

Inspection report for Denton South Children's Centre

Local authority	Tameside
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Reporting inspector	Priscilla McGuire

Centre leader	Mrs Emma Lewis
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team, senior representatives from the local authority and representatives from the health services and other partner agencies. They also met workers from community groups, staff and parents and carers.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including case studies, evaluations and action plans.

Information about the centre

Denton South Children's Centre is a Phase two centre based within the Haughton Green community centre in Tameside. The single storey building used by the centre is owned by the National Health Service and leased to a local community group. The children's centre shares the use of the building with other community based organisations. Centre services include, access to health provision, outreach support, information and guidance and family support.

The community served by the centre is characterised by high levels of deprivation and poor health. There is a mix of social housing and privately owned houses in the area. Most families are of White British heritage, but an increasing number of families are from a range of minority ethnic groups. Obesity rates and rates of smoking during pregnancy are higher than national averages. Teenage conception and pregnancy rates are also higher than the national average. The number of nought to four year olds living in households claiming housing benefit and child tax benefits is around 31.2%, which is higher than the average for Tameside which is 25.02%. Children's level of skills on entry to early years education 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 families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Denton South Children's Centre provides a satisfactory service to families. The centre has recently been re-located to the Youth and Family team within the local authority. Staff value the opportunity they now have to access expertise and resources from a range of other professionals who work alongside them within the re-structured service. They also welcome the increased opportunities to access staff development courses that are relevant to their work with children and families. The centre is still in a period of transition because a further 're-design' of local authority services is expected. Staffing resources have been reduced as a result of re-structuring and staff, including the senior practitioner who manages the centre, works in other centres in the locality. This limits their ability to have a regular presence at the centre. However, staff remain committed to improving the life chances of families who live in an area that is characterised by significant social problems.

Strategic and operational arrangements to safeguard families are good. Safeguarding practice is regularly reviewed because the capacity of staff to respond appropriately to safeguarding issues is a priority. This is demonstrated in the regular participation of staff in a range of professional development opportunities and wider local initiatives relating to safeguarding. Signposting and referral mechanisms are also used well to ensure families receive support from the most appropriate agency. 'I was going through a rough patch but was well supported by staff.' This comment is typical of parents and carers who feel well supported by the centre. They feel 'listened to' and valued. The quality of the package of care, guidance and support provided to families is a key strength of the centre and families feel confident that they will receive sensitive support from the centre during times of crisis.

Leaders and managers recognise the challenge they face in acquiring and using up-to-date data to monitor the impact of provision in the reach area. They have, therefore, produced an action plan to improve the quality and availability of data. The lack of up-to-date reliable data for the reach area limits the centre's ability to monitor and demonstrate the impact of provision on its target groups. The centre is also not yet in a position to use data to accurately monitor participation rates by target groups.

Some data on the characteristics of the reach area are available and are used to help the centre plan its services. Centre staff compensate for the gap in reliable data by using community consultation, partnership links, qualitative information and any other data they can obtain, to assess needs and plan provision. Centre staff highly value the input of parents and carers in shaping services and user engagement is, therefore, good. Views of parents and carers are captured through the effective Parents' Forum but also through work with partners to conduct detailed consultation with families using in-depth discussions and surveys.

Accountability arrangements are clear but changes in staffing and centre management have left some lack of clarity about the function of the advisory board. An action plan to amend the terms of reference for the 'Total Family' steering group has, therefore, been produced to ensure that members of the group are clear about their roles and responsibilities in relation to governance of the children's centre. Although self-evaluation is not sufficiently evaluative and well informed by data, leaders and managers are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses in provision and have action plans in place to make improvements. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is, therefore, satisfactory as is the quality of leadership and management.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

The local authority to work with the centre to:

- Implement rigorous data management systems to ensure effective monitoring of impact of provision.
- Clarify governance arrangements to ensure the function of the advisory board is well understood.
- Strengthen performance management arrangements by improving the quality of the self-evaluation process and action planning.
- Monitor regularly the impact of changes in staffing capacity and resources in relation to service delivery.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for families are satisfactory. Staff and partner organisations that work with the centre understand the challenges faced by families and the impact this has on their emotional and physical health. The centre responds satisfactorily to the health needs of the community by offering services to help parents and carers take action to improve their health and that of their children. For example, many families have taken advantage of the centre's 'toothbrush scheme,' which offers a selection of three good quality dental hygiene products at low cost. Evidence from the health services indicates that oral health in the community is improving and levels of tooth decay are reducing. Other health issues within the reach area, such as low breastfeeding rates are being tackled through activities, such as

a weekly breastfeeding support group and also through the support available from breastfeeding support mentors.

