

Inspection report for John Smethurst Children's Centre

Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	383973
Inspection dates	27–28 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Jean Kendall HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Kath Kenyon
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	St James Road Blackburn Lancashire BB1 8ES
Telephone number	01254 698350
Fax number	01254 299811
Email address	kath.kenyon@blackburn.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY336022 John Smethurst Children's Centre

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 early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior managers from the centre and the local authority, parents and carers, members of the governing body, children's centre partners and practitioners including health and Early Years Foundation Stage professionals. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

John Smethurst Children's Centre is situated in the Shear Brow ward. The centre was previously a maintained nursery school and part of a Sure Start local programme. It was designated as a children's centre with the full core offer in September 2006 and opened in January 2007. The Nursery provides childcare and early learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage for children aged two to five years. This provision is inspected separately and inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre delivers maternity services, adult learning and employment and financial advice in partnership with health professionals, Jobcentre Plus and adult learning services. The centre is one of a network of 13 children's centres within the Blackburn with Darwen area and is funded through the local authority. The centre manager manages three centres within a geographical cluster. Some services are offered in collaboration with other centres and some are provided through district teams. The local management board is made up of equal representation from staff and professionals from partner agencies, parent representatives and Children's Trust representatives.

The centre serves an ethnically mixed area with approximately 39% of the population from minority-ethnic groups. It serves an area that experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage being located in area in the top 30% of the most deprived wards in the country. Levels of unemployment are high and many of the existing jobs are low paid. The majority of families using the centre's services are from an Asian background. Most children enter the childcare and nursery provision with knowledge and skills that are 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

John Smethurst Children's Centre provides good quality services which are improving outcomes for families in the area. The centre is friendly and welcoming; its inclusive approach ensures that services are in high demand and well used by the local community. Staff provide outstanding care, guidance and support to improve families' well-being. Those facing difficulties receive excellent personalised support through the Family Intervention and Support Team which works across the geographical cluster. Families value the centre's services greatly, stating for example, that they have 'learned a lot', 'feel able to share ideas and worries' and have 'received excellent support at a very difficult time'.

Staff have high levels of professional expertise. Provision is enhanced through excellent partnership working with other centres, schools and professionals from other agencies. There is an effective 'sifting' process on registration that ensures families are allocated appropriate services, support and guidance to meet their needs.

The centre promotes equality and the celebration of diversity effectively. Staff are sensitive to the needs of all who use its services. Families speaking English as an additional language receive good support from bilingual support workers. Specific groups such as young parents, fathers and families with children who have additional needs receive timely support which is tailored to their needs. The safety of families is central to the work of the centre. Good quality family support and good safeguarding arrangements ensure all who benefit from services and use the centre feel safe.

The centre makes a good contribution to the economic stability of families through its well-established partnership working with Jobcentre Plus, the credit union and adult learning providers. Adults receive good advice and support to manage their finances and claim relevant benefits. Those who wish to, can access a range of courses to enhance their basic skills and learn English. However, centre leaders recognise that there is more they could do to promote work-related learning, through providing opportunities for volunteering.

Children make good progress in the childcare, nursery and play and learn sessions. They make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development because staff help them build confidence. Parents and carers are appreciative of the good quality feedback they receive, reporting for example, that staff know the children very well and, 'always make time to tell you about your child's learning'. Children are well prepared for school and transfer to other settings. Their transfer is supported by good transition procedures.

Children with additional needs are exceptionally well-supported across the whole range of services. Staff have received good quality training to help them support children with complex needs. They have particular strengths in early identification, assessment and support, supported by the strong partnership working with health professionals.

The centre manager provides effective leadership across three centres in the geographical area, working in close partnership with the local authority. Staff and the local management board have high expectations for the local community and show enthusiasm and commitment to improve outcomes for families in the area.

Self-evaluation is accurate and takes good account of the views of those who use services. Priorities for improvement are appropriate and effectively promote improving outcomes. However, although developing, the centre does not have the means to evaluate the impact of services on all users over time, for example, in assessing children's continued progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage and adults' progress in gaining qualifications or employment. Action planning lacks specific and measurable targets by which to measure success. Centre leaders have identified the need to develop consultation with the wider community to ensure all needs are being met.

