

Inspection report for Park Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY334906 Nursery in the Park

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.

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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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre manager, the management board, staff, partner agencies and parents and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Park Children's Centre was designated in 2006 as a Phase 1 children's centre delivering the full core offer under the governance of the local authority. It is a multi-use facility with a 52 place on-site day care provision managed by Nugent Care. The centre is housed in a traditional school building built in the 1800's and modernised in 2006. The centre manager is also responsible for a Phase 2 and Phase 3 centre.

Skelmersdale was designated as a 'new town' in 1961 to alleviate the over population of Liverpool. Housing in the local area is mainly terraced council houses. There is a lot of countryside along with industrial sites within the reach area. Applications for employment within the local community are high, with the Cooperative Bank call centre being the largest employer.

Park is located in the top 30% of ward deprivation in the county, with an above average proportion of families claiming benefits in relation to income and employment. The majority of families are of White British heritage, with an increasing number from Eastern European backgrounds. There is one council site for Traveller families which is currently unoccupied. The reach area has an approximate

population of 714 children aged under five years. Children enter early year's provision with levels of development below those expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Park Children's Centre is a good centre overall. 'It is a godsend' and 'it gives me the kind of support no-one else can' are typical comments made by users to show how much they value the centre. Good quality leaders and managers support staff effectively to provide good services for all users and other centres. The advisory board provide good support and challenge to management and are well represented by key partners, including parents and carers. The local authority provides a secure line of accountability which is filtered down through the management tiers. Staff are acutely aware of the diverse nature of the local community and ensure the centre is a warm and welcoming place for all. Self-evaluation is accurate and used well to inform practice based on targets clearly linked to the Children and Young People's Plan.

Data collection systems are good overall, providing accurate information to inform services. A previous gap in relation to live birth data has now been addressed and will significantly improve the centre's ability to reach more parents and its capacity to support the most vulnerable families. The centre's registration rates in 2010-2011 showed a significant increase on previous years. The number of users accessing services either at the centre or through outreach has increased by 7% in the last year. Links have been established with local schools, however, data regarding children's achievement in nursery and crèche is not analysed on a joint basis to ensure accurate assessment of children's attainment on entry to school.

There is a high priority to safeguarding children and their families. Robust procedures at the reception desk ensure all visitors are properly checked into the centre and can only access the appropriate areas. Secure safety systems provide additional protection for areas not used by the general public. The centre works effectively with social care and is skilled in using the Common Assessment Framework to support families and respond to needs.

Outcomes are good and improving due to the strong relationships with key partners. The pregnancy booking-in clinic, early notification forms and on-site health care have resulted in relationships being established at an early stage to support users. A

targeted focus on safety has significantly increased parental awareness and feedback from users states that the new knowledge has changed their everyday practice to make their home a safer environment. This is supported by data that shows that in 2009-2010, the number of emergency hospital admissions decreased by 14%. Many users spoke about how sessions had improved their confidence and raised their aspirations to increase their employment opportunities. However, only a small number of users acquire qualifications in literacy and numeracy or other accredited qualifications. Outreach work has been successful in reaching the most vulnerable groups to provide effective support and improve their general health and well-being.

Centre staff know their users well and assessment is well thought out and integrated across key partners to provide a cohesive approach. Much thought has gone into ensuring the centre provides value for money by ensuring services are not replicated and evening and weekend sessions are as fully inclusive as possible. User feedback is encouraged to help the centre develop services and the introduction of participatory appraisal has been well received by staff and users to inform future planning. This, along with the centre's record of past improvement and data demonstrates the centre has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop opportunities for users to improve their economic stability through adult training linked to literacy and numeracy and other accredited qualifications.
- Improve the existing links with schools to ensure the record of assessment for children leaving the centre and entering school is accurate

How good are outcomes for users?

2

There is clear data to indicate that outcomes for health are improving, for example, the number of mothers initiating breastfeeding increased by 32% in 2009-2010. There has also been an eight percent increase in the number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. Obesity, for Lancashire as a whole, has been of particular concern and the centre has targeted healthy lifestyles for parents and carers. Although obesity remains an issue, the data reflects that for children in reception, that have accessed services from the children's centre, there has been a 5% reduction in obesity levels. The number of children receiving vaccinations has increased by 5%. The number of mothers who have stopped smoking during pregnancy has increased by 20% in the last six months. Access to maternity services has been a resounding success with all ante-natal appointments held at the centre and the rate for teenage conception has reduced by 62.5%.

A range of activities has been introduced to encourage families to improve their

emotional well-being, confidence and general health. The popular Stay and Play sessions are used to good effect to introduce activities linked to health. One example is the 'Cook and eat' session delivered by Skelmersdale Food Initiative, with users saying, 'As a family we are eating more veg' with our meals.' Staff have been trained to deliver 'Healthy Heroes' and this will soon be incorporated into the centre programme to involve more users. 'Bump, Birth and Beyond' is very well attended with parents reporting an increase in their knowledge of all that pregnancy entails. Clever timetabling of the 'Wiggles and Giggles' sessions for babies aged nought to none months has also enabled parents to access the baby weighing clinic run by the health visitor to obtain advice and support if needed. Physical activities, including 'Healthy walks' and swimming are enjoyed by many and the outdoor area, through consultation with parents and carers, has developed into a safe and exciting play environment.

