

Inspection report for Unity College Blackpool Children's Centre

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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY315659 Unity College Blackpool Family Centre

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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 Unity College Blackpool College 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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team, representatives from the local authority, representatives from the governing body, health services, speech and language service, frontline workers and children's centre partners, parents and other users of the centre's facilities. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Unity College Blackpool Children's Centre is a Phase one centre located in Blackpool North, serving the Layton, Warbreck and Greenlands communities. The children's centre is an integral part of Unity College Blackpool 0- 16 through school, which opened in September 2010. The two predecessor schools, inspected in January and November 2010, comprised a secondary school with a non-maintained nursery and, on the same site, a primary partnership, managed by another primary school. Since September 2010, these have been replaced by an all-through school that includes provision from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to Key Stage 4. The federation with a local secondary school is no longer in effect. Alongside the children's centre the on-site Family and Business Centre houses an occupational-learning provision for the school. The school hosts a resourced provision for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and an integration centre for secondary school pupils who are newly arrived in Blackpool.

Blackpool is listed as the sixth most deprived local authority in the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation. The town experiences one of the highest levels of population mobility of

children and young people in the country. The centre serves families who experience significant issues relating to long-term unemployment, poor health, substance misuse and who experience complex needs associated with social and economic deprivation. The area is ranked in the top 50% most socially deprived and disadvantaged areas in the country with three areas falling within the lowest 20%. The percentage of children living in households claiming workless benefits is 29% compared to 21% found nationally.

Most children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge lower than those usually expected. The proportion of pupils who join or leave Unity College at other than the normal times is four times the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for a free school meal is approximately three times the national average. Of Blackpool residents, 96.1% are from White British Heritage. Blackpool benefits from a cosmopolitan mix of residents, but actual numbers from each constituent group are very small. Recent migration from European Union Accession States has resulted in an increasing Polish population.

The centre received designation in 2006 and it provides the appropriate range of services, including childcare provided by Unity College Blackpool Family Centre. A maximum of 49 children under eight years may attend the facility. As with Unity College, separate arrangements are in place to inspect this provision and reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The delivery of children's centre services has been delegated by the local authority to the headteacher of Unity College Blackpool. The work of the centre is monitored by the governing body and the local authority. The day-to-day management of the centre is undertaken by the Early Years Lead, alongside her senior leadership team.

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 senior leadership team, governing body and the local authority provide an excellent strategic steer for Unity College Blackpool Children's Centre. Despite ongoing and significant re-development of the whole site, good leadership and management overall, has ensured services the centre provides are targeted well to meet the needs of the most vulnerable families it serves. A temporary reduction in space has led to a sharp service review ensuring key targeted services continue to operate and promote good outcomes for families. This coupled with high levels of satisfaction from families using the centre and the continued development of outreach support has ensured the number of families registering and engaging with the centre has continued to increase.

A strong senior leadership and staff team, intent on improving the lives, opportunities and aspiration for families in the reach area and beyond, confirms parents' and carers' views that this children's centre '...helps them flourish beyond their expectations'. Furthermore, existing plans to enhance the role of parents in governance is enabling them to play a key role in the future development of this exciting campus. As a result, the centre's capacity to sustain further improvement is good overall. The centre has some good systems in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of services over time but not all partners provide outcome focused evaluations of their service preventing the centre from demonstrating the full impact of their work.

Outcomes for families are good overall and outstanding in relation to families keeping themselves safe. In addition, parents firmly report improved emotional well-being due to the accessibility of specialist agencies to address significant problems relating to substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health issues. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in their learning and development due to good quality provision replicated across all activities and close links with teaching staff within the school. Close monitoring across all outcome areas previously indentified gaps in provision for health and employment, which the centre have proceeded to tackle. As a result, parents are engaging in a good range of family and adult learning programmes alongside healthy lifestyle activities, such as swimming. However, despite a securely improving trend in breastfeeding

rates and levels of obesity, these remain much lower than national averages and, therefore, continue to be a key priority within the centres work. However, plans to tackle this are not enforced by strategically agreed targets.

