

Inspection report for Workington Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	367878
Inspection dates	13-14 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Christine Potter

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Stephanie Crosthwaite
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	The Minto Centre Nilsson Drive Westfield Workington CA14 5BD
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Linked school if applicable	Westfield Nursery and Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY273087 Footsteps 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre leaders, staff, a wide range of partners, a representative of the local authority linked to the centre and users. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Workington Sure Start Children's Centre is a phase one centre, which received designation in 2005, having been originally a Family Support Project. The centre is directly managed by Action for Children under contract to the local authority. Services are delivered primarily from the Minto Centre, with three satellite sites based in local communities within the reach area. The Minto Centre is located on the site of Westfield Primary School and Westfield Housing Association. The site incorporates the school, Footsteps Nursery, local housing association, children's centre and office accommodation where administrative, health, children's services and primary care staff are based.

The centre offers a full range of integrated universal and targeted universal services on site and at its satellite venues, together with outreach support.

Workington is an area of declining industry and high unemployment, with pockets of high deprivation. Life expectancy is low compared to many parts of the country and there are high levels of drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence. There is a higher than average number of children under five years old subject to a safeguarding plan, the majority of which are related to neglect. Within the area there is a low level of educational attainment, linked to a cycle of low aspirations and low self-esteem. Most children entering Early Years Foundation Stage have skills and levels of development considerably below those expected for their age.

Most families within the area are of White British heritage, although there are a small number of Polish families making their home within the community.

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

Workington Children’s Centre provides good quality services with several outstanding aspects. The inclusive and welcoming environment, and the dedication and commitment of the staff, ensure that it has a positive impact on the lives of the children and families who take part in the exceptionally good range of services and activities organised by the centre. `It is a brilliant place for families to get involved in’ and `There is always someone here for you’ are typical of the comments made by parents and carers. They all report how their confidence and self-esteem has grown since first accessing the centre’s services.

The centre provides excellent care, guidance and support which empower parents and carers to overcome a wide range of difficulties in their lives. Partnerships with other services are outstanding and enable the centre to provide relevant, cohesive provision. Support is carefully and effectively tailored to meet individual needs. Parents, carers and children are regularly consulted and through the Parent and Carer Network and volunteering they make an outstanding contribution to the evaluation and development of the centre, as well as to the life of the community.

Courses at the centre are well attended and the high success and completion rates are celebrated regularly. Parents and carers are proud of their achievements and develop confidence and aspirations which help them to access further training and employment opportunities. Many activities provide excellent opportunities for children to develop skills within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Some use is made of observations and tracking data by individual providers, but information is not shared systematically.

The centre’s approach to safeguarding is exemplary, with extremely rigorous policies

and procedures, which ensure that families are protected and engaged in an appropriate range of services that improve their safety and well-being. As a result, the extent to which users feel safe is outstanding. Multi-agency referrals, prompt intervention and regular review through the Multi-Agency Support Team and Common Assessment Framework (CAF) ensure that families and children most at risk receive the care that they need.

The centre has clear policies to promote equality and diversity and all staff and volunteers are aware of these. Parents and carers are well supported in attending training by the provision of crèche or childcare facilities and by adaptation of the location and timing of courses to reflect their circumstances. There are particularly effective strategies in place to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups, such as children and young people with disabilities. Discussions with fathers and young parents show that they have been welcomed and well supported by the centre.

The centre is well led and managed. The service manager and coordinator work well in partnership, lead by example and take an active role in the activities of the centre. There are well-established procedures for monitoring and evaluating provision. All members of the leadership team have a clear understanding of the strengths in provision and where further improvement is still required. For example, although there is some information and analysis regarding outcomes relating to health and to the engagement of different groups of users, they recognise that a more systematic use of data for the centre's reach area would enhance planning and evaluation. This means that the centre has a good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve self-evaluation and planning by using data and other information more effectively to demonstrate the longer term impact of the centre's work on outcomes for children and families.
- Improve outcomes for children in Early Years Foundation Stage by further developing the systems for monitoring and tracking their progress.

