

Inspection report for Cramlington West and Village Children's Centre

Local authority	Northumberland
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Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

Centre leader	Ruth Brooks
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Beacon Hill Primary School Site Langdale Drive Cramlington Northumberland NE23 8EH
Telephone number	01670 710080
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	Ruth.brooks@barnardos.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Beaconhill URN 122193
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Beaconhill Playgroup URN EY392828

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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 adjacent primary school, Beaconhill, was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. 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 additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre and the local authority, front-line professionals, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a range of partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This purpose-built centre opened in 2006 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. It is linked to a group of children's centres that form the Blyth Valley partnership and is run by Barnardo's, a voluntary sector organisation, on behalf of Northumberland County Council. The centre provides the full range of core offer services. It is situated to the rear of Beaconhill Primary School site near the town centre of Cramlington, an ex-mining town in the urban south-eastern corner of the large, predominantly rural county of Northumberland. The Village Children's Centre was originally designated as a separate centre but merged with Cramlington West in 2010. This part of the children's centre is located in the town centre, within the same building as the private day care provision, Little Angels.

The centre serves a community with mixed social and economic characteristics. Most families and children attending the centre are of White British heritage. The proportion of children aged under four who are living in households where no one is working has remained stable over the past three years and is below the Northumberland average. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage settings with skills and abilities that are often below that expected for their age. The centre has crèche facilities on-site and uses a number of local venues to deliver activities and courses. Sessional childcare is provided on-site by a community playgroup called Beaconhill Playgroup. This setting was previously subject to its own inspection. The report can be found at www.Ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The centre provides good quality services and is securing good or rapidly improving outcomes for children and families; particularly for those facing barriers or experiencing difficulties in their lives. The approach to safeguarding families who use the centre and who are engaged through outreach work is outstanding. Child protection, safer recruitment procedures and risk assessments are robust and leaders share their exemplary practice across the local authority area. Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors were unequivocal about how safe they feel and how well staff ensure the safety and care of their children.

Children and families using the centre have a good range of opportunities to be healthy and to enjoy and achieve. Outcomes are mostly good. Although reducing, obesity rates in young children remain higher than average. The centre is tackling this through a range of effective healthy eating initiatives and partnership working with arts and leisure services, providing activities that parents say they really enjoy. Children make good progress in their learning and are well prepared for the next stages of their development. In the playgroup, parents and carers are provided with learning journals which celebrate their children's achievements over time. However, this good practice does not always extend to other appropriate learning activities.

Centre leaders successfully engender high expectations of staff, including team work. Their work is characterised by a highly inclusive ethos where every effort is taken to promote equality and challenge disadvantage of any kind. This is exemplified in the way family support workers, the learning work advisor and breastfeeding peer supporters work flexibly to meet the individual preferences of their families; and to good effect. In times of most need, high quality partnership working with health and children's social care colleagues results in a timely, well integrated package of support and care for children and families. Consequently, the number of children needing child protection plans is low and there has also been a significant reduction in the numbers of children requiring children in need plans.

Partnerships with adult education services and Jobcentre Plus are improving but have not yet had the same marked impact of other partnerships. The views of families are gathered

regularly and make a positive contribution to shaping the services offered. Parents and carers using the centre feel strongly that their views are listened to. Members of the parents' 'holiday planning' group particularly, appreciate their opportunities to develop fun activities.

Leadership and management are good. Self evaluation is accurate. All activities and the work of staff are monitored and evaluated regularly through robust performance management arrangements. These arrangements together with leaders' good knowledge of the local community and their analysis of increasingly sophisticated local data and information, identifies unmet needs and informs future priorities. Priorities are set out in clear action plans, often with measurable targets by which leaders, the advisory board and staff can judge the effectiveness and impact of their work. Given the improving outcomes for children and their families, the impact of successful partnership working and good, insightful leadership, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is also good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop personalised records of children's achievements in appropriate activities.
- Extend collaborative working with adult learning services and Jobcentre Plus to enable more parents and carers to gain the skills, confidence and qualifications that will contribute to their economic stability.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Partnership working to improve children's, parents and carers health is good. This includes the work of health visitors, midwives, family support workers and breastfeeding peer supporters. Consequently, a higher than average proportion of mothers continue breastfeeding beyond six weeks and the proportion of mothers who smoke at birth is low and reducing significantly. Children who participate in centre activities benefit from a good range of healthy snacks and use the high quality indoor and outdoor equipment and areas enthusiastically. Healthy cooking activities and sessions like 'Tiddly Winks' provide good opportunities for parents, carers and children to be healthy and have fun together. Staff are well trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and assessments are used to good effect in developing a united approach to targeting services quickly to those in acute need. This includes support for parents and carers with emotional health needs or needs arising from different kinds of abuse. These actions are successfully helping them to overcome barriers, to safeguard children and help parents and carers build more positive relationships with their children. Initiatives to help parents and carers develop coping skills and keep their children safe, like the 'Comfort Zone' and 'Triple P' are highly regarded by families for their effectiveness. High quality partnership working with the community safety team, police and fire and rescue services enables a shared, cost-effective approach to the provision of information, guidance and safety equipment to help safeguard families in their

homes and local area. As a result, the number of children admitted to hospital due to non-accidental injury is much lower than the Northumberland average.