The centre provides excellent care, guidance and support together with outstanding safeguarding protocols and procedures. Consequently, interventions for families experiencing domestic violence are exceptionally swift. Furthermore, referral routes to services and multi-agency support via the request for service process ensures intervention and prevention strategies work hand-in-hand and provide effective tailored support that promotes sustainable independence and stability for families who face significant difficulties in their lives.

Inclusion and anti-discriminatory practice remains at the forth front of the centres priorities. As a result, centre data confirms increasing engagement levels across all target groups and increasing numbers of children from Polish families accessing nursery places. Provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good and this is confirmed by their good levels of progress within the setting and an increasing range of provision to suit their needs.

The secure links with families accessing services in the reach area, good or better outcomes, and the value given to its services within the community, confirms that the centre's overall effectiveness is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop systems and procedures to systematically evaluate the impact of the full range of activities, services and signposting to demonstrate both short and long term outcomes for families.
- Work with the local authority to identify robust targets for improving breastfeeding and obesity within the service delivery plan.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe as they actively take on board important messages about improving home safety for younger children, taking care during seasonal events, such as bonfire night and supervising their children closely around the car park. Parents comments such as, 'It's every parents responsibility to supervise children, not just staff', confirm this. Children in the nursery equally demonstrate their knowledge of good safety practices as they remind each other to 'walk in the building not run' and 'not to climb on furniture in case they fall'.

Outcomes for children in need, those on child protection plans or who are looked after, are exceptional. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process which underpins the centres work with vulnerable families, alongside multi-agency support and positive parenting courses, address family difficulties and prevent them escalating further. Parents describe how the centre makes them feel safe because ‘...everybody is on the ball, security is tight and having all their children attending a 0-16 site provides additional safeguards for them’. Families receiving outreach and family support heed the excellent and sensitive guidance provided by the workers enabling them to sustain significant improvements in relation to their children’s emotional and physical well being.

Good practical health guidance within ‘Toasty Toddlers’ and ‘Weigh and Play’ provide parents with useful information relating to safe sleeping and weaning practices and healthy eating tips, alongside reassuring contact with a health visitor. The centre's engagement with a group of young girls through the ‘Teens and Toddlers’ study has helped to raise their confidence and self-esteem and has resulted in raised academic aspirations and no teen pregnancies amongst attendees. Signposting to groups, antenatal advice and a breastfeeding champion on site provide support for feeding mothers and centre data confirms a rising trend in both initiation and prevalence of breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. However, as with obesity levels, these remain much lower than national averages and, therefore, require a robust approach to secure further improvement.

Children make good progress in their learning and development ensuring a year-on-year improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores. Therefore, children are equipped with the necessary skills for the future and prepared well for their transition to school. Children’s progress is closely monitored and assessed through the use of learning journeys to map their progress. Good quality provision is replicated across other centre activities ensuring children who may require additional learning support are identified at any early stage. As a result, children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language make equally good gains in their learning.

Parents report increased understanding of their child’s development through Family Learning programmes, such as ‘Lets learn Together’, ‘Stories and Rhymes’ and basic literacy and numeracy courses, which increase their understanding of the importance of play, build their confidence and ability to support their children’s learning at home. Parents are consistently involved in evaluating the impact of services they engage in and their views help to design new groups, such as the ‘Twins and Multiples Group’ and ‘Little Tadpoles’ swimming classes. Currently, newly appointed parent governors are actively devising plans to seek the views of parents more formally alongside the centres strategy to re-establish a parents’ forum. New members of the governing body are showing a tremendous commitment to undertake this strategic role with vigour and determination.

Parents report that attendance at GCSE mathematics and English classes and volunteering opportunities have increased their confidence, self-esteem and aspirations for the future. ‘I surprised myself, I didn’t think I would do so well, now I’m going on to a childcare course,’ beams one elated parent. Parents value the necessity to be a good role model for their children and they are inspired to take extra steps in their personal development, as a result,

more parents including young parents are seeking careers as a means to improve their economic stability and independence. The centre provides good advice about training and employment and signposting to pertinent agencies, such as housing, and benefits advice is evident. However, outcomes for families referred to such agencies and Jobcentre Plus are less evident.

