

# Inspection report for Audley and Queen's Park Children's Centre

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Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	383620
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Centre leader	Sheila Moss/Tracy Lysons
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY287349 Audley CC

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## Introduction

The inspection covers 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 registered Early Years provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with parents and carers, children and centre staff including the acting geographical manager and the operational manager. Interviews were also held with local authority representatives, partners and members of the local management board. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Audley and Queens Park Children's Centre was designated in 2004 as a phase one centre that is co-located with a neighbourhood learning centre, providing a campus approach. The centre serves 1171 children under the age of five years. It is located in a deprived area of Blackburn with Darwen where poor health is a major issue. Life expectancy is significantly lower than nationally and within other areas of the local authority and a high proportion of children are living in families who are claiming incapacity and other disability benefits. Many families are living in poverty, face issues of high levels of unemployment and poor dental health. Most children enter Early Years learning with knowledge and skills that are below those expected for their age. The centre serves families living in one of the 10% most deprived areas in the country. Over 60% of families are from Black and minority ethnic groups.

The centre is accountable to the local authority and is governed by a local management board. The operational manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre. The Early Years geographical manager has responsibility for three children's centres

across Blackburn with Darwen and leads the services provided by the centre and co-ordinates those provided by its partners. At the time of the inspection the operational manager had been in post five months, and the acting geographical manager had been in post for six weeks. Audley and Queens Park Children’s Centre works closely with the other twelve children’s centres in the local authority. A multi-agency team that includes qualified teachers, midwives, health visitors, credit union and Jobcentre Plus provides services for the centre.

## 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

‘I am what I am because of this centre’, a view expressed by many families, sums up why this is a good and improving centre. This welcoming centre is used well by an increasing proportion of families in the reach area; in particular it is being used well by those from target groups. Staff and partners are committed to providing an inclusive environment for children and their families. Of particular note is the high number of mothers who initiate and sustain breastfeeding and the whole organisation’s commitment to improving the health of the local community. Daily menus at the café take good account of promoting a balanced diet while recognising the different cultural and religious needs of families. The centre provides a particularly safe environment that is at the heart of the community and is rightly proud of the high regard with which it is held by local people. Central to this safe environment are the welcoming reception and caretaking staff and the café and its ever-cheerful team who work tirelessly together to create an oasis of calm.

A key strength is that the centre has grown from the outset through consultation with local families. Managers and the staff team have demonstrated determination to improve the lives of local children and families at a time when changes to the centre’s available resources, including staffing levels, have been a challenge. They have a clear understanding of the strengths of the centre and where further improvement is still required. For example, they are aware that while adults are signposted to accredited and non-accredited courses and training, the impact of this is not effectively evaluated in terms of attendance and improved outcomes and that there is more to do to enable families to participate in volunteering.

Challenging leadership and a commitment to offer the best services possible are key characteristics of this good centre. The high priority given to safeguarding is central to everything the centre does. Families benefit well from the expertise of a diverse and multi-skilled team, who make excellent use of their strengths to ensure that the centre provides good value for money through sustainable working, careful monitoring of room usage, and very effective partnership working. All have a real commitment to improving provision for families in the area, in particular those from target groups. Particularly good assessment of needs and care, guidance and support empowers parents to overcome many difficulties in their lives. Very well planned transition support is beginning to help prepare children settle into school quickly. Centre users are highly enthusiastic about the high-quality provision and the impact that the centre is having on improving their lives. Typical views users express are, 'they have given me a new life', and 'without the centre I would still be alone and isolated, with nowhere to go for help and support'.

The centre is highly-focused on improving further and the capacity for sustained improvement is good. Self-evaluation, supported by quarterly performance monitoring, is beginning to be used more effectively to monitor and review progress. Data information is increasingly used to compare the impact of the centre's work against local and national performance indicators. Progress towards targets is discussed at senior management level and in team meetings. The local management board and supporting sub-committees are powerful tools that are good opportunities for parents to have their voice heard. In recent months, due to changes in the leadership and management these opportunities have declined and fewer parents are currently represented. The centre is fully aware of this and is working hard to increase user representation through the 'Family Voices' group.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Make best use of the good practice in the assessment of early learning to develop effective planning, tracking and monitoring that focuses on the progress and achievement that adults make. Ensure that the planning of individual learning and course development provides adults with accessible learning pathways to enable them to achieve their aspirations.
- Work closely with partners to develop and embed a wider range of volunteering opportunities in the centre and the wider community to support more parents into employment.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>2</b>
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A high proportion of families, including those in target groups and those most in need of intervention and support, make extensive use of the centre's services and are achieving good and improving outcomes. A particularly strong focus on breastfeeding across the local authority is having a significant impact on increasing the proportion of mothers who initiate and sustain breastfeeding, with rates currently at 46%, and higher than local and national

rates. The centre and café promote healthy snacks at all groups so that parents understand the importance of families eating healthily. The proportion of children in the reception year who are overweight or obese increased in the last year.