How good are outcomes for users?

Outcomes for parents and carers and their children are good overall, and outstanding in relation to their positive contribution and staying safe. This is confirmed by a wealth of case study evidence and personal testimony. However, data relating to specific outcomes is less well used by the centre to measure the longer term success of its work.

The centre is effective in promoting healthy outcomes through its guidance and activities. Parents and carers show a good understanding of ways in which they can improve the health of their children, for example, they enjoy watching their children experience the taste of different types of fruit at snack times. Healthy cooking courses, including those specifically aimed at fathers and young parents, have shown them how they can provide nutritious meals on a low budget. The centre has recognised the need to reduce obesity levels and has prioritised activities aimed at getting children and their parents physically active. Especially popular are the Movers sessions targeted to meet the developmental needs of different age groups. Parents and carers recognise the positive impact these have on their children's confidence and social interaction, as well as their physical development.

Community midwives and health visitors work well with the centre to provide drop-in clinics and targeted support for new and expectant mothers. There is a particularly well-attended Young Mums group, which prepares them for the birth of their babies and provides a programme of relevant activities relating to breastfeeding, smoking cessation, sexual health, drugs and alcohol. The young mothers regularly share their experiences and gain confidence from one another. Immunisation rates are high and increasing numbers are attending breastfeeding support groups. Children's emotional health is promoted very well through fun days, trips and other activities which encourage families to bond effectively and spend constructive time together.

Parents and carers unanimously say that they feel extremely safe and secure at the centre, and that they have trust and confidence in the staff. Very good role modelling by staff promotes consistent behaviour management and awareness of keeping children safe. Users receive an excellent range of advice on safety, including comprehensive parenting and first aid courses, information booklets and home safety checks. They are involved in planning activities and are extremely well aware of the importance of ensuring the health and safety of all those who participate in activities both on and off site, through thorough risk assessments and adopting safe practices.

A high percentage of families have circumstances which make them particularly vulnerable. There are very well embedded procedures to ensure that these most vulnerable children and families are recognised quickly and highly effective packages of support are put in place through intensive intervention by Assertive Family Support Workers, partnership working with other agencies and targeted involvement

in the centre's activities, so that risks to children are minimised.

Children's happy smiling faces show how much they enjoy using the centre's facilities and taking part in activities. They are very well behaved, relate positively to each other and to the adults around them and there have been some improvements in local Early Years Foundation Stage data. However, monitoring and recording children's development whilst taking part in activities and sharing this information between services is at a relatively early stage. The necessity for high quality play and early learning experiences is well promoted through activities, such as Rhyme Time, Baby Sign and Play Matters. Parents and carers report how they now feel more confident to replicate these activities at home and take pride in their children's progress.

Adult users have access to a wide range of accredited and non-accredited courses and parents and carers state that their involvement in these impacts positively on their self-confidence and willingness to seek further education and employment. Many parents and carers go on to achieve level one and level two qualifications in literacy and numeracy and this has supported some users back into the workforce. All those who complete training programmes receive certificates and awards and they are clearly proud of these. The centre is sensitive to individual need and willingly provides one to one support in basic skills for those parents and carers who feel unable at this stage to access group sessions. One father reported how previously he felt frustrated by his poor literacy skills and how this support has enabled him to experience real pleasure in reading stories to his children. A range of information is available from the centre, including links to Jobcentre Plus, access to benefits and debt management.

Parents and carers are encouraged to make an excellent positive contribution to the centre and wider community by joining the Parent and Carer Network, representing parents and carers on the Advisory Board and becoming volunteers. They see this as '... an opportunity to give something back' and a way of '... looking out for others and encouraging them to get involved'. Accredited personal effectiveness training has helped volunteers reach out into the community and engage others and to act as ambassadors for the centre. They feel that their views are valued and their opinions really count, and they can cite many instances where their suggestions have been acted upon, for example, through the organisation of the Time Out Together To Share activities. Parents and carers are increasingly having opportunities for organising community events, such as the Teddy Bears Step-out and have been extremely successful in fundraising for the centre.