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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The care, guidance and support families receive are outstanding. Comments such as, 'this place is an absolute godsend, the impact is priceless' and 'outreach support is the best, I would not be here if it wasn't for their help', confirm this. Provision, such as 'Happy Memories,' provides a specialist group for children who have experienced significant trauma in their lives and 'PiP Start' and 'PiP Mix It' provides well for children with additional needs and their older siblings so they can spend quality time together during school holidays and during designated stay and play sessions.

Well-established inter-agency work across Unity College and with health professionals, the Parenting Team and Homestart, combined with effective outreach support and robust safeguarding ensures families receive swift and tailored interventions pertinent to their needs. Weekly 'Request for Service' meetings provide a central referral point for the coordination of multiagency services and a forum to review outcomes following interventions. The use of the CAF alongside Team around the Family (TAF) meetings ensures the holistic needs of the family are considered. Consequently, some parents have been able to overcome a range of difficulties pertinent to several family members and sustain positive improvements.

Participation rates across most services are good and routinely include young parents, grandparents and fathers in particular, as well as many vulnerable families from outside the reach area. Increased monitoring of activities has highlighted gaps in provision relating to health and employment leading to a concerted increase in related activities. A concerted

approach has increased engagement particularly within the three lowest super output areas and across all user and target groups. Furthermore, supportive links with health professionals ensure new families are routinely signposted to the centre for membership, which is helping to address the lack of live birth data. The temporary closure of the community café has not impeded parents wish to enjoy the company of welcoming staff in the reception area as suitable drink facilities have been provided. As a result, the reorganisation of space allows the full range of groups to continue.

The range and quality of provision ensures that both children and adults make good progress in their educational and personal development and family learning outcomes are now being tracked to monitor both short and long term progress through the 'Family Tracker' and 'Success from the Start' information systems. Regular support from the speech and language team alongside the implementation of 'Every child a Talker' initiative ensures children at risk of a language delay are identified at an early stage. As a result, parents report a 'real difference' in their child's language acquisition and readiness for school. Parents describe how they joined the centre for 'Baby massage and Baby Sign' and before long they had progressed to a confidence building course, GCSE mathematics and are now seeking volunteer work, training or employment. However, access to resources within the Business and Enterprise centre, such as the hair and beauty salon and training facilities, are not yet available for volunteering and work experience opportunities but the centre have plans to pursue this.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The senior leadership team, governing body and the local authority provide an excellent strategic steer for the children's centre ensuring the development of services and continuous improvement remain the upmost priority during the challenge of reconstruction. The focus placed on the meeting the needs of Blackpool residents and those particularly residing within the reach area are firmly embedded in all that the children's centre sets out to achieve, hence increased key priorities within health and employment and the engagement of vulnerable groups. The headteacher and Early Years Lead work in unison and ensure robust strategic and operational management. Development plans are precise and firmly focused on the right priorities. However, systematic evaluation across all centre services and interventions are not fully embedded preventing the centre from demonstrating the full impact on outcomes.

Accountability arrangements are robust and staff at all levels display an impressive drive and sense of responsibility for their individual roles and their contribution towards improved outcomes for families. The governing body are exceptionally well organised and ensure the school, business centre and children’s centre are equally represented, supported and appropriately challenged. A rigorous annual conversation led by the local authority, close monitoring of by the Extended Services Committee and detailed termly reports to the board ensures that the centre receives firm challenge in relation to its performance. In addition, the recruitment of three new parent governors is bringing an array of innovative ideas to collate views more widely and involve parents firmly in strategic leadership and drive improvement.

Safeguarding arrangements are exemplary. Criminal Record Bureau checks or service level agreements confirm the suitability of those working and delivering services within the centre. Additional safeguarding protocols are firmly in place to ensure the ongoing suitability of staff and these are effectively implemented where there is cause to do so. Building checks and risk assessments are rigorously undertaken and security arrangements remain constantly under review by vigilant staff in order to manage an exceptionally busy reception area. A firm process is in place to ensure effective case management, including the recording and upkeep of family files. Furthermore, staff training particularly for outreach support workers is extensive ensuring staff are able to identify and support a range of family difficulties.