Many parents report that because of the centre’s supportive atmosphere they have made many new friends and feel far less isolated. Activities such as ‘Story and Rhyme Time’ and ‘Stay and Play’ have a strong focus on developing communication skills and because of this children who start their early learning with communication, language and literacy skills with below age-related expectations, make good progress. Consequently the proportion of children achieving six points in personal, social and emotional development and communication language and literacy is close to the national average by the end of the Reception Year.

Families who attend parenting courses report a clear improvement in their confidence and parenting skills. One parent said. ‘I am a much better parent and we are a much happier family thanks to the centre.’ Families who attend the centre trust the staff and feel able to share any concerns with them. Stringent reviews and monitoring for children on child protection plans shows that there is a significant and sustained improvement in outcomes with excellent and well-planned ongoing support and provision for the children and families.

Centre users are continuously consulted on the quality and range of provision at the centre. A wide range of feedback mechanisms, including the innovative feedback apple tree, are used to gather honest feedback from users across all groups. Families and the wider community see the centre as being at the heart of the community. The words of one parent summarises the importance of the centre to the community: ‘... we are blessed by the children’s centre.’ Children behave well and are developing useful skills for the future such as co-operation and independence and families have respect for each other. Currently opportunities for volunteering are low both in the centre and in the wider community..

The Credit Union is very effectively supporting children and their families to save and, where necessary, to adopt safe borrowing practices. Adults are supported and encouraged to attend education and training courses but currently there is little follow-up to evaluate how many have attended signposted training, or how many have progressed into further learning or employment. Centre leaders are therefore aware that, as yet, the provision is only helping some families, including target groups, to undertake adult learning leading into employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.</b>	<b>2</b>

**How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre has a high level of contact with target groups in the area; some 96% of children in the area are registered and 75% are accessing at least one session. Staff know the families who use the centre and they are continuously reaching out to include others across the community. As a result, registrations and participation by local families, including those from target groups, are good and improving. For example, 89% of Black and Minority Ethnic children are being reached through centre activities. Well-planned systems ensure a very fast response for families and individuals, especially in times of crisis. ‘They saved my life’ and ‘we are still a family because of the centre’ are typical of the comments parents made on the support and help received during difficult circumstances. Strong partnership working across the local authority through weekly referral meetings means that assessment of child and family needs is comprehensive and used well. A good number of children are de-escalated from the different levels of concern due to the effectiveness of assessments through the Common Assessment Framework and the introduction of the ‘Think Family’ approach to working with families.

Families turn to the centre in times of crisis and feel well-supported. For example, those experiencing domestic violence have been helped to find safety. Speakers of other languages receive good help to attend interviews with other agencies, as well as support to improve their language skills. High-quality information and signposting is available throughout the centre from centre staff, partners and through the colourful, up-to-date notice boards, written in clear, understandable language. More sensitive information regarding domestic abuse and sexual health is displayed confidentially in washrooms within the centre.

The centre celebrates achievement well and helps to raise aspirations. Users grow in confidence and extend their personal and social skills well. As one parent said, ‘I was so proud to achieve something and for the staff to think it was important enough to celebrate....how good is that?’ All of the case studies gathered by the centre clearly demonstrate considerable progress made by families in target groups. Information from assessments is used well by the centre to provide opportunities to meet the identified needs of both parents and children.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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

**How effective are the leadership and management?** **2**

The geographical and centre managers lead with passion, clarity and determination. The work of all staff is highly-valued and morale is high. This has been maintained through a recent and challenging period of local authority review of budgets and staffing. The openness and friendliness with which staff work together is extended to the families who use the centre and reflect a real commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Staff have a positive approach; they evaluate their work and value the opportunities to learn from one another, from parents and partners as an integrated team. During the inspection senior leaders were quickly identifying how they could make improvements and discussing their immediate implementation. Self-evaluation is increasingly becoming an integral part of appraisals and supportive monthly supervision meetings.

