

# Inspection report for Ditton Children's Centre

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Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	383582
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Ditton Nursery School 110957
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Ditton Early Years Centre EY280132

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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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 maintained nursery 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff and senior managers, health professionals, local community partners, user groups and parents and carers. They spoke to the chairperson of the advisory board. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation and data.

## Information about the centre

Ditton Children's Centre was designated a phase one centre in 2005. The centre offers a range of child and family services with the support of partners and commissioned services at Ditton Community Centre and Ditton Library. The main site is located alongside the Ditton Community Centre and Youth Centre and is adjacent to the Ditton Early Years Centre. The centre is in the south of Widnes and provides services across a wide, socially and economically mixed area in the wards of Ditton, Hale and Broadheath. The reach community is amongst the 30% most deprived nationally and parts of Ditton are amongst the 10% most deprived. Unemployment rates are decreasing but around 25% of children under five live in households dependent on workless benefits in parts of the reach area. The proportion of families from minority ethnic backgrounds is very small.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is delivered through various settings and groups in the reach area. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills at an average level expected for their age, although their levels of speech, language and communication are often below average levels.

The Think Family Principal Manager manages the Ditton Children’s Centre and is also responsible for another centre nearby. The centre reports directly to Halton local authority’s Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Children’s Trust. The recently established advisory board which helps steer the work of the four children’s centres in Widnes consists of a range of professionals, members of the community, partners and five parents. Two of these parents are from the Ditton Centre. The manager of the Kings Cross Charity, a Widnes based voluntary organisation, is the chairperson.

## 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

Ditton Children’s Centre is a good centre which meets the needs of children and their families well. The centre enjoys a good reputation and for many families it has been a ‘lifeline’ when they were struggling to cope. ‘I am more confident now to be a good mum and my children enjoy playing together’ is a typical comment that reflects the views of the community. The strong leadership team, all staff and partners have worked vigorously to ensure that provision and outcomes are good. Particularly strong support and guidance is given and for many vulnerable families it is outstanding. The centre has successfully increased participation by isolated children and families through well integrated and collaborative working with partners. The centre is managed particularly well, its leadership is outstanding and governance arrangements are good. However, the role of parents and carers in decision-making through the advisory board is less well established. The impact of services is monitored and evaluated thoroughly through the use of recent and accurate data. The self-evaluation is largely accurate and identifies well areas for further improvement. The centre has good capacity for further improvement.

Outcomes for children and families who use the centre are good overall. There are good improvements in children’s personal, social and emotional skills, in sustained rates of breastfeeding and the number of families living in workless households. Year-on-year the gap between those who achieve well and others is narrowing. Timely referrals, effective signposting and swift intervention enable concerns to be addressed quickly and prompt action to be taken. Substantial measures are in place to improve children’s communication skills and there is good early identification of children who need additional support.

However, children's progress in developing speaking and listening skills declined in 2011. The centre has not yet had a significant impact on some aspects of healthy lifestyles, such as obesity and smoking rates.

Services are delivered in an inclusive environment and there is good promotion of equality and diversity. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding and informed by excellent measures to ensure that all participants understand their responsibilities in keeping children and adults safe. Potentially vulnerable families feel confident to raise their concerns in what they describe as 'a safe space.' Families benefit from the centre's very effective partnerships and with health and social care receive services to meet the widest possible range of their pre and postnatal needs. Close working relationships with childcare and early years providers are improving children's learning and development. Parents benefit from good opportunities for further education, training and employment.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase parents' involvement and influence in decision-making through active participation in the advisory board.
- Extend opportunities for families to learn further about healthy eating, the benefits of not smoking and the value of exercise and measure the impact of these initiatives.

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

<b>2</b>
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The centre offers a good range of integrated services to promote healthy lifestyles and well-being for children and their parents and carers. Carefully planned collaborative work with midwives and breastfeeding buddies enables new mothers to get focused advice on the benefits of breastfeeding. This has led to increased rates of mothers maintaining breastfeeding, which are now above the borough average. Family engagement workers give focused support to pregnant teenagers in the home and play workers encourage new parents to attend baby massage sessions. Child obesity rates have fallen slightly, following a sustained awareness raising programme for parents but they are still too high in parts of the reach area where parents are not actively involved. As one parent said 'I have changed my shopping habits. I did not realise how big the portion sizes I gave my child were'. Users are encouraged strongly to take more exercise, including through active play, dancing and supported swimming classes. Parents and carers are encouraged to stop smoking, but these measures have had limited success in some areas. Families are signposted to programmes such as 'dump the dummy', which helps to reduce children's dental cavities, which are high in some parts of the area.

