

Inspection report for Netherton Children's Centre

Local authority	Sefton
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	St Oswald's Church of England Primary School 104900
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Fun 4 Kidz Mobile Creche EY344328
	Netherton Children's Centre EY340466

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 partner primary school 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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior leaders, parents and members of the advisory board. They met with a range of partners, observed the centre's work, and looked at relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Netherton Children's Centre is a phase one centre and was opened and designated in September 2006. The centre is linked to Saint Oswald's Church of England Primary School in Netherton, Liverpool, although it is located a short distance away from the school site. The centre is situated in the top 30% most deprived areas. The centre provides the full core offer and a range of supporting services, including a crèche, health support, adult courses and workshops. In addition to the centre, services are also provided at other community venues such as a community centre, schools and nurseries. The centre's reach area serves the communities of St Oswald's, Netherton and Orrell, which are in the top 5% most deprived neighbourhoods in Britain.

There are high levels of deprivation as well as high levels of crime, anti-social behaviour, mental health illness, teenage pregnancy, and alcohol and drug misuse within the reach area of the centre. Domestic violence and health inequalities are also key issues within the area. The number of families attending schools in the reach area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is high, as is the proportion of children who are living in households dependent on workless benefits.

There are 836 children under the age of five living in the reach area, of these 78%, are registered with the centre. The centre has 20 children registered from minority ethnic backgrounds and most have a Polish or Turkish heritage. Currently there are 107 lone parents and 62 fathers registered with the centre. The vast majority of families within the area served by the centre are of White British heritage. Children enter early years provision with a range of skills and knowledge below those typically expected for their age, particularly in personal, social and emotional development.

At the time of inspection consultation is taking place with a view to merging Netherton Children's Centre with The Grange Children's Centre. Governance and the advisory board had been formally dissolved on 31 March 2012 and arrangements are in hand to combine both centres' governance and advisory boards, although this has yet to take place. The meeting to establish governance was planned to take place on the first day of inspection, but was postponed until after inspection. The centre manager was recently appointed to be responsible for both centres. Until dissolved, the centre had an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents and the local authority is responsible for governance of the centre. It is the local authority's plan to continue this model.

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

3

Main findings

Netherton Children's Centre is a good centre. All of the centre's features, with the exception of its capacity for further improvement, evaluation, ambition and prioritisation and promotion of healthy lifestyles, are good. The senior leadership team and centre staff are passionate about improving outcomes for families. There is a clear vision for the centre and effective governance and accountability arrangements have been successful in steering the centre through a period of great uncertainty and change due to local government budget reductions. As a result, overall effectiveness of the centre is good.

Staff morale is high; they effectively support each other and show great respect for their leadership team who support them well. Very effective partnership working ensures that services are well integrated and cohesive for families, thereby ensuring the needs of users are effectively met.

Those accessing the centre are kept safe and protected as staff complete detailed risk assessments. There is a high regard for safety at all times, which is effectively shared with families at every opportunity. Outcomes for users are good overall. The centre consistently gives a high priority to safeguarding all children and their families and the very successful care, guidance and support provided enables families to remain safe. As one parent reported, 'The centre is somewhere to bring my children and I know it's safe'. Another said, 'The staff are brilliant, there is clear signposting to help'. These comments demonstrate why the centre is held in such high regard by those families accessing services.

The centre offers good support and advice to families in order to improve their economic and social well-being. Staff are particularly effective at improving users' self-confidence and signposting families to advice on benefits and financial management. Good support for parents is offered through well organised courses such as information and communication technology (ICT); success rates for those who complete courses are high. Despite much good work, centre staff are aware of the need to increase outreach activities, particularly in neighbourhoods within the reach area where the vast majority of vulnerable families reside.

The range of provision on offer meets the needs of families well. The centre's teacher offers good support and guidance to parents, staff and childcare providers in order to continue to improve the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision within the area. Equality and diversity arrangements, as well as the arrangements for safeguarding, are good.

The centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. The self-evaluation report is insufficiently critical of the centre's provision. Current action plans to address identified weaknesses are not yet clearly linked to the self-evaluation process to enable staff to drive improvements for families within the reach area more rapidly. Senior managers from the local authority have identified this as the key priority for the new centre manager to resolve. Despite many good initiatives, staff and managers are unclear about the effectiveness of actions; greater attention is required to the interpretation of data and the monitoring of performance.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Drive improvements further by setting clear measurable targets that arise directly from the self-evaluation process.
- Develop further the outreach facilities in priority areas where most families whose circumstances have made them hard-to-reach reside.

