

Inspection report for Bram Longstaffe Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	366343
Inspection dates	9 – 10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Jean Kendall HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Joyce Hawthorn
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	N/a
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY285306 Bram Longstaffe Neighbourhood 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 senior managers and staff, outreach and family support workers, health professionals and early years practitioners. They also met with health care and education professionals, local authority representatives, advisory board members and groups of parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Bram Longstaffe Children's Centre is situated within Bram Longstaffe maintained Nursery School. It was part of the Early Excellence Centre initiative before it became a designated Sure Start phase one children's centre in December 2004. It is now one of eight centres in the Furness area managed by Action for Children. Each centre has its own dedicated core team but they share resources and staff expertise across all centres. The current three year contract runs until 31 March 2011. The centre includes Walney satellite site, which is 1.5 miles away. These two locations provide the full core offer including childcare and early learning, family support, family learning, health services and early years respite provision. An advisory group oversees the work of four centres in the cluster.

The centre serves the wards of Walney North, Walney South and Barrow Island. The area experiences relatively high levels of social and economic disadvantage, including seven super output areas with two in the top 10% of deprivation. There are currently 691 children aged from birth to five years within the centre's reach area. The vast majority of families are of White British heritage. There is a higher than average level of unemployment. Approximately 20% of children aged from birth to four years are living in households dependent on workless benefits. Most children enter the early years provision with knowledge and skills that are below those expected for their age. The Bram Longstaffe Nursery was inspected in April 2010; 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Bram Longstaffe Children's Centre provides good quality services. Aspects of its work are outstanding, such as the care, guidance and support for families facing challenging circumstances and the extent to which children are safe and protected. Highly effective partnership working enables the centre to provide an excellent range of services. Parents are full of praise for the centre, stating for example that they have received 'Great support through a time when we were struggling' and that children 'Love coming to the activities, and I do too – we've both made new friends'. Centre leaders have a clearly articulated vision to improve outcomes further for families in the area, which is fully supported by staff. Their purposeful and passionate approach is helping to secure improving outcomes for centre users. Resources are very well managed to secure a full offer with high levels of professional expertise, so that the centre has good capacity to sustain improvements.

The centre is well known in the community and widely used. Centre users feel welcome and able to talk freely to staff to share any concerns. Families using the centre are similarly friendly towards each other so that anyone coming for the first time feels included and keen to return. There are robust procedures to safeguard centre users and excellent outreach support and services to promote safety. These ensure that parents and children feel extremely safe in the centre and are developing a good understanding of how to keep safe at home.

Highly effective partnership working means that centre users can access an excellent range of services either at the centre or through other centres and agencies. Staff work collaboratively with health professionals, education practitioners and social care professionals to secure the best support for families. The centre also works in close partnership with eight other children's centres managed by Action for Children in the Furness area. This facilitates very productive sharing of resources and staff expertise and means that all centres gain from specialist support as well as having a core team that knows the local community very well.

Centre leaders are constantly reviewing provision to ensure needs are effectively met. This includes identifying any gaps in local services as well as asking parents and children to contribute their views. So, for example, when external services for women experiencing domestic abuse were cut, the centre appointed a member of staff to provide support from the centre. The centre has similarly provided additional support for new mums experiencing post-natal illness. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well provided for so that they make good progress in their learning and personal development. The provision is enhanced by strong partnerships with other private and voluntary providers, local schools and leisure services.

The broad range of provision is bringing about improvements in most outcomes for centre users. Health and safety outcomes are improving from a low baseline and promotion of safety in the home is reducing the incidence of accidental harm. The most recent inspection of the linked Bram Longstaffe Nursery School reported that children make excellent progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare setting at the school. Children are very happy and well behaved in the child and parent activities provided by the children's centre and make good gains in their personal development. They make at least satisfactory progress in other areas of learning. Planning for these sessions has been reviewed to put greater emphasis on learning outcomes. However, the sessions do not always follow through the intentions outlined in the detailed planning so there are some missed opportunities to develop learning.

Parenting skills are very well developed through various courses. There are more limited opportunities for adults to extend their own learning and work related skills and centre leaders recognise there is scope to develop these services further. They have already appointed a volunteer coordinator and are forging further links with local colleges and adult learning providers.

Centre leaders and the advisory board have a clear understanding of the centre's work, its strengths and areas for development based on a range of monitoring tools. However, although monitoring provides a good indication of attendance and enjoyment it does not clearly evaluate the quality of learning or identify clearly how it may be improved. There is a range of information relating to impact measures but it lacks coherence so it is not easy to discern key messages. Evaluation is supported by a constructive partnership with the local authority to ensure the contract is fully delivered but the local authority's role in monitoring requires further clarification to ensure a coherent approach to self evaluation.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In liaison with the local authority:
 - rationalise data so that it provides a succinct overview of key measures, trends and benchmarks against which the centre can evaluate strengths

- and set targets for improvement
 - clarify the role and purpose of local authority monitoring in the self-evaluation process.
- Develop internal evaluation processes to provide an overview of the quality of provision and impact on users' outcomes both in the short and longer term.
 - Extend provision for adult learning and volunteering to support adults in the development of basic and work-related skills.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Health outcomes are improving from low baselines as a result of good integrated provision from centre staff and health professionals. Midwives and health visitors provide good support to new families and effectively refer families to follow-up activities at the centre. The percentage of breastfeeding mothers is increasing, although still well below the national average and immunisation rates have improved. Parents enjoy the practical learning activities to promote healthy diet and lifestyles. Many say they are introducing changes into their daily routines. Child obesity is higher in the area than it is in the rest of England but is reducing. Outreach and more focused support are helping to improve emotional health and well-being through support for post-natal illness or drug or alcohol dependency.