The centre is highly effective in ensuring all users are aware of how to keep themselves safe. The reduction in the number of emergency hospital admissions for children and young people since 2008 is highly encouraging and suggests that the focus on safety is proving to be successful. Due to good communication links with key partners early intervention measures are able to be applied swiftly and to good effect. The number of self-referrals linked to domestic violence has increased but this is attributed to the increase in confidence by users who have recognised the need to protect themselves and their children. The 12 week Ladybird project to support women and children who have been subject to domestic abuse had a 71% completion rate with participants reporting an increase in confidence and emotional health.

Excellent links with social care and other key partners support families in need through the use of the Common Assessment Framework. In the past year, 41 families were supported through outreach and family support, including those who are hard to reach. 'Without the support I probably wouldn't be here' was a particularly poignant comment received and attributed to the centre. Children behave exceptionally well, moving with confidence between activities, and parents and carers have a very good knowledge on procedures to follow if they have any safeguarding concerns.

Data from the Early Years Foundation Stage profile shows a variance in the percentage of children reaching the 78 points across the assessment scales within local schools. There are many opportunities within the centre for parents and carers to stay and play together with their children in a supportive environment. 'Wiggles and Giggles' and 'Waddle 2 Toddle' are sessions aimed at the younger children whilst 'Lots 4 Tots' is for all children up to five years of age. Activities are planned to allow mainly child-initiated activities with focused activities being introduced on a rolling programme. Children's language has been successfully supported through the delivery of the 'Language in Partnership with Parents' project. As a result fewer children require speech and language referrals. Currently, joint working to agree attainment on entry is not analysed on a joint basis. Consequently, gaps in children's skills and knowledge are not fully captured to assist the centre with future planning.

Good use is made of the multi-sensory room which is available to groups free of charge. It provides a relaxing environment with lights, music and bubbles. Dads are fully included and regularly attend the 'Lots 4 Tots' sessions. Saturday morning activities have proved to be popular for dads and their children and a 'Fathers and Children' Network has been established which is supported by the voluntary sector. 'The Solihull Project' has successfully improved bonding and attachment relationships between mothers and babies and the 'Incredible Years' parenting programme has enabled many parents to improve their relationships with their children. Through close links with a local special school, the 'Holiday allsorts' programme was established to provide activities for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and receives excellent reviews from parents.

Parents and carers are increasingly involved in decision making and give regular feedback to the centre, through the advisory board and the parents' forum. This in turn leads to a strong level of contribution to the development of the centre. The centre is rightly proud of the introduction of the participatory appraisal scheme which has strengthened the links to ensure the ever changing needs of users are met. The introduction of healthy walks and snacks are a direct response to parents' and carers' feedback. Community cohesion is developing well, as participants at sessions represent the different backgrounds of the community. Volunteering is promoted throughout the centre and case studies show success rates with several parents gaining sufficient confidence to volunteer and a few continue to gain accredited qualifications, helping them to improve their lifestyle. Parents and children play well together supported by staff. Children behave very well at the centre and interact with staff in a confident manner.

At 19.4%, West Lancashire has an above average number of children living in households dependent on benefits. Links with Jobcentre Plus are in place but as yet are not sufficiently developed to gain good quality information to support services. The childminder network continues to thrive, with 32 childminders now registered on the network. Two childminders are registered on the Early Years Foundation degree and a further four are working towards a National Vocational Qualification at level 4. Work has been heavily focused on engaging with teenage mothers and 23% of these are in education, employment or training. Data is not collated on accredited qualifications acquired by users, for example, literacy and numeracy. This limits the centres ability to effectively encourage users to learn new skills that will foster economic independence.

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, and 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 and employment	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has good data systems in place to assess the needs of its registered users. Services have been adapted at the request of parents and carers to meet changing needs, for example, by providing sessions on a Saturday. The early notification system has been a resounding success. Due to the good links with the midwifery service, assessment can be made at an early stage and relationships established. Multi-agency work, particularly through health and social care, is used well to ensure effective support is given to users particularly in ensuring the use of the Common Assessment Framework and for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The outreach team has done some sterling work with the Traveller community, with Traveller children now accessing the day care provision on a regular basis.

All centre staff are trained in the Early Years Foundation Stage which is delivered across sessions and supported by the centre teacher and staff. Improvements made to the outdoor areas have increased opportunities to promote learning in each area of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Information and advice on sessions are easily accessed in the reception area and regular promotion of the centre within the community has led to an increase in registrations. The volunteer programme is successful, with some past users now working as staff within the centre.

The centre can demonstrate good attendance levels for the majority of courses. 'Bump Birth and Beyond', 'Stay and Play' and parenting support are the most frequented sessions. The outreach team show great determination to reach the most vulnerable groups. This includes contact with 77% of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, 62% of teenage parents and 43 contact visits with a Traveller family. In 2010-2011 795 children attended early years sessions held at the centre. The outreach team deserve recognition for the considerable amount of work that has been done to engage with teenage parents and their continued commitment to the on-going work with this group.