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	1

concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	
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 staff and leadership have a good knowledge of local families and the community and strive to ensure that those with the greatest needs have highly personalised support. Referrals come from a variety of sources including health workers, social care and self referrals. Careful assessment of the family's needs is a priority for the centre and families are fully included in the process. Exceptionally strong links with other agencies and providers enable the centre to provide a complete package to meet individual needs.

The centre prides itself on raising the aspirations of all users and provides many opportunities for learning and development. Well planned activities for young children are based on the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and there is some evidence to measure individual children's progress. Adults have access to an extensive range of free adult training, based on initial assessment of need, much of which enables individual users to gain accreditation and improve their educational and employment prospects. The centre regularly trains volunteers and uses their skills effectively within the provision.

The range of services provided by the centre is outstanding. A major strength is the centre's flexible approach and its sensitivity in adapting the provision to meet specific needs, for example, recognising where a person is too emotionally fragile to be part of a group and offering the same services on a one-to-one basis. Cohesive packages of support are offered and parents and carers are enthusiastic about how participation in the centre's activities has changed their lives. Their suggestions for courses and activities are reflected in the centre's programme, services are carefully located and attendance levels and participation rates are high. For example, health visitor drop-in sessions and shared play and learning sessions run from a variety of community venues to increase opportunities for engagement by the wider community. Courses provide participants with practical skills and new interests and cover topics as diverse as flower arranging, Tai Chi, and financial management. There are particularly imaginative activities offered for children with disabilities, where weekly drop-in sessions help them to develop confidence and social

relationships, and adventurous activities enable them to demonstrate remarkable achievements. The Little Rainbows group also provides parents and carers with a safe setting where they can ‘stop apologising’ for their children. Fathers appreciate that their needs and contributions are recognised and enjoy activities, such as cycle rides which give them time for themselves, as well as fishing and seaside trips to enhance their involvement with their children.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the centre is outstanding. Parents and carers know that they can turn to the centre at any time and someone will be there to help them. ‘No one is turned away’. First-hand evidence of this was seen during the inspection when staff immediately responded to a young parent who arrived without an appointment. ‘You can go to any member of staff with a problem and they’ll all bend over backwards to help you,’ is a typical comment which demonstrates how appreciative parents and carers are of the care and support they receive. Parents and carers are confident to ask activity providers for ‘a quick word in private’, knowing that their concerns will be listened to. The centre provides excellent emotional and physical support in times of crisis, together with more practical day-to-day assistance, such as organising finances and helping with childcare. Parents and carers feel empowered to take responsibility for their lives to improve their own and their families’ outcomes.

The range of advice and support on offer at the centre is wide and varied. The environment is rich in information for users to access, either through the Parent Information Point, leaflets they can read themselves or by speaking to someone at the centre. The position of some information, such as how to get help relating to sexual health or if suffering from domestic violence, is sensitively displayed to allow privacy.

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

Leadership and management are good. Leaders and managers have a clear vision and have worked hard to improve the effectiveness of the centre. They work well together to communicate their high expectations and to promote the strong ethos of meeting the needs of the most vulnerable which is evident throughout the centre. They are well supported by an extremely dedicated and passionate team of staff and partners.

Arrangements for governance are clear and well organised. Regular, effective monitoring and auditing systems are well established, which inform planning at a strategic level. However, the advisory board has recently been reorganised and this new body has yet to demonstrate its effectiveness in providing challenge and support to the centre.

Evaluation of services is good through a range of methods including activity evaluation forms, surveys and questionnaires. Staff, parents and carers, children and partners are involved in self evaluation. However, the use of data that would enable the centre to identify specific targets to demonstrate clearly the full impact that it is having on improving outcomes is at an early stage. The centre adopts a wide range of ongoing strategies to enhance user engagement, including leafleting, publicity in community venues, schools, doctors' surgeries, and holding well organised community events, such as the well attended Fun Days, which raise awareness of what they can offer.