The centre responds well to safeguarding issues that affect families. Staff use their location within the Youth and Family team to work in an integrated way with a wide range of professionals to protect families from key target groups, such as lone parents and teenage parents. Home safety is actively promoted and parents' and carers' understanding of how to keep their homes safe is well demonstrated in the learning points they record. For example, key points recorded by parents and carers after learning about home safety include, 'I feel confident now because knives are locked away', 'I know what to do if a fire breaks out' and 'I'm more careful about ironing now and about leaving the iron on when I'm not in the room.' The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used effectively to assess the individual needs of families. Staff also work effectively with a range of professionals to support families who have children on child protection plans.

Evidence from parents, carers and children confirm their enjoyment of activities at the centre, such as a 'Wonderful place to play' and 'Baby Babble'. Data from schools in the area show that the achievement of children across the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving and also that the gap between the number of children in the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is narrowing. Since 2007-08, the percentage of children who achieve 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased from 31.1% to 50%. Children also make satisfactory progress in developing skills for the future, such as independence and social skills. Adult learning and training programmes for parents and carers are organised on a 'needs led' basis. No adult learning courses are included in the current timetable of activities but previously run courses on literacy and numeracy have been successful in developing the knowledge and skills of some parents and carers. However, the centre is not able to demonstrate participation rates for adult learning courses or participation rates by target group.

The centre works satisfactorily with agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus, the local library and the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), to provide advice and guidance to families about job search skills, employment and welfare support. Sessions provided by the CAB service are well attended. Through the individual support they receive from outreach workers and through their participation on parenting courses, parents and carers improve their ability to manage the behaviour of their children. Parents and carers also make an active contribution to decision making through their involvement with the Parents' Forum. For example, in response to suggestions from parents and carers, a First Aid course is being organised.

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	3
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 children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3
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?

3

Centre leaders, managers and partners understand the key social characteristics of the reach area and use this knowledge to assess needs. From their location within a community centre that is used by a range of agencies, staff use their links productively with community based workers, such as the health improvement manager and the regeneration development worker. Through outreach work the centre satisfactorily monitors the needs of key target groups such as lone parents, teenage parents and vulnerable families including those who live with domestic violence. The restructuring of the service has led to an increased focus on targeted provision for the most vulnerable families. For example, whereas parenting courses were offered on an open access basis, parents and carers are now referred to these courses. Data although limited, shows that parents, carers and children from key target groups are attending centre activities.

Activities for children are clearly linked to Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes. Observations of individual children are also linked to key areas of learning and the information is used to plan sessions for children. 'It was a great help in understanding how children learn through all sorts of ways', was the comment of one parent, which demonstrates the impact of the centre in helping them to learn how they can support their children's learning and development. Provision for adults to learn is purposeful, particularly in relation to the parenting programmes. For example, the parenting course run in conjunction with the Barnado's charity is linked to outcomes around improving parenting skills, improving the behaviour of children and parents' and carers' understanding and ability to cope with domestic and community violence.

The quality of care and support for families is good. Through their productive links with professionals, such as speech and language therapists, charity organisations, such as Homestart, social care teams and health services, centre staff provide an integrated package of care, guidance and support for families. Case study evidence and testimonies from parents and carers demonstrate the effectiveness of the centre in providing timely intervention and support. The quality of care for families has also been enhanced for families who attend parenting courses. Parents and carers on these courses now complete a 'parent support contract' which is used to record an initial assessment of family issues and to agree intended outcomes arising from participation on a course.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

3

How effective are the leadership and management?