The centre is a very safe place and users consider security arrangements to be excellent. Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and for others and learn how to manage risks safely through play. Staff encourage particularly safe working practice and help families to learn positive ways to manage their children's behaviour. Families learn, and are more aware of, how to reduce risks to children in their homes through first aid training,

home safety checks, low cost safety equipment and effective fire prevention.

The centre's reach area has some high levels of deprivation, some parents are particularly vulnerable and cases of known domestic violence are high. Children are well protected by the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) before situations become threatening. Outcomes for children on child protection plans and those in need have improved because of particularly effective outreach work and early intervention. Case studies record well the benefits of regular visits to potentially vulnerable families and the value of prompt specialist support from relevant agencies.

Messy Play and Stay and Play workshops enable children to become more confident and to learn new skills and to explore new materials creatively. Parents discover, by joining in, how play activities can help with their children's development and improve their own parenting skills. Children make good progress in the development of their personal, social and emotional skills. Children are well prepared for school because they make good progress in developing skills that will help them in the future. Transition is supported well, particularly through the thorough use of 'my EYFS learning journey,' which is used well to record the child's early socialisation, progress and achievement. Children's achievements are celebrated in an award ceremony attended by their parents. The centre is investigating the recent decline in children's speech and language skills, which has occurred despite the good promotion of parents' awareness of the importance of these skills.

Parents and staff enjoy positive working relationships in a strong culture of mutual respect. The centre promotes well an ethos of tolerance and understanding by all users, which is particularly important in premises that are shared with others who use the community centre or the library. Children and parents can express their views freely and are encouraged to suggest improvements. Increasing numbers of users become volunteers as a result of their positive engagement in centre activities.

Some users are beginning to run established activities in the centre which are no longer funded, as a way of sustaining them. Many vulnerable families access the centre's services because of the successful work of community parents and visitors.

Many parents make good progress in adult education classes. By gaining accredited qualifications in literacy and numeracy, they are better able to help their children develop and improve these skills and some are confident enough to move on to further training. The centre's excellent collaborative working with partner organisations, including Jobcentre Plus, has encouraged some parents and carers to train for potential employment in new retail outlets within the Widnes regeneration scheme. Good advice is available to parents and carers on debt management and to help them to check they are receiving their full entitlement to benefits and tax credits.

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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User needs are identified well and services are well attended and accessible to all. Many activities are targeted at those who have many and complex needs. The centre has significantly increased the engagement of users from the reach area and over 70% currently attend. Children involved with Social Care or are 'in need' are engaged well. A father's group is well established and the group has recorded their work in a DVD. Programmes are coordinated well so that parents can attend at times that suit them best.

The integrated 'Team around the Family' approach encourages thorough assessment of need and good coordination of the support needed. Assessment procedures enable the centre to meet users' welfare, health and social needs very well through high quality and well-targeted services. Parenting needs are assessed thoroughly. The centre tracks carefully children's progress in learning and keeps detailed case records to personalise support and measure the impact of programmes. The progress of parents and carers attending adult education classes is recorded well.

The quality of care for all centre users is good and staff provide personalised very effective support plans, including for children with additional needs. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive well coordinated individual support. Particularly good support and guidance helps parents to cope with difficult situations reducing risks to children. In times of crisis, families most in need feel confident enough to turn to the centre for help. All users are made to feel special and as one parent said, 'If it wasn't for the twins group I dread to think what I would be like now'. Children and parents are actively involved in making choices and decision-making. Children are encouraged to participate in the selection of new resources through the use of picture prompts and stickers.

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>
<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?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre's vision reflects a local authority strategy that prioritises the need for targeted services for the most disadvantaged families and aims to ensure that everyone succeeds. Plans and targets are ambitious and are informed by the very close and strong collaborative working between the children's centre, health services, social care and the voluntary sector. Stringent monitoring of progress towards these targets is carried out by the centre's principal manager to inform quarterly reports to senior managers and the children's trust. The centre's principal manager is a dynamic, supportive and outstanding leader who inspires staff to produce the best quality services for all users. Rigorous procedures, including external audit, are in place to assess the effectiveness of processes and systems.

