

# Inspection report for Mereside and Clifton Children's Centre

Local authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	365699
Inspection dates	5–6 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Chanan Tomlin

Centre governance	Blackpool Local Authority
Centre leader	Sue Dutton
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Mereside Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Stars 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 two additional inspectors.

Inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, health professionals, voluntary and statutory partner organisations, the local headteacher, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, visited families in their homes, and attended a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) meeting. They looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Blackpool is a town in transition and is becoming renowned for its radical development and innovation. However, the town still faces significant challenges in the form of social and economic problems that impact on the lives of children, young people and their families. The area is characterised by high levels of deprivation and unemployment. Over 30% of children under four years old live in households dependent on workless benefits.

Mereside and Clifton Children's Centre is the hub for Blackpool's south locality. It has additional responsibility for services delivered at two satellite centres: Highfield Children's Centre which is a Phase 2 centre and the Phase 3 Rainbow Lodge Extended Services Centre. The centre also has a locality-wide brief, supporting and providing services across four school-based children's centres. It was established in 1999 as a Sure Start trailblazer and serves the community of Clifton Ward which is an area of high deprivation and social need. The Centre is managed by the local authority and sits within the Learning, Schools and Communities Service in the Children, Adult and Family Services Directorate.

The centre serves a predominantly White British community. A Traveller camp is located within its catchment area and there has been some contact with Traveller families via a satellite Extended Services Centre developed as part of Blackpool's Phase 3. Since June 2008, the centre has occupied a new purpose-built centre, co-

located with Mereside Primary School. The centre has good links with the school and the headteacher is the chair of the centre’s Advisory Board.

Nursery provision is provided in a separate building adjacent to the school and centre, with accommodation at present for up to 13 children from birth to three years of age. Children’s skills on entry into the early years provision are broadly as expected for their age. The centre is currently upgrading its nursery accommodation which will increase capacity to 18. The nursery works closely with the school’s maintained nursery and most of its children move to the school in the term following their third birthday.

## 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**

<b>1</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>1</b>
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## Main findings

Mereside and Clifton is a highly effective children’s centre which serves the needs of its community very well. It provides the full core offer for children and families within its catchment area and extends its services to those living outside the designated area through its satellite centres. Centre staff reach out to potential users after referrals from health professionals and publicity organised by the local authority. However, usage of the centre could be further extended to those who are hard to reach through more direct canvassing and publicity by the centre.

Leadership and management of the centre are outstanding. The centre leader and her highly effective team of outreach workers, health, and child care professionals set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and well-being of the local community. Senior staff target and adapt the provision particularly effectively to meet local needs and the centre provides ongoing support to many who are extremely vulnerable. Consequently, the centre is making a real difference to the lives of children and families, particularly those most disadvantaged by economic and social circumstances. It is raising the aspirations and increasing the confidence of adults in the community by providing practical help and support for parents and carers, children and families towards achieving better futures. Attendance at activities at the centre is currently over 70% of the families registered. This is much

higher than the average attendance for other children's centres in the area.

The outcomes for children and adults that access the centre are outstanding. They are learning to lead healthy lifestyles and attendance at appointments with the health visitor and midwife is high. Parents are keen to participate in courses aimed at strengthening emotional resilience and family well-being. They participate enthusiastically in activities and courses, such as basic mathematics, English and 'Speak Easy'. These help them develop their academic skills which contribute significantly to their future economic security. The centre actively encompasses, supports and promotes initiatives aimed at developing economic stability. Examples of this are the 'Work Focused Pilot', budgeting courses and credit union information sessions. Take-up of 'Work Focused Pilot' support specifically targeted at lone parents, low income and workless households, has been particularly high. Benefits of the pilot's impact within the centre have been studied and evaluated in the 'Work Focused Pilot' research interim report 2010.

Parents say they feel safe at the centre and many say it is a refuge when life's challenges are difficult to bear. Staff are always on hand to give guidance and support for the most serious problems to the seemingly trivial. Single parents and teenage mums appreciate frequent additional support, such as home visits from the specialist midwife and health visitor. Many users say that if it were not for the centre and staff, they would either be housebound or in serious physical danger. They say they feel listened to and respected. When users make requests for services, they are always confident that their needs will be met. For example, the centre has adopted a second-hand 'clothing swap' initiated by one mother, and crèche staff are in the process of introducing an 'empty nest' group for mothers contemplating their next steps after their last child has started attending school.

