetings ensure parents are well supported in their quest to improve their personal circumstances and keep their children safe.

The centre has worked hard to engage the reach population, but they are aware that more needs to be done to increase registrations and attendance, and they have begun to address this area for improvement. The centre's concerted actions have resulted in a steady increase in engagement levels from South Asian and East European families and the designation of Father's Champions and the Men Friendly Initiative is challenging the way in which services are delivered to make them more 'dad friendly'. As a result, the centre has improved the engagement of fathers in both activities and governance roles. Although the centre make the best of the provision at Accrington Road and additional community space, the alignment of services at Shadsworth Children's Centre provides extended provision for children and parents with disabilities and enables parental access to a sensory room, library and community café.

The Early Years Quality Improvement team provide effective support to local childminders and private and voluntary providers. Centre data confirms that inspection outcomes for many childminders has significantly improved because of the teams' involvement and a number are now enrolling on foundation degree courses. The Family Information Service (FIS) and family support play a key role in signposting users to Work Club, Early Start, ESOL and parenting courses, such as the Child Parent Game. Once engaged, parents and carers make good gains in their learning, often progressing from courses such as Play and Learn to accredited courses provided by St Mary's College. The availability of a crèche and input from FIS enable parents to find local childcare provision, which supports the retention and completion of these courses by all the participants.

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

Governance arrangements are well established and secure. Lines of accountability are understood, reporting arrangements are embedded, and the local authority and management board are providing robust challenges to the geographical and operational managers through the annual conversation and performance and financial audits. Performance management procedures and the priority placed on continuous professional development ensure all staff are well equipped for their roles and responsibilities. Family support work is highly focused and intent on improving outcomes for the most vulnerable families by reducing the degree of support against the Continuum of Need Response Framework, and has had some good examples of success.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and exceed statutory requirements. Appropriate risk assessments are in place and security measures, including a very rigorous visitor procedure, are particularly effective. Local safeguarding procedures systematically apply to the centre's work and effective recruitment; vetting and induction procedures ensure the suitability of staff and associated partners. Specialist training relating to domestic violence and forced marriages ensure family support workers are alert to worrying signs and able to act on their concerns. Staff take appropriate steps to alert parents and carers about their safeguarding duties, which ensures their work is open, transparent and supportive.

The centre is successful in creating a fully inclusive provision, which meets the needs of all its users. Excellent outreach work ensures families benefit from equally good services within the home if required. User's contributions provide a valuable resource, which centre staff appreciate. For example, a grandparent has supported the Infant Feeding Team in breaking down some traditional views associated with breastfeeding and a parent keen to train staff about her child's health requirements was invited to do so at the centres Workforce Development Day. Family voices provides a forum for users to discuss centre business more formally and influence its next steps in addition to providing willing parents, with a useful platform in which to address issues of concern and also join the management board.

The cohesive and integrated approach to family support and early intervention is a

tremendous strength of the centre and this is shown in the wide range of partners with which the centre engages. Particularly strong links with health professionals, social care, extended school's team and the teen pregnancy team ensure vulnerable families consistently receive a package of tailored support that is adapted as individual needs dictate. Strong links with Shadsworth Children's Centre and those with various local community associations help to promote community cohesion and widens opportunities for the centre to meet families who are yet to engage.

The local authority provides excellent levels of support and a strong strategic steer; its officers recognise all the hard work and are keen to celebrate the centre's achievements. They effectively assist the centre in its on-going development and have high expectations of its performance. The management board is well represented by parents and carers, Children's Trust, partner organisations and staff who know and understand the needs of the community it serves. The board is led by a strong parent chair who is intent on improving health inequalities, raising aspirations and success for parents who in turn become positive role models for children. She and the board effectively challenge and hold the centre accountable for its work.

The centre has some excellent models of good practice that ensure that services are monitored and evaluated. For example, all commissioned services produce an evidence based report card which evaluates service provision and outlines future plans. Centre development plans are led by individual sub-groups, which feed into strategic planning through the geographical manager and then, the management board. This process ensures that all staff, partners and centre users play a valid and active role in the evaluation and development of service delivery. This provides leaders with a secure vision for the future and assurance that the centre provides good value for money. However, the centre does not collate and analyse outcome data well enough, which prevents them from demonstrating the full impact of their work.

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	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	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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Accrington Road Children's Centre on 2 and 3 February 2011 and we judged the centre as good overall.

Those of you we spoke to say the centre provides a friendly and welcoming place where you and your children can make new friends and enjoy activities together. All parents agreed that staff work hard to help you and they listen to your ideas about how some activities could be better. You also told us that you always feel safe in the centre because the building is secure and you trust the staff that work with you. We found that staff have to undertake rigorous vetting checks before they are able to work at the centre. We also found that staff work exceptionally well with other agencies when trying to help families in crisis or at risk. As a result, many parents have been able to make some positive changes in their lives by joining parenting groups and by making their home a safer place for them and their children. You told us that the centre is brilliant at bringing multi-agency teams together to support you, and this has been particularly helpful for parents who have children with disabilities. We strongly agree with this view because we know some children receive speech and language therapy to help them improve their speaking and listening skills. We have also seen how progress review meetings help you with specific issues such as preparing children for the transfer to school. Those of you who have participated in the Early Start programme say this has not only helped you to support your child's learning but it has also led you to adult learning programmes where you have achieved level one and two literacy and numeracy qualifications. During the inspection, we found that many of you have acted on good advice from the Credit Union representative by avoiding doorstep money lending and by opening proper savings accounts. All these things ensure you are making a positive difference to your lives, so well done!

We know that the building at Accrington Road Children's Centre is limited but we are pleased that all the parents we spoke to are making good use of the activities and services at Shadsworth Children's Centre. You particularly like the library at Shadsworth because some of you said you probably wouldn't get around to borrowing books otherwise, so we are pleased about that. You also like activities such as Rhyme Time and you make good use of the community café to socialise with your friends and extended family. We found that the centre is helping you to improve your lifestyles through healthy eating and dental health promotions and we know many of you have agreed to join the smoke free homes initiative. However, because the centre does not keep enough information we are not actually sure how many of you have quit smoking.

You told us that the centre takes an 'interest in the whole family'. We very much agree because the centre has worked hard to involve people from a range of backgrounds and also fathers, grandparents and very young parents to be involved in the centre activities. We found, the way in which the centre gets to know you and understands your support needs is exceptional. However, there are still people in the community yet to access the centre and staff are working extra hard to engage them.

The inspection also found that the centre is extremely well led and managed by centre leaders and the local authority. What impressed us most was the outstanding contribution that parents, carers and children make to the centre. We found that many of you help assess how well the centre is working by joining sub-groups which discuss how to improve the community's health, safety, learning and independence. We also found that some parents play a key role in making formal decisions about plans for the future. One of these parents is the chair of your local management board and we think she does an excellent job. We found that the centre has some really good systems to monitor the services and activities to make sure they meet your needs. However, they do not always use information from their partner agencies to show the difference their work makes to your lives, so we have asked them to address this area for improvement.

Thank you for speaking with us and we wish you good luck in the future.

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