Leaders and managers are committed to improving the quality of provision and staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The arrangements for governing the centre are less clear in terms of roles and functions within the advisory board. The senior practitioner for early years who manages the centre does not have a daily presence at the centre, however, arrangements for the day-to-day operational management of the centre are satisfactory. Staffing and other resources, although limited, are prioritised to ensure the needs of key target groups and the most vulnerable groups are met. Outcomes are all at least satisfactory and the centre has a positive impact on the lives of families. Value for money, therefore, is satisfactory. The centre works with a wide range of partners from the Youth and Family team and also with external representatives of the voluntary and statutory sectors, such as charities, the health service, the police and community groups. Partnership work has a satisfactory impact on improving outcomes for families.

Centre staff, the senior leadership team and the locality manager, who has strategic responsibility for the centre, have regular meetings to monitor provision and share information and good practice from across the locality. Processes for self-evaluation are satisfactory but because of the limited quality and availability of data, self-evaluation is not well informed by data nor is it sufficiently linked to the delivery plan. This in turn has an impact on the arrangements for performance management, which are satisfactory rather than good. Evaluations from parents and carers and children are used adequately.

User engagement is good, particularly as a result of the effective way in which the centre works with parents and carers as partners. The work of the centre's volunteer peer mentors is good. These mentors are a small group of parent volunteers from the Parents' Forum, who work with the health improvement manager and regeneration development worker based within the community centre. Together they visit other parents in the community and conduct detailed consultations about the needs of the community and also collect views about the centre. Their work is making a good contribution to shaping the future of both the community centre and the children's centre.

Multi-agency work to provide early intervention and early support for families is effective. Case study evidence shows that the centre makes a prompt response to safeguarding issues that arise in families such as domestic violence or neglect. Outcomes from a serious case review have been used to develop a safeguarding action plan, which is being used to improve safeguarding practice, particularly in areas such as staff supervision. The centre has a targeted approach to safeguarding to ensure that practice is relevant to the needs of the community. For example, as a result of the high rates of sexually transmitted diseases in the community, staff have received training in sexual health. They have also completed training to equip them with the skills to have informed discussions with families about sensitive matters around sexual health.

The centre is committed to inclusive practice and satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity. The number of families with children who have additional needs is low in the reach area but support is provided for families as required. Through the work of an area special educational needs coordinator, staff have been trained to work confidently with families that have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
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 Denton South Children's Centre on 17 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. We appreciate the time you took to speak to use during the inspection and value your contributions to the inspection process.

We know that the centre has been through various changes in recent months and this has obviously led to changes in staff and in the number of activities offered at the centre. Because of all the changes, particularly to the number of staff who now work at the centre, we have asked the local authority and the managers to keep reviewing how changes to staffing affect the centre.

In spite of all the changes that have occurred, we found that the needs of families remain a key a priority for staff. Like you, we felt welcomed at the centre and know that you feel well supported and cared for by the staff who work at the centre and also by staff from other organisations who work with them. We think the support and care offered by the centre is one of its key strengths. The way that staff can get in touch with lots of different professionals to help you and your families is something we know you appreciate.

We also know that the centre staff work really hard to keep families in the community safe and this is something that we think is another key strength of what the centre does. Staff are constantly improving their knowledge and their skills to make sure they know how best they can protect families from harm. We know from your comments that many of you have also improved your learning about what you can do at home to make your families safe.

From talking to you and reading some of your comments, we can see that your children benefit from attending activities at the centre. We can also see from looking at some statistics, that the achievement of children in the area has improved in recent years and this is encouraging.

We found that the staff understand the challenges faced by the local community but with more statistics about the area, they could get to understand even more about what's going on. For that reason, we have asked the local authority to work with the centre to obtain

better quality data about the health of the community and other issues. We also think that the staff will be able to make more accurate judgements about the difference the centre makes to the lives of families, if they not only have better data but also if they improve the way they assess the impact of the centre and plan for the future. One more thing we have asked the centre to do is to make arrangements for governing the centre much clearer, so that everybody who is involved in managing and monitoring the centre is clear about their roles and responsibilities.

Once again, many thanks for your time during the inspection and we wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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