Adults participate regularly in a wide range of courses effectively designed to build their skills and confidence. They gain proficiency in basic mathematics and English which prepares them well for future employment. They learn about childcare and child development through home visits and the 'ELF Babies' programme. Parents gain insights into their own child's speech and language development through courses, assessments and referrals. They receive good, consistent advice and guidance about employment. The centre has a 'Dads Group' for young fathers. However, this group has relatively low attendance and the centre has not yet developed effective ways of engaging fathers and male carers. Usage of the centre by working parents and carers is not well promoted and opening times do not facilitate their attendance. Mothers, carers and children that use the centre are predominantly White British. It provides some activities that raise awareness of other cultures and faiths, such as celebrations for the Chinese New Year, and displays at the centre. Through discussion, it is clear that centre users are receptive to learning about minority ethnic groups and their customs and beliefs. However, this initiative is not well developed to enable greater promotion of multicultural awareness and understanding.

The provision of a free crèche makes activities accessible to parents and carers of

young children and the café serves as the focal point for socialising, making useful contacts and receiving advice. Data held by the centre show that the gap between the lowest achieving children and the rest is narrowing and the outcomes for children who attend the centre's day care are very good.

The centre makes excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to target resources effectively. Group activities, such as 'Bambinos' and 'Bumbles Parent and Toddler Group' are popular and are outstanding in the ways they help parents understand how their children learn and develop. 'Knitting Nanas' is a weekly gathering of older ladies and young mothers that teach each other how to knit. Members relax and socialise while improving their knitting skills. This group works effectively towards narrowing the generation gap.

Leadership and management of the centre are outstanding. Safeguarding users' health, safety and well-being is good. The centre has effectively identified areas for improvement and sets itself high standards for achievement. It is demonstrating an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Further extend usage of the centre to those who are hard to reach through more targeted canvassing and publicity that is exclusive to the centre.
- Improve the extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services by:
  - exploring ways of engaging fathers and male carers
  - considering ways of promoting usage of the centre by working parents and carers for example by having some facilities open in the evenings and at weekends
- Explore more ways of promoting multicultural awareness and understanding in order to promote community cohesion.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>1</b>
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Outcomes for children, parents and carers are outstanding. Evidence shows that children of families that use the centre have an excellent start to school life because their parents or carers gain good, strong parenting skills through the centre. The nursery, that adheres to the Early Years Foundation Stage guidelines and has strong speech and language support, leads to very significant improvements in children's personal, social and emotional development and in their speech and language skills.

The centre is outstanding in the ways it promotes healthy lifestyles through smoking cessation initiatives, extensive support for breastfeeding and ongoing support for adults with mental health issues. Evidence shows that the support offered by the centre has had a real impact and users have made genuine, sustained changes to

their lives. It is also outstanding in the ways that it keeps children safe and protected by signposting parents and carers to services that ensure safety in the home, through guidance and well-attended courses that promote effective parenting. The centre takes issues related to the protection of children very seriously and safeguarding procedures are good.

Staff thoroughly understand the CAF processes. They adhere to these processes to ensure that children receive appropriate support. Children that have child protection plans and those that are looked after receive excellent support and care through the centre's excellent relationships with extended services, through good attention to care and by being alert to any causes for concern.

The centre is also exemplary in the ways that it supports teenage parents and in alleviating many of the stresses resulting from poverty through sage advice and practical guidance. The support that they receive is consistent and all users feel that they are never alone when they need assistance, support or advice. Many adults that attend the centre have low self-esteem and confidence. When they join the centre, their expectations are low. However, through attending courses that help them improve their literacy, numeracy and language skills and through persistent encouragement from a caring, devoted staff, a high percentage of regular users goes on to further education and seeks meaningful employment. One centre user, who was particularly vulnerable and initially wouldn't leave her home because of mental health issues, is now a vibrant member of the centre and volunteers regularly. Another mother, who had real difficulties communicating with others, is now a member of the Parents' Group. She attends many activities in the centre and sees the centre as her 'home away from home'.

Parents and carers air their views through a 'comments box', regular appraisals of activities and events, and through the Parents' Group. They unanimously feel that they are listened to and know that their ideas and suggestions are always adopted.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

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

## How good is the provision?

<b>1</b>
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The centre is outstanding in the ways that it assesses the needs of children and families. It has developed excellent relationships with the statutory, private and voluntary services for children and families. Many of these professionals, including a social worker, midwife, health visitor and an Early Learning and Families Worker, work from the centre and this contributes to highly effective networking. They work together very effectively to intervene and support children and families. Support and advice given to individuals includes: employment, housing, keeping safe, healthy eating, smoking cessation and breastfeeding.

Users genuinely appreciate the professionals who work with them. They talk about the differences that they have made to their lives. The centre provides a wide range of group activities and courses aimed at improving the parenting skills and life chances of the community, families and children. These include courses on personal development and confidence building, food hygiene, mentoring and key skills. Courses and activities are well-attended and thoroughly enjoyed by participants.

Staff are extremely sensitive when they assess need and ensure that users attend activities appropriate to their personal needs. The centre is also exemplary in the ways that the midwife, health visitor and family workers liaise effectively and work in partnership with other agencies to support young mothers.