The centre provides good value for money overall. The Unity College site is being carefully managed with building work pending. Consequently, the best use of space and resources are maintained and financial management remains robust with ongoing priority given to the sustainability of services. As a result, outcomes are good or better and provision is well matched to local needs ensuring increasing numbers of families within target group’s access services which enhance their health, social stability and independence. A significant amount of work, targeted at specific groups including teenage parents, fathers and those families from minority ethnic groups, has resulted in a secure improvement in their engagement. However, the centre is keen to further improve the engagement of fathers.

Partnerships with health professionals are particularly strong with their active engagement in sessions, such as ‘Baby Weigh’ and secure links have been established with midwives offering maternal services located at a hub centre. The Childcare Partnership Scheme has established good links with private, voluntary and independent providers of childcare although childminder training and support has been redirected to an alternative site due to a reduction in training space. Close working relationships with Barnardos, Parenting team, children’s social care and other partners ensure vulnerable families and those most in need, receive timely and effective interventions.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting 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

Inspection outcomes for Unity College Blackpool Family Centre have been considered as part of this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Unity College Blackpool Children's Centre on 10 and 11 November 2011 and we judged the centre as good overall. However, there are several outstanding features.

As part of our investigations we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff, partners who work with you. We found that your centre provides an exceptionally safe and welcoming place for you and your children. Those of you we spoke with said that the centre had helped you to improve safety in your homes, develop more positive ways to manage your children's behaviour and improve your emotional well-being by accessing specialist agencies. As a result, some parents have been able to overcome significant problems, such as, mental health issues and others have received excellent support which has enabled them to flee domestic violence and, therefore, protect their children.

Parents who spoke with us all said that your children's centre is a warm and welcoming place, full of staff who they feel they can speak to when they need help or support. We found that the centre was effective at helping people at times in their lives when they most need it. Parents told us that action was taken quickly and different people and organisations worked well as a team to support both children and adults when in difficulty or distress. We

also found that the centre has excellent safeguarding procedures which ensure families are well protected in the centre and during the work they undertake with you.

The centre provides you with lots of information about how to lead healthy and active lives which has encouraged many of you to attend 'Tiny Tadpoles' swimming club at the Hilton Hotel. The centre was able to show that health-related activities were helping to improve your understanding of how to eat well and take more physical exercise and it was pleasing to discover that mothers were able to get help with breastfeeding matters. However, despite a securely improving trend in breastfeeding rates and levels of obesity, these remain much lower than they should be so we have asked centre leaders to tackle these issues further.

Through our observations and discussions with you and the staff, we could see that children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their learning and development due to good quality activities such as, 'Jo Jingles', 'Stay and Play' and crèche sessions. Furthermore, we found that children attending Unity College Family Centre nursery also make good strides in their learning and development which ensures they have the skills they need for starting school. The centre is eager to meet the needs of the whole family and this is seen in activities, such as 'Pip Start' and 'Happy Memories' which cater for children who have suffered particular traumas or who just need a place to play with their brothers and sisters who have a special educational needs and/or disabilities .

The children's centre provides a range of good quality activities which are aimed at helping families improve their lives. Your views firmly support this as you tell us that you are happy with the activities you use because they have helped you in lots of different ways. For example, some of you have found the opportunities to undertake GCSE mathematics and English courses have helped you to help your children in their own learning. These opportunities have also encouraged some of you to seek other courses or pursue careers, such as those in childcare. Parents described how they ...'surprised themselves because they did so well in these courses'. They are also proud of being a good role model to their children as they know it will encourage them to do well too.

People in charge of running the centre are doing a really good job. The children's centre leadership team have worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live and the families who live here. The centre has also taken steps to encourage parents to be part of the governing body. Those who have been recruited are especially keen to hear your views about the centre and they already have some really good ideas about how to meet and speak with you and find out what you want from the centre in the future.

Centre leaders are facing some major difficulties as the development of Unity College continues, but they have done extremely well to keep all the activities running and continue to increase the number of families accessing the centre during this challenging time. However, the centre sometimes misses opportunities to capture the impact of the work it does because it does not always receive information from some of their partners to show the difference particular activities make to your lives. So we have asked them to improve

the way in which they record this information. Overall, this is a good centre which is making a positive difference to your lives.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us, we are very grateful for your help and we wish you well for the future.

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