The centre and local authority have taken effective steps to ensure that the quality of services is sustained during a reorganisation to maximise efficiency and accommodate cuts to funding. The move to geographical teams has focused on transforming services to target resources to need. The identification of 'champions' within the centre to cover de-commissioned services has helped to build capacity and secure the most effective use of professional expertise. This ensures that the centre has good capacity to sustain improvement in provision and outcomes into the future.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop self-evaluation and improvement planning by:
 - tracking the longer-term impact of services for adults and children
 - conducting consultations with the wider community and investigating information relating to registration and take-up of services to ensure all needs are being met
 - involving families more strategically in planning and decision-making
 - using measurable success criteria to identify improvement priorities and measure progress with the improvement plan.

- Extend opportunities for adults to develop work-related skills through the development of a volunteer programme.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Health outcomes show good improvement from low baselines. Staff take every opportunity to promote health, for example, in safer sleeping, healthy diet and lifestyle, oral health and breastfeeding. The initiation of breastfeeding has increased with good support from breastfeeding services and continued encouragement through the centre. The 'Play and Learn' sessions make a strong contribution to the physical and emotional health of both parents/carers and children. Provision for outdoor play makes a strong contribution to children's physical development. Children with additional needs have very thorough individual health care and learning plans, supporting them to make good progress.

There are good systems in place to provide notification of pregnancy and register families with the centre. The effective 'sifting' process enables appropriate multi-agency services to be sign-posted and allocated early to prevent difficulties escalating. Where families need more intensive support, the centre's strong partnerships with other agencies ensure they receive good support to meet their needs. The centre has initiated a number of safety campaigns in response to needs in the local community. Consequently, children, parents and carers have a good awareness of how to keep themselves and others safe. Successful campaigns to promote road safety and safety in the home and the car have resulted in a reduction of accidental injuries.

Children play and learn together happily and confidently. They make good progress in the childcare provision, 'Play and Learn' sessions and nursery. Most children have knowledge and skills below those expected for their age when they begin at the centre. The pre-school profile, which is used to measure children's progress, indicates that the majority are working at age-related expectations by the time they transfer to school. They are especially well prepared for school, socially and emotionally. Good transition procedures, supported by positive relationships with local schools and good quality assessment help to ensure children make a smooth transfer.

There is keen competition for places on the 'Play and Learn' courses and full attendance at story and rhyme sessions. Parents told inspectors that the courses are, 'great fun and you really learn a lot about how to help your child learn'. Parents also enjoy and make good gains in the adult courses in basic skills and English for speakers of other languages classes. The active Fathers Group promotes constructive relationships and active learning between fathers and their children. However, the one positive parenting course that was offered in the last year had a high drop-out rate suggesting that parents' needs were not fully met by this course.

Parents and carers make a very positive contribution to the centre through their friendly, welcoming behaviour and respect for one another. They are pleased to provide feedback after courses and invariably demonstrate a high level of satisfaction. However, opportunities for them and members of the wider community to contribute to service planning at a more strategic level are limited. The centre has struggled to engage parents in more formal forums and is actively seeking alternative ways to consult more widely.

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	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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

Good quality services and excellent care, guidance and support for families and children in the early years provision are improving outcomes in the local community. Procedures to assess families' needs when they first engage with the centre are robust. Families who need more intensive support because they are facing difficulties have received excellent, seamless support from a range of agencies. Staff often play a leading role in implementing the Common Assessment Framework with good engagement by partner agencies and constructive working with social care agencies. Case files are well ordered indicating the impact of support and where further work is needed. Where a child protection plan is in place the centre works very effectively with social services and the child protection team. Parents told inspectors of the, 'first rate and faultless support' for children who have additional needs.

Staff provide a good range of services to encourage participation by harder to reach groups and support those who are vulnerable due to challenging circumstances. The active Fathers Group and support for teenage parents provide good opportunities for personal development and learning. The centre has very good links with a local women's refuge and provides a number of services and assisted childcare for women experiencing domestic violence. The cultural needs of the community are given good attention in planning services. For example, the flexible childcare provision offering short sessions is much appreciated by families during Ramadan. Those who speak English as an additional language appreciate the help and support of bilingual workers. Staff are seeking ways to encourage further

engagement by other ethnic groups in the area who do not currently use the centre’s services, through outreach and links with schools.