The centre is inclusive, although it needs to find ways to encourage fathers and male carers to access its facilities more. Staff are highly skilled and experienced and have an excellent knowledge of the community and its families. Although it has not been verified by available data, the centre's provision for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is good.

The centre is a hub of activity and the café is at the centre of it. Users come on a daily basis to socialise, take and share advice, attend courses and take part in activities. The sensory room is used regularly both informally and as a basis for supporting parents with their children's learning and development. One mother said that during the inspection, she came to the centre to 'run away' from the stresses of home. Another said that she met her best friend at a toddlers' group only to find out later that they were actually neighbours!

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
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**How effective are the leadership and management?** **1**

Leadership and management of the centre are outstanding. The centre manager is highly skilled and experienced. She leads a team of qualified, exceptionally well-motivated professionals who work together effectively to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of children and adults within the centre’s reach. Staff morale is high and both staff and users of the centre are extremely positive about the leadership.

The centre provides good value for money. It is accountable to the local authority, representatives of which have expressed complete confidence in the centre and its management. Development planning is closely aligned to local and national indicators for children and families. Clear policies support the centre’s work in ensuring safeguarding and child protection. Staff recruitment procedures are rigorous; all staff have been suitably trained in child protection and have undergone enhanced checks by the Criminal Records Bureau. The centre has succeeded in reaching some of the most potentially vulnerable families in the community. However, the centre has agreed that others could be reached through canvassing and publicity exclusive to the centre in addition to initiatives by the local authority.

Relationships at the centre are very positive. Parents and carers spoken to by inspectors place a high level of trust in the centre. They are active contributors to decisions related to the provision at the centre and the views of all users contribute to self-evaluation. Governance and supervision of the centre are outstanding. Staff who work from the centre are involved in regular meetings regarding specific users. These meetings are clearly documented and inform the local authority’s input into the centre on a regular basis.

The centre promotes equality and diversity well, although this has been identified as an area for further development. It is successful in supporting children with disabilities and is exploring ways of promoting the attendance of working parents and carers through possibilities of opening in the evenings or at weekends.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>



<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

Inspectors took into account local authority Early Years Foundation Stage data and observed the crèche and nursery provisions.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Summary for centre users**

We inspected Mereside and Clifton Children's Centre on 5 and 6 April 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding.

You told us about the excellent work the centre is doing and we really appreciated all your input. This centre is the main hub of services for children, families and carers who live in the centre's reach area. Many of the agencies who support children and families are based there. The work that the centre team and other professionals do together is outstanding. The whole extended team is very committed to making sure that children get the best possible start in life by providing outstanding support to their families and carers.

The centre is making a real difference to the lives of parents and children in the local community. The centre promotes health and well-being exceptionally effectively and users gain a detailed understanding of how to keep their children safe and free from harm. The centre promotes adult learning and it provides you with valuable,

consistent advice and guidance in all areas of child rearing, employment and life skills. Those of you who spoke to us explained how the centre has transformed your lives and how it has had an enormous impact on the well-being of your families.

The staff at the centre are well-qualified and experienced professionals. You stressed to us that the staff support you extremely well, both in raising your self-esteem and confidence and by providing practical help and advice. You also said that the centre is a place of refuge and that many would not be 'where you are now' if it were not for the centre.

Activities provided by the centre help to improve parenting skills. Several of you believe that your contact with the centre has been life-changing. You enjoy the 'ELF Babies' programme and find the individual guidance and support that you receive invaluable. The café is at the centre of what happens at Mereside and Clifton. It is seen as a place in which to relax, make friends, take and share advice, and enjoy a healthy wholesome meal. You also value the sensory room, the speech and language course and the range of baby groups.

Leadership and management of the centre are outstanding. The centre manager is passionate about improving the outcomes for children and families in the locality and has agreed with our recommendation that the centre should publicise its activities more extensively in order to reach families that are either unaware of the centre or reluctant to participate. She is constantly looking for ways to improve the centre's services and after this inspection will be exploring ways of attracting more dads to the centre and extending activities to accommodate working parents and carers by opening the centre in the evening or at weekends. We feel that members of your community are receptive to learning about other cultures and faiths in order to improve community cohesion. The centre has agreed that this is also an area for development and is considering arranging inter-cultural events that will interest you.

Those of you who attend courses at the centre are able to access excellent crèche facilities free of charge. The leaders and managers know what needs to improve and have the capacity to carry out their plans effectively. The advisory board supports and challenges the leadership rigorously and the recently established Parents' Group contributes new ideas and supports the work of the centre very well. The centre is outstanding in the ways that it supports groups who are vulnerable, such as single parents, teenage mums and those who are out of work. The centre admirably fulfils its core purpose in serving those who are suffering from disadvantage and it is highly successful in supporting those who are most in need.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).