All staff and volunteers benefit from high quality training and support in their work. Self-evaluation is used well to steer the work of the centre and there is rigorous monitoring and searching analysis. Outcomes for almost all users of the centre are good and improving. The centre uses its resources well, fulfils all of its statutory duties and provides good value for money. The role of parents in decision-making is improving through the role of the newly established parents' forum. However, the centre knows that not all parents are aware of where decisions are made and recognises the need to strengthen their influence on the development of its activities.

Equality is promoted at all levels and the inclusion of all children and their families is at the heart of the centre's working practice. The celebration of festival and faith events successfully involves families from different heritages. Family cookery encourages very young children to discover different tastes and menus. The centre promotes equal rights and access for users with special educational needs and/or disabilities and offers good support to vulnerable two year olds. The gap between the lowest 20% of children's Early Years Foundation Stage scores and the Halton average is successfully being narrowed.

Safeguarding procedures are particularly robust and safeguarding is given the highest priority. Local authority procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed stringently. Rigorous Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out on all staff, including volunteers. The centre works very effectively with partner agencies to protect children and vulnerable adults. Through partnership with the local fire service many families receive information and practical help to make their homes safer. The numbers of hospital admissions following accidental injuries to children have reduced in the last year. All staff



are trained and have a thorough knowledge of safeguarding, risk assessment, child-protection procedures and information-sharing protocols and are confident to implement them. They give very good advice and access to expert help for those experiencing domestic violence. All staff know how to support vulnerable adults. Users understand safeguarding issues well and are given a safe space to raise their concerns.

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 secures 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**

The inspection of Ditton Nursery School took place at the same time as the children's centre and the findings from that inspection were taken into consideration.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ditton Children's Centre on 8 - 9 December 2011. We judged that this is a good centre overall. A significant strength is the commitment from the centre and its arrangements to keep children and families safe. We judged this aspect as outstanding. The centre provides you with a safe place where you can be sure to receive a warm, friendly welcome. As part of the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation and talked with a number of children, users of the centre, staff, community representatives and partnership workers.

We would like to thank all the people who spoke to us when we visited the centre. Many of you told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very helpful. Everyone we spoke to was full of praise for the centre. These are some of the typical things that parents said. 'The centre has made a real difference to how I approach difficult behaviour with my four-year old. I am much calmer now and more in control when dealing with it.' 'The 'positive you' programme gave me a lot more confidence and I now feel able to make my own decisions.' I became a community parent because I wanted to give something back and I had received so much help after my child was born.'

So that more families can benefit from the types of service you are receiving, we have asked the centre to make it easier for users to influence decisions made about what the centre does and the activities it offers. We have also asked the centre to do more to help parents and carers stop smoking, to help to reduce child obesity and to help improve children's speech before they enter the Reception Year.

The manager knows the local community extremely well and is passionate about helping you to improve your lives. You told us that all staff work very well to involve your children in enjoyable and stimulating activities and that you particularly like the play sessions where you can join in with your child. We know from the information supplied by the centre that the safety of your children at home and in the community is good. Because of their work with partners, such as the fire service, they have helped you make your homes safer and children are having fewer accidents. Health workers, social care workers and voluntary organisations work closely with centre staff to try to provide good services to meet all of your family needs. The links with health professionals are good and these are making it much easier for you to attend baby clinics and to gain useful information about how to keep your children healthy. Some of you were full of praise for the breastfeeding support group. You also valued the advice you got on how to deal with your child's behaviour.

Some of the work that takes place in the community is very successful in helping parents who find it difficult to come to the centre or who do not know who to ask for help. The centre works well with a range of partners in health, social care, education and community groups. Some of you have enjoyed the chance to go to adult education classes to improve your English and mathematics so that you can help your children more easily. Others have attended training to learn employability skills that might help them get jobs in the future

when opportunities come up. Your children have good opportunities to learn and develop through the wide range of activities available. They are confident, are developing independence and are getting ready for school. They are making good progress in developing their skills for the future. You particularly like the booklet 'my learning journey' which gives you a good record of how well your child is developing. The care, guidance and support offered by the centre are very good, especially for families who need extra help.

Thank you again for coming to talk to us. We enjoyed visiting your centre and send you and your families our best wishes for the future.

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