The centre manager, along with local authority early-years specialists, provide good quality training, advice and support to childminders, play groups, schools and other settings for children aged under five. This is helping to raise aspirations and ensure more consistent and rigorous assessment processes. Such actions are also aiding successful transitions into schools. As a result of the collective actions in the Early Years Foundation Stage settings, children make good progress from their starting points and a higher number than average achieve expected levels in their development goals by the end of their Reception Year in school. Parents and carers, attending activities, including family learning courses, report good progress in their own learning and in their understanding of how they can help their children enjoy and achieve. Children's achievements in activities, such as 'Stay and Play,' are recorded in scrap books. However, leaders are aware that more could be done to track children's individual achievements.

Children's behaviour is good in all settings observed and relationships between staff and children and families are exemplary. Most parents' and carers' evaluations of activities are very positive. Those attending parenting programmes and other targeted support report increased confidence, improved relationships with their children and improvements in their children's behaviour and attitudes. The centre is successfully involving more families through the provision of transport, crèches and by organising activities in locally accessible venues. Large community events, such as the Easter Fair and holiday clubs, are enticing more and more families to sign up to the centre's activities. Importantly, the centre is engaging groups, such as the small proportion of families from ethnic minority communities, families with disabled children and teenage parents, who often find it difficult to access services. One teenage mum's views of the support provided echoed that of many when she said, 'I love the Tots and Teens group; staff are always ready to listen and give advice'.

The centre's Learning Work Advisor's creative approach is helping some parents and carers into training or work. In the absence of on-site support from Jobcentre Plus, she takes compensatory action by making sure the most up to date vacancies are on display in the centre. Trained centre staff work with the Family Information Service to provide advice on tax credits or benefits. Together this year, they have helped many families with young children access the correct benefits. The impact of partnership working with adult learning services is more modest. However, following concerns from parents and carers about the length of time that separate English and mathematics courses were taking, a shorter joint English and mathematics course has been developed. This makes it easier for parents and carers to attend and has improved retention rates, as well as improved their basic literacy and numeracy skills. The added benefit of crèche facilities means that parents and carers can learn knowing their children are safe, well-cared for and enjoying themselves.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1

The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	3

How good is the provision?

2

The good provision is based on leaders' accurate analysis of community needs based on their increasingly good use of data and information at post code level. This identifies the diverse groups within the community, captures the proportion of families registered with the centre and numbers actually benefitting from its work. Leaders use this information to target gaps in provision so they can tailor activities to better meet the needs and interests of families who would benefit most such as, teenage parents, the small proportion of families from ethnic minority communities and families who have children with special educational needs or with a disability. Consultation with families whose children have a disability resulted in higher levels of engagement in the centre's activities beyond their weekly 'Little Treasures' session. For example, leaders found parents and carers preferred their children to attend holiday activities with their siblings. As a result, summer activities were developed to meet that need. Partnership working with The Point, a voluntary organisation, has secured a complementary package of activities for teenage parents. Young parents say they value highly the support and care provided through 'Tots and Teens' sessions that include developing their basic skills, cookery skills, financial and budgeting skills, alongside child focused activities with their children.

A good range of well-planned, activities engage families from the wider community and promote their learning and development well. Sessions such as 'Grand-parents Drop-in' and a range of cookery activities are well attended. Feedback from parents and carers show that regular family learning opportunities like 'Healthy Share', 'Number boxes', 'Share with Bear' are also well received and making a positive difference to families' enjoyment, personal development, confidence and skills. Staff provide high quality care, guidance and support. They are acutely sensitive to the needs of families. Case studies and feedback from those who have been supported, through for example, the development of their parenting skills, or help to escape domestic violence, pay testament to the difference staff are making to their well-being, sense of worth and their children's safety and care.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leaders have become accomplished in using information about their area and evaluating the impact of their work, to develop clear, succinct priorities and set challenging targets for improvement. Performance management is good. Leaders are held to account for their work through regular performance meetings with the local authority's children's centre improvement partner and Barnardo's assistant director of services as well as through the quarterly review of their performance by the advisory board. Performance management of centre staff is also good and there is regular supervision of staff which includes evaluation of progress against targets within individual action plans. Staff and key partners say they are fully involved in the development and evaluation of the centre's priorities. As a result, a strong sense of teamwork extends across the centre's work. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary and actions for monitoring the welfare of children and the sharing of concerns are outstanding and applied with rigour.