- Develop data systems to ensure all staff and managers are clear on the impact of actions taken to improve performance.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The extent to which the centre ensures that children are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles is satisfactory. Clear advice is given to families covering an appropriate range of health related matters. Together with health partners, the centre has actively encouraged breastfeeding and data show that these rates have risen by 7% year-on-year to 50% in 2011. However, sustained breastfeeding after six weeks has significantly declined from 23% down to 13% in the same year. Families also receive a range of information about healthy eating. The centre is making a concerted effort to tackle childhood obesity with many good initiatives, however, obesity rates remain high at 15%, which is a rise of 2% from 2010 and 5% higher than the Sefton figure.

Centre staff are very effective in educating families in how to improve children's safety, sensitively reminding parents of the need to be vigilant at all times. A large majority of families have received home safety advice and/or equipment. Many displays about safety throughout the centre consistently reinforce the message. As a result, the numbers of children needing accident and emergency services have dropped significantly and have halved in one year. As one parent reported, 'Centre staff know what they are talking about, I think it's great that we can get all this safety equipment for free'.

A clear benefit of the centre is that social care workers are also based in the building. Relationships are strong which ensures that children who are subject to a child protection plan are effectively safeguarded through clear protocols and good safeguarding arrangements. All partners working with families are keen to ensure that users need only inform one agency in order to access appropriate services. Staff are well-trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and discharge their responsibilities well. As a result, those families most in need of intervention and support receive appropriate services to best meet their needs and enable them to be more independent.

Good transition arrangements are in place to ensure children are well prepared for their next stage of learning. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile point scores demonstrate improvement, particularly in communication, language and literacy, albeit from a very low starting point. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest closed slightly over a two-year period from 2009 to 2011. Adults regularly access learning opportunities in order to improve their skills. The centre runs a number of very effective courses aimed at teenage parents. A vibrant teenage group ensures that those attending enhance their self-esteem and improve their mental health.

Families develop strong relationships within the centre and show respect and concern for others. Adults regularly express their views about the centre through activity evaluations and the active parents' forum. There are good opportunities for users to make a positive contribution. Those with low self-esteem and lacking in self-confidence are well supported to express their opinions, either informally or formally. The active advisory board includes parent representatives and offers effective support and challenge to the centre. Many parents report that staff have given them the confidence to engage with centre activities and have helped them to raise their aspirations. A striking example of the influence parents have on the centre is the very well designed outdoor play area, which has been thoughtfully created by parents and staff following in-depth consultation. Children behave well and are learning to share and take turns.

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	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

Advice, support and guidance given to all families are good. Parents spoke positively of the skills that they had acquired to enable them to cope with raising their children. One mother summed up the impact of the work of the centre when she said, 'This centre is so important to me, I don't want to come here one day and find that it's closed'. Enthusiastic staff work tirelessly to make contact with hard-to-engage families. The centre is fully aware of the difficulties and challenges faced by families within its reach area, including feelings of isolation and issues of domestic abuse. An active network has been established for women affected by domestic abuse, which is effective in providing stability for women at a time of great vulnerability. Staff are skilled at integrating families in crisis into activities run at the centre, thereby effectively helping to de-escalate agency involvement. Although the centre has established effective partnership arrangements with a local community centre, more needs to be done to engage with vulnerable families living in the most deprived neighbourhoods in the reach area.

Staff at the centre know the community well and successfully meets the needs of most users. There are good support systems in place to help those most in need of support. Effective care and guidance plus very good collaborative working with partner agencies, secure a swift and appropriate response to families in times of crisis. Courses run by the centre to enhance self-esteem are particularly effective. ICT courses are well organised. Participation rates and attendance levels on most courses are good, particularly for those in target groups.

There are many examples of good quality purposeful learning activities, including regular baby clinics, play sessions designed to meet varying needs of children, a rolling training programme for parents, baby massage and a teenage mums' group, although there is no active fathers' group. All sessions involving children are planned with the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning in mind and successfully promote their learning. All activities, for children and adults alike, are continuously reviewed and changes are implemented in light of families' views and evaluation of their effectiveness. All centre users report they feel valued and respected.