The quality of learning and development for children and adults is good. Staff in the childcare and nursery provision use assessment effectively to support all areas of learning across the Early Years Foundation Stage. Families who use the centre report that they receive good quality advice and guidance on how to help their children learn. The location of a Jobcentre Plus kiosk and referral system helps parents gain access to information about jobs and benefits. However, the impact of such services and activities on supporting parents into education or employment is not known and is an aspect which could be developed further.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership is good at all levels and greatly enhanced by excellent partnership working. Staff have a high level of expertise supported by good professional development. All share high aspirations for the community and provide good support and challenge for leaders. The local management board is well established with good representation from staff, parents, partner agencies and the local authority. The challenge role is well understood and the board has set appropriate targets for the centre leader. The organisation of staff and board representatives into focus groups leading on each outcome is very effective. The groups meet regularly to evaluate the impact of services and plan for further improvement.

Self-evaluation is accurate and takes full account of the contributions from staff and partners. It is supported by regular review meetings with local authority quality-improvement officers and local data. Families who use the centre are regularly invited to give their views on ways in which they have benefitted from services and suggest improvements. As a result activities generally meet local needs well and activities and services are in high demand. However, there are some groups within the local community who do not use services, for example, the White British population. Leaders recognise they could do more to gather the views of the wider community and use these to inform service planning and ensure all needs are being met. Although registrations have increased, the centre does not have a clear indication of the proportion of registration from within the reach area.

Good safeguarding arrangements are supported by the clear lines of communication and collaboration between agencies to ensure children are safeguarded. All checks, vetting and recruitment processes meet current guidelines and staff have up-to-date training in safeguarding, child protection and first aid.

The centre is inclusive and welcoming to all. It promotes equality and the celebration of diversity effectively. Staff are sensitive to the needs of all who use its services. Specific groups such as young parents, fathers and families with children who have additional needs receive good support which is tailored to their needs and delivered through strong partnership working. The centre itself is a highly cohesive community where positive relationships flourish. Those who access the centre make good gains in their learning, personal development and health. The centre provides good value for money.

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	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 John Smethurst Children's Centre on 27 to 28 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. There are some aspects of work that are outstanding, including the care, guidance and support for families, particularly for those facing challenging circumstances. The quality of services is enhanced by highly effective partnership working with other centres and professionals from other agencies. This ensures that families needing more help receive the most effective support to meet their needs early on.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents, talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with you. Many of you told us that you thoroughly enjoy the activities provided by the centre and have learned a lot. You told us that you find staff friendly and approachable so you trust them and feel able to share any concerns you might have. We found the centre to be welcoming and inclusive. You play an important part in this, through your friendly manner to all who come to the centre.

The activities, courses and sessions are of good quality helping both adults and children to make good gains in their learning and personal development. The supportive relationships and good safeguarding procedures mean that children and adults feel safe at the centre. The strong focus on promoting health and safety has a positive impact on the well-being of adults and children alike. It is clear that both you and your children thoroughly enjoy yourselves in the various activities.

Children make good progress in all areas of learning including the childcare, nursery and 'Play and Learn' sessions. They thoroughly enjoy playing and learning in the bright and happy environment. They are well prepared for school and transfer to other settings. Children with additional needs are exceptionally well supported across the whole range of services.

The centre makes a good contribution to the economic stability of families through its partnership working with Jobcentre Plus, the Credit Union and adult learning providers. It provides good advice and support to help families manage their finances and develop key skills. However, centre leaders recognise that they could do more to help you develop your work-related skills and are keen to introduce more volunteering activities.

The centre is well led and managed by the geographical manager and staff are knowledgeable and skilled. Together with the local authority they have taken effective steps to make sure that good services are sustained during a reorganisation to accommodate cuts to funding. They are all very keen to build on the good quality services and improve them further. We think they have good capacity to do so.

There are a few aspects that we have suggested centre leaders work on.

- To develop self-evaluation and improvement planning by:
 - tracking the longer-term impact of services for you and your children

- conducting consultations with the wider community to ensure the needs of all groups are being met
 - involving you more strategically in planning and decision-making
 - using measurable success criteria to identify improvement priorities and measure progress with the improvement plan.
- To extend opportunities for you to develop work-related skills through the development of a volunteer programme.

Thank you for your contributions to the inspection. We would like to wish you every success for the future.

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