Adult users and children feel extremely safe in the centre. They trust staff and feel able to share any concerns. Safety in the home is very effectively promoted in partnership with the local fire service. The provision of safety equipment is helping to reduce the incidence of children's admission to hospital due to accidents in the home. Vulnerable families receive excellent integrated support tailored to their specific needs. Where appropriate, the common assessment framework (CAF) is initiated and used well to ensure families receive joined up services to prevent difficulties escalating. This support has helped to reduce the number of families with child protection plans and the number of re-referrals has decreased. Families with plans and looked after children are well known and well supported in close collaboration with social care professionals. Parents are appreciative of the personal support they receive.

Children thoroughly enjoy a range of activities at the centre and make good progress in their learning across the range of provision. They make excellent progress in the linked local authority maintained nursery school and childcare provision and steady gains in the centre-run parent and child activities. Children's overall achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage shows improvement over the last two years although it is still well below average levels, particularly in language development. This rightly remains a focus in child and parent activities and crèche provision.

Adult users report a high level of enjoyment and make good gains in parenting skills and their personal and social development. Opportunities for parents to engage in learning and extend their own work-related skills are more limited but developing. Where parents have engaged in adult learning and volunteer work they have made good gains in their economic well-being. Many have gone on to secure further employment or engaged in further training. The centre has found it difficult to maintain links with Jobcentre Plus but directs parents to further work related advice and guidance as their needs are identified. Financial advice is similarly offered or users are directed to other agencies.

Centre users make a good contribution to the work of the centre. Adults have positive relationships with each other and are welcoming to new service users. Children are very well behaved and play happily together. All users have good opportunities to provide feedback on various activities and services and their views are fully considered in planning for subsequent services. Parents are represented in the advisory group. However, because the group oversees the work of four centres, the extent to which parents contribute to decision making and governance of the centre they represent is limited.

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	1
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 centre provides good quality learning for all its users and an excellent range of services to meet local needs. Services are managed creatively to ensure they adapt to changing circumstances in the community and respond to demand. The centre has been proactive in employing staff with expertise to meet local demand, for example, with the new appointments to promote volunteer work and to support women experiencing domestic abuse. It has also responded quickly and creatively to the needs of the most vulnerable in the population, providing, for example, support with drug and alcohol dependency issues. The highly successful 'Young Mums' club provides good quality advice to promote parenting skills, health and well-being, as

well as a much appreciated social network. Comments, such as, 'I've had fantastic support and learned a lot. It's always welcoming with lots of activities' and 'It's like a second home' are typical from the young mums attending this group. Participation in some groups is low, for example, in the 'Dad's Club' and at childminder network meetings, but centre staff are doing all they can to publicise activities and adapt them to meet needs.

The care, guidance and support for families in difficulty or facing challenging circumstances are excellent. The combined centre-based support and outreach services are highly effective in meeting families' needs at an early stage. Activities at the centre are well publicised from the first visits by health professionals and through follow-up visits from family support staff. Centre staff have an excellent understanding of safeguarding and child protection procedures so that referrals made to social care are appropriate. Where appropriate, the CAF is implemented to good effect to ensure that families receive integrated support from a range of agencies.

The centre provides a wide range of good quality health care supported by health visitors and midwives. Baby clinics located at the centre provide a good introduction to centre services for new parents. New and expectant parents benefit from a number of classes and individualised support to promote their health and well-being. The aqua-natal classes at the local pool are particularly popular with parents reporting that they are 'Good opportunities to socialise as well as keeping fit'. Parent-craft classes and breastfeeding support are helping to increase the initiation of breastfeeding.

There is good provision for children with additional special educational needs and/or disabilities, with accessible universal services and some targeted provision. Good support for children with speech and language difficulties is available through 'Communication Clinics' and targeted group activities with a speech and language therapist. For needs that cannot be directly met at the centre, there are very effective strategies to support parents in accessing other centres, services and agencies.

Provision to promote family learning is good overall. The centre-run drop-in sessions for parents, carers and children are thoroughly enjoyed by children and adults alike, and very well attended. The promotion of personal development and enjoyment is a strong feature in all these sessions so that both adults and children make good gains in these areas. Training in the Early Years Foundation Stage is relatively recent but is beginning to improve assessment and planning for progression in learning. The qualified teacher and the speech and language therapist are providing good support to maximise learning opportunities and promote language skills. They recognise there is more to do to assess learning fully but the recently-introduced 'All About Me' booklets provide a good start with information about children's achievements. There are good arrangements to support children's transition into school through collaboration with the linked maintained Nursery School.