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.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are good overall, although the centre's self-evaluation process lacks rigour and is insufficiently self-critical. Currently, action planning does not clearly link to self-evaluation and, therefore, progress is sometimes not easy to track. Senior managers recognised this prior to inspection and have appropriate plans in place to improve the situation.

The centre has recently undertaken significant changes with a merged management, and governance arrangements across two centres about to be finalised after extensive consultation. Consultation with all stakeholders, but particularly parents, has been extensive and sensitively managed. Senior leaders have a clear vision, communicate high expectations and ensure that the centre is effective in improving the life chances of all users. Day-to-day management, accountability and strategic leadership arrangements are clear and effective. Supervision arrangements are good and ensure staff are well supported and have clear direction. Governance is effective and the advisory board is functioning well, holding the centre to account and challenging the centre to improve further. The centre sets targets in order to improve services, although staff and managers currently find it difficult to measure

the impact of the many activities they organise. The centre is therefore unsure if they are being effective in helping families to become healthier.

Safeguarding arrangements are good because staff are effectively supported in their work through appropriate training. This ensures they have the necessary skills and knowledge to work effectively with target groups. As a result staff have a clear awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities and are able to respond swiftly and confidently to concerns, particularly for those families most at risk. Increasingly robust procedures and protocols for sharing information about those whose circumstances make them vulnerable ensure that needs are prioritised effectively.

Partnership working is particularly strong, increasingly so at an operational level. Very good use is made of the centre facilities. All rooms are constantly in use and an effective 'hot seat' system ensures that partner agencies are able to operate effectively at the centre. This ensures the centre offers good value for money.

The inclusion of all children and families is prioritised well. Staff ensure that all children and parents, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have equal access to the provision available. The centre meets its statutory duties well; it is fully accessible and has been successful in increasing the engagement of families for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Consequently, the centre has had improved success in engaging with the community and with families whose circumstances make them hard to reach. The centre has successfully engaged with 31% of the small number of Turkish or Polish heritage families living in the reach area.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use 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	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	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	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
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The concurrent inspection findings for St Oswald's Church of England Primary School were used to inform this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Netherton Children's Centre on 26 - 27 April 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of children and adults including parents, staff, and partnership workers. We were pleased to speak to some of you about the centre's work and to listen to your views. We really enjoyed talking to you around the centre and in the various activity sessions you were engaged in. You expressed your views very clearly and we appreciated your 'straight talking' in telling us how things really are.

We are pleased to tell you that the centre provides good support to you and your families through the range of good quality activities and services it has on offer. We are pleased that careful attention is given to ensure you and your children stay safe. The way the centre offers you care, guidance and support during times of crisis is particularly effective. We were delighted to hear how you have benefited from coming to the centre, increased your confidence and become involved in the many worthwhile activities available to you.

The centre are also good at helping you increase your knowledge about how children learn through the many play activities and parenting sessions. The centre offers a range of good support to new mums to breastfeed their babies and to give them the best start in life. As a result of the support offered, breastfeeding rates are increasing well, although it is disappointing that this is not continued after a 6-8 week period.

The new centre manager is clearly focussed and enthusiastic about the work of the centre. She is well supported by senior managers from the local authority. Centre staff work very hard to make the centre as good as it can be. They have innovative ideas to improve what they do, so that more families can benefit from its activities. We have recommended that

the centre improves its outreach activities so help for families most in need can be even more effective.

Governors and the advisory board act as an effective critical friend and challenge the centre to do even more. We are pleased that parents are represented on the board of governors, the advisory board and the active parents' forum. The centre sets targets in order to improve services to you, although not all targets are precise enough for the centre to measure its success easily. We have, therefore, asked the centre to ensure all targets are clearly linked to its self-evaluation process. Furthermore, we have asked that both staff and managers pay more attention to the impact of the many activities they organise to ensure they are being for example effective in helping families to become healthier.

It is pleasing to find that you feel welcome at the centre. The inclusion of all children and families is prioritised well by friendly staff who ensure that all of you, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have equal access to the centre. We are also pleased that you feel the centre is a safe place to bring your children. As one parent said, 'The centre is somewhere to bring my children and I know it's safe', we agree.

It was also good to hear about those of you who have undertaken training to increase your confidence and develop your skills, which may help you secure employment in the future. Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to share your views with us. We can see why the staff enjoy working with you so much and wish you every success in the future.

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