Good care, guidance and support are offered through family support, outreach and strong partnership work. A strength of the centre is the link with key partners who continually make referrals to the centre. Case studies show how targeted support for families is increasingly effective in developing their well-being. 'Staff know when to support and how to support' is a typical comment made by users of the centre who have benefitted from the service. The quality of childcare from the on-site day care provision is satisfactory. A wealth of information in regard to health, education and

welfare is easily accessible to users. For example, consideration is given as to where sensitive information on domestic abuse is displayed to ensure confidentiality. Evaluations show that users are good advocates for the centre and are keen to share their positive messages with others.

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	2
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?

2

Staff are supported through a clear management structure, effective line management and regular six weekly supervision meetings. Despite several staff changes in the last year, the management team have been successful in building positive relationships and developing effective teams. Senior management is ably supported by clear direction from the local authority and very clear roles and responsibilities have been established. There is absolute clarity in regard to contractual arrangements and memoranda of understanding are in place for key partners. Monthly financial meetings ensure the centre provides value for money with all available resources being utilised.

The development plan identifies clear priorities which are regularly scrutinised. This helps to ensure the centre remains on track to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Extensive promotion of the centre to reach more families has resulted in a 99% registration rate from the reach area and an overall increase in participants. The senior leaders show a high level of enthusiasm for their work, which in turn is embraced by the staff. The success of the centre in engaging with families is partly due to many of the staff living in the locality and knowing the area well. The welcoming reception area and staff expertise in bonding with families has made users feel valued and trusting of staff.

The centre can demonstrate to good effect how users from all groups have contact with the centre, through either accessing the centre directly or through outreach. Crèche facilities are on-site to support users and sessions are arranged to meet users' needs. Evidence of celebrating diversity is seen on display boards throughout the centre and the centre is fully accessible for adults with disabilities. Work with Travellers, translation for Polish families and the summer holiday scheme for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are good examples of how effective the centre has been in meeting different needs This has been reflected in the

positive feedback from these groups.

Staff, volunteers, visitors, parents and carers and children are safe within the centre due to a stringent regard to safeguarding all. Staff are trained to the required level and both staff and users are able to demonstrate extremely well how they safeguard themselves and others. Recruitment and vetting is robust and induction procedures include safeguarding arrangements. Parents and carers are reminded of their responsibility for their own children and notices to support this are displayed around the centre.

The management knows the locality well and uses information from evaluations to good effect, supported by good data systems. The implementation of participatory appraisal in gauging impact and informing planning has proven to be highly effective in evaluating services to meet users' needs. Self-evaluation is accurate in identifying priorities and the views of users support the centre's evaluation. The successful delivery of services is attributed to the good relationships with key partners, who have a strong representation on the advisory board. On-site health facilities have contributed greatly to the increase of families engaging with the centre. Joint planning and delivery of sessions, for example, speech and language and the Ladybird project have increased the knowledge and expertise of staff enabling them, in some cases to continue to deliver sessions when joint working is no longer available.

Current feedback from users shows a good level of satisfaction with the centre. Views from 'Have your say' and general evaluations are used to good effect and collated on a regular basis to adapt services. Parents on the advisory board show great enthusiasm and a commitment to their role. The centre's mission statement, code of practice and working with parents and carers information demonstrates the value the centre places on user engagement.

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

The most recent report for the day care provision is to be found on the Ofsted website. This was taken into consideration as part of this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Park Children's Centre on 9 and 10 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for finding the time to speak to us and to share your views about your time spent in the centre. We really enjoyed talking to you in the centre and at other venues. You expressed your views clearly and we learnt a lot.

We are pleased to tell you that the centre provides good support to you and your families. We were delighted to hear how you and your children enjoy the activities and how welcoming the staff make you feel. Some of you told us how the centre has helped you through some very difficult times and how you now have more confidence and feel less isolated, which has made a difference to your lives.

The centre does some things extremely well, such as the way you are encouraged to stay safe, lead healthy lifestyles and the way it works with others to give you good quality care, support and advice. We know you have found the on-site antenatal services particularly helpful, along with the parenting sessions. We saw how caring staff were towards your children and how confident the children were moving around the crèche room and experimenting with different equipment, both indoors and out. We were delighted to hear of the success of the volunteer scheme where some of you said how you 'just wanted to give something back'.

Staff work hard to make the centre as good as it can be. You can help with this by talking to staff about what you like most about the centre and what you would like to

be improved. It is encouraging that some of you have joined the parents' forum and feel able to share your views. This is important, so keep up the good work. To help the centre we have suggested that they develop their links with the local schools your children will attend to help the school know more about your children and help them settle in. We have also asked the centre to see what sessions can be delivered from Park to help you gain additional skills in adult education, particularly around literacy and numeracy which will help you when looking for work.

Thank you once again, we wish you every success in the future.

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