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and well-understood. The local management board provides good challenge to centre staff and makes sure that the centre’s resources are managed appropriately; as one board member said, ‘We don’t let them get away with anything... if they haven’t done something we asked them to do, they tell us why’. As a group, its members are increasingly confident to act where necessary to support improvements or to question proposals. This is complemented by good local authority support and challenge. The centre provides good value for money and this has been consistently achieved through collaborative use of staff expertise and space across the centre, the geographical area and the local authority.

Safeguarding is of the highest priority in the centre and the local area; procedures are comprehensive and very effective. The centre manager is particularly confident to challenge concerns and to escalate incidents to the highest level. Consequently children, their families and staff are exceptionally safe. The premises are very secure and all rooms have keypad locks. All required systems and procedures are in place to check the suitability of staff, and senior staff are trained in safe recruitment. A wide range of training about safeguarding, for example managing challenge, domestic violence and lone working has been undertaken by the staff team.

The inclusion of children and their families is central to the centre’s work and sensitive and carefully-delivered programmes such as those for teenage mothers and activities to support the most vulnerable children to settle well into school are testament to this. Imagery used in displays throughout the centre reflects diversity and this helps a wide range of people to feel valued and respected. Community languages are valued and promoted, whilst ensuring that those whose first language is not English are encouraged to improve their English to support them in their move towards employment.



These are the grades for leadership and management:

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>2</b>

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

Information made available from the recent inspection of Audley and Queens Park Early Years provision was taken into consideration.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Audley and Queen's Park Children's Centre on 16 and 17 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We really enjoyed chatting with you during your activities, around the centre and in the centre café. We were particularly moved by the huge changes the centre has made to your lives and by some of the experiences you shared with us. Throughout the inspection we were constantly told by you and your children of the difference that the centre is making to you. You were very clear about your views of how good the centre is; you were very helpful to us – thank you.

Those of you we spoke to say that the centre is a very safe and welcoming place to be where you and your children can make new friends and take part in activities. Many of you told us how much you enjoyed attending sessions such as 'Messy Play' and the 'Family Sundays' where there is the chance for whole families to come to activities at the centre. Everyone we spoke to said that the staff really listen to what you have to say, particularly when you would like to try a new activity. My colleague really enjoyed attending 'Stay and Play' and 'Teatime Fun,' she was very impressed with your enthusiasm and the range of activities that were on offer. You are very enthusiastic about the walking bus to the toy library and the opportunities it provides you with to try out new toys whilst getting some exercise and seeing more of the local area. The family health clinic is used really well and you told us what a bonus it is knowing it is there if you need some advice or information about something that is troubling you.

Everyone we spoke to was really positive about how supportive and approachable the centre is. Many of you told us how helpful and understanding the staff are, particularly when you are facing challenges or just struggling with day-to-day life. We were extremely impressed by the way the centre has helped you to make new friends, learn English and to get jobs. You told us how much you enjoy the activities that the centre offers and that by coming to the centre you have made new friends and feel less isolated. A lot of mums were really enthusiastic about the help that you are given when breastfeeding and also the information you are given about when and how to introduce solids to your child. You told us that staff do not make you feel silly when asking about the types of food to give your toddler, but give you really helpful information. In particular the information the centre provides on eating healthily on a low income is really valued by all of you. You all really appreciate the varied and economical but healthy menu that the café provides. My colleague and I really enjoyed the food we had whilst we were at the centre!

We were very impressed by the way that the centre ensures that you are safe at the centre and at home, through the information it provides you with on home safety and the way it helps you to keep you and your family safe. The centre provides plenty of opportunities for new parents to be given useful information on how to manage their children's behaviour. The team that leads the centre are motivated and knows exactly what they need to do to make sure it continues to improve. They really want you to be more involved and are working hard to get more of you involved in 'Family Voices' and the local management

board and they are looking at the best ways to make this happen. Although the centre collects information on how many of you are using the centre we have asked them to collect information that shows how many of you are doing courses and what you are learning, as well as how many of you are moving on to more training and into jobs. We have also asked the centre to make sure that more of you have the chance to be involved in working as volunteers at the centre which a number of you would very much like to do.

Thank you once again for your help and we wish you and your families every success for the future.

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