Outcomes for children and families are improving because strong partnership working ensures resources and expertise are maximised to deliver services that meet the needs and interests of an increasingly wide range of families in the area. The centre's strength lies in the good partnership working to support those most in need successfully, and at times of acute crisis, as evidenced in the reduction in the number of children at risk of significant harm. Centre staff constantly work to remove barriers through their flexible approach to service provision and delivery and by taking services and support into the community or into families' homes.

The inclusion of all parents, carers and children lies at the heart of the centre's work and any form of discrimination is tackled with vigour. Leaders are always looking for ways to involve families with young children all the centre has to offer. For example, they recognised the need to support the small number of families with young children who are from ethnic minority communities; particularly economic migrants who are settling into the area. Following consultation they developed the 'culture club', a one stop shop to provide advice across the partnership of children's centres. This has become a successful stepping-stone into other services and a high proportion are now benefitting from a range of activities including sessions to help them learn English. To make sure parents' and carers' views inform the work of the centre, a number are formally represented on the advisory board and underpinning Area Lead Groups, developed by the Blyth Valley Partnership around themes and priorities. Regular 'chill and chat' sessions provide informal opportunities for parents and carers to provide feedback on services to help change and amend what is on offer. One parent summed up the view of a number when she said, 'staff always listen to us and take on board our views'.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2

The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cramlington West and Village Children's Centre on 5-6 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The way that staff work to safeguard you and your children is outstanding. As part of the inspection, we spoke to a number of staff, including staff from a range of services who work with the centre. We looked at the centre's plans, policies and procedures as well as the many evaluations you complete following attendance at sessions and activities. We also spoke to a number of you in the sessions taking place and before sessions. Thank you so much, your views are very important and we took account of them, and the views of all the people we met, when we made our judgements. Those of you who spoke to us say you are very happy with the range of activities and the support you receive. You say you feel very safe in the centre and the buildings the centre uses across the community and also that staff are very good at making sure your children are safe and well-cared for. Many of you commented on how approachable and welcoming the staff are to you and how good they are at listening, especially in times of great need. You particularly value support provided by the centre staff who visit you in your homes to deliver one-to-one activities that help you cope in times of crisis and help your children.

The centre is making a good and positive difference to those of you who take advantage of all it has to offer, and for those of you who are facing temporary challenges or difficulties in your lives. This is because centre staff work successfully with other partners, like health and

social care services to enable you to access a range of advice and support that is tailored to what you need. For example, the centre's work with health visitors, midwives and breastfeeding peer-supporters is helping you and your children to be healthier through actions like providing healthy snacks in all sessions, 'Tiddly Winks' sessions where mums and toddlers have great fun doing physically demanding activities and the many healthy cooking activities that take place over the year. Good help when you first have your babies is making sure that more of you than average continue to breastfeed your babies. There are many activities and sessions to help both you and your children enjoy learning and achieve well, particularly in the play group, crèche and through activities like 'Share with Bear' or 'Stay and Play'. Your children behave really well in the sessions and are well prepared for nursery or school. They make good progress in many areas of their learning so by the time they finish their Reception Year at the age of five, their attainment is above average. In the playgroup, staff let parents and carers know how well their children are doing by filling in learning journals. This is a good idea and we have asked the centre manager to use these in some other sessions so more of you can celebrate your children's progress and achievements.

A number of you are able to take part in training and activities that will help prepare you for your return to employment or further your education. Those of you who do so are very appreciative but we think the centre's staff and their partners could do even more. Therefore, we have asked the centre manager to work with the adult education service in Northumberland and Jobcentre Plus to help more of you to gain the skills, confidence and qualifications that will help you achieve your future goals.

The centre manager and staff try in many ways to listen to your views and develop activities that will help you and that you would like. For example, young parents attending the 'Tots and Teens' programme, value highly the learning opportunities they have for themselves and the ideas they gain to play and learn with their children. The parents' holiday planning group appreciates the opportunities they have to develop interesting activities in the holiday times. We know they would like even more of you to let them know what you would like so, please do go along to the centre and let them know your views and join in the great things on offer.

Thank you once again to everyone who took the time to speak with us, we are very grateful and we wish you and your every success for the future.

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