The centre provides good value for money. Resources are used effectively and staff are deployed well to ensure that provision is planned well to meet users' needs. Good use is made of the space available at the centre and other venues. The centre has a policy of sustainability, which includes improving the skills of existing staff to deliver the full range of services, thus reducing costs and ensuring continuity. All trips and outings are planned to be cost effective, such as the imaginative use of local parks and beaches and encouraging families to provide picnics. This policy also helps families to understand that spending time together does not have to cost a lot of money.

The inclusion of all children and families, regardless of background, is central to the centre's vision. All staff and volunteers receive training in equality and diversity. Parents and carers recognise that people from all walks of life are helped to attend the centre and that a non-judgemental welcome is extended to all. The centre and associated venues are fully adapted to meet the needs of any adult or child with a disability and staff are on hand to provide extra support if necessary. Information is provided in both English and Polish and an interpreter service is available.

Safeguarding is of the highest priority and policies and procedures to ensure the health, safety and well-being of all who access the centre and its activities are outstanding. Safeguarding is integral to all aspects of service delivery, with the need to protect children being paramount at all times. There are rigorous recruitment and

vetting checks, senior staff have undertaken enhanced training in child protection, and induction and training procedures for staff and volunteers in safeguarding are comprehensive. The Multi-Agency Support Team and use of the CAF processes ensure that a wide range of professionals work together well to safeguard and protect children and families. Particular attention is given to ensuring the safety of the most vulnerable, such as children and young people with disabilities.

The excellent partnerships established include health, social services, children's services and education, housing and adult education. The centre works tirelessly to involve new partnership working where this will be beneficial to the users of the centre. A Multi-Agency Day organised by the centre was instrumental in promoting joint working. The cohesive and integrated approach to family support and early intervention is a strength of the centre and multi-agency working ensures that potentially vulnerable children and families consistently receive a package of tailored support that is adapted as individual needs dictate. A particularly effective and mutually beneficial partnership exists with the Workers' Education Association, which provides good quality tutors and course materials to learners at the centre, who are able to enjoy a positive learning experience and are encouraged to broaden their horizons and develop their aspirations.

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	1
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

None

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 Workington Children's Centre on 13-14 June 2011. As part of the inspection process we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of people including parents and carers, staff and partnership workers. We judged the centre as good overall, with some outstanding features.

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for contributing to the inspection by sharing your experiences and views of your children's centre. Your open and honest views were very helpful to us.

Many of you told us how friendly, helpful and welcoming the staff are, and how no-one is ever turned away. We could see that you enjoy the many opportunities to have fun and to play and learn with your children. You enjoy seeing your children making friends with other children and understanding how they learn and develop. The centre is outstanding in ensuring that you make a positive contribution to making decisions and planning activities. You told us how the staff always listen to your views and that your opinions matter and make a difference. It is clear that you are proud of your centre. One of the dads described the centre as a 'cracking good place to be', and we agree.

Those of you we spoke with said that coming to the centre has given you more confidence and has helped you make new friends. You have enjoyed the wide variety of courses which have helped you to keep your children healthier and safer and you clearly appreciate all the guidance and support available to help develop your parenting skills. Some of you told us that for the first time in your lives you have gained qualifications and completed courses which have led to employment.

The centre staff take extremely good care to ensure that you and your children are kept safe. They work very well with other agencies when trying to help you and your families, and provide you with exceptionally good support and practical help and advice. Some of you, such as young mums, dads, and parents who have children

with disabilities, feel particularly well looked after. It is clear that the staff work very hard and want the very best for you and your families.

We have suggested that the centre further improves its systems for measuring the positive differences that the centre is making to you and your families, and that they track the progress of the younger children more systematically.

It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to talk with so many of you – thank you once again. We can see why the staff love working with you and wish you and your children every success in the future.

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