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	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Centre leaders have set a clear vision for the work of the centre, focused on creating a safe environment and promoting quality learning for all who use its services. All staff share this vision and strong ambition for the local community. Inclusion and the promotion of equality and understanding of diversity are at the heart of the centre's work. It provides a safe, friendly environment where all feel welcome.

All staff have a good understanding of safeguarding and child protection procedures. They work effectively with other agencies, such as health, social care and housing, to safeguard children and vulnerable adults who may be at risk. There are robust procedures to ensure staff are recruited safely and good training ensures they are kept fully up to date with safeguarding requirements. These procedures, together with thorough risk assessments, ensure the centre is safe and those at risk are well supported. Parents feel the centre is 'Very safe – no-one can just walk in and everyone is helpful'.

Since taking over the running of the centre, Action for Children have rationalised the management and workforce to make best use of staff expertise. Following a full review, they have created a core team at the centre and established key posts across all the centres in the Furness cluster. This extremely effective partnership arrangement ensures that users are effectively directed to a wider range of services than the centre can offer alone. In addition, the centre has excellent partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies in the area, supporting the provision of fully integrated services. Resources are used and managed highly effectively to ensure best value with a wide range of activities and effective support to the most vulnerable. Professional supervision arrangements are supported by good quality training and professional development.

The advisory group has a clear understanding of the centre's key strengths and areas for development based on review of the service delivery plan, evaluation of the impact of each activity and external audit by independent researchers. The advisory group oversees the work of four children's centres in the Furness area. The constitution of the group is currently under review as they have recognised that the extent of the area covered limits the extent to which local parents and carers can

contribute to strategic decision making. Service users have good opportunities to feed back their views on activities and contribute ideas as to how services might be improved. Their feedback is overwhelmingly positive.

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	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

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspection of the Bram Longstaffe Nursery School, URN 112092, has been taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children.

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 Bram Longstaffe centre on 9 and 10 February. We judged the centre as good overall. It has some outstanding features including the care, guidance and support for families facing challenging circumstances and the extent to which children are safe and protected.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with you. Many of you told us how much you enjoy activities at the centre. You told us that staff are friendly and welcoming and you can talk freely with them about any concerns. We agree with you. We found the centre to be highly inclusive and welcoming. You play an important part in this, providing a friendly welcome for any newcomers to the centre. The supportive relationships help children to thrive and feel extremely safe at the centre. It is clear that both you and your children thoroughly enjoy yourselves in the parent and child activities.

The centre does some things exceptionally well. All the professionals from different agencies work closely together to make sure you receive the right advice and support. We found that families facing particular difficulties receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported in the centre-run activities. The centre also has very good links with other services and supports families in accessing a wide range of services for children with additional needs. Children with speech and language difficulties receive particularly good support from the speech and language therapist who provides support across all centres in the area.

One of the key strengths of the centre is the way in which it works in partnership with other centres and agencies in the local area to provide an excellent range of services to meet your needs. This means that you have access to a range of well-qualified staff and you often go to other centres to take advantage of other services. The centre staff are constantly reviewing provision to ensure your needs are met. They are keen to take account of your views and identify any gaps in provision in the local community. For example, they have taken on additional staff to support women experiencing domestic abuse because this service is no longer offered in the local community. They are also providing additional support to promote post-natal well-being.

The centre makes an excellent contribution to keeping children safe and protected. The strong focus on promoting health and safety in the home has helped to reduce the number of accidents and is having a positive impact on children's well-being. Centre staff work closely with health professionals to provide good quality health advice and promote ante-natal and post-natal health. Activities in the parent and child sessions also effectively promote health and personal development so that health outcomes are improving.

Children make good progress in their learning. They make excellent overall progress in the linked Bram Longstaffe maintained Nursery School and good gains in their personal development in the centre-run child and parent sessions. Their learning in other areas in these sessions is at least satisfactory. Parents also make good gains in their personal and social development in the good quality parenting classes. Those of you who have taken advantage of the adult learning and volunteering opportunities have also made good gains in securing further education or employment. However, these opportunities are more limited and the centre is seeking to extend these.

Centre leaders provide good leadership which is fully focused on improving outcomes for you and your children. Staff work very hard and are passionate in their desire to provide the best possible support and guidance to families in the area. They have high levels of expertise and collaborate very effectively to secure good quality services. You also play an important part in securing the success of the centre. We were very impressed by the positive relationships you have with each other and with your children. Centre leaders and the advisory group know where further improvement is needed and are constantly seeking to review and improve services. They are looking at ways to give you more of a voice in decision making on the advisory board. These strengths secure good capacity to improve provision and outcomes further.

There are three aspects that we have asked centre leaders to work on:

- In liaison with the local authority:
 - rationalise data so that it provides a succinct overview of key measures, trends and benchmarks against which the centre can evaluate strengths and set targets for improvement
 - clarify the role and purpose of local authority monitoring in the self evaluation process.
- Develop internal evaluation processes to provide an overview of the quality of provision and impact on users' outcomes both in the short and longer term.
- Extend provision for adult learning and volunteering to support adults in the development of basic and work related skills.

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