

Inspection report for Derwent Valley Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	383764
Inspection dates	26–27 April 2012
Reporting inspector	Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones

Centre leader	Stephanie Crosthwaite
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	134789 St Herbert's CofE (VA) Primary and Nursery
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY392944 Keswick out of school club

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.

Report Published: May 2012

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 parents, grandparents, staff including senior leaders, partners, and representatives from the Advisory Board and local authority. They observed the centre's work and looked a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Derwent Valley Sure Start Children's Centre comprises of two centres, Keswick Children's Centre, designated as a phase two centre in 2008 and Cockermouth Children's Centre, designated as a phase three centre in 2009. The centres amalgamated in 2010 to become Derwent Valley Sure Start Children's Centre. The centre is located in a purpose-built structure on the site of St Herbert's Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary and Nursery School in Keswick, Cumbria and serves a rural area. The centre is directly managed by Action for Children under contract to the local authority. A range of integrated and targeted universal services are delivered from the Keswick and Cockermouth centres, together with outreach support. The centre provides 80% of the full core offer. The majority of staff are based at Workington Sure Start Children's Centre, which is approximately 23 miles from the Keswick centre. A range of agencies such as health visitors, children and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS), children's services and primary care workers are co-located on the Workington site. One member of staff is based at the Keswick centre on a part-time basis and the Cockermouth centre is covered for three days per week. The centre has a reach area of 982 children aged under five years and 4346 aged 0 to 19 years.

Keswick and Cockermouth are areas of mixed social and economic backgrounds. The Cockermouth centre serves one of the 40% most deprived wards in the country. Of families in the centres reach area, 99% are of White British heritage. Workless households and

families claiming benefits are lower than the national average. Teenage pregnancy rates, crime and domestic violence are also below the national average. The number of children subject to a child protection plan is low. The majority of adults have qualifications to at least level two. The majority of children in the reach area enter school with skills that are at a level expected for communication, language and literacy, numeracy and personal and social development. The centre is managed by a cluster manager and there is an advisory board in place.

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

Derwent Valley Sure Start Children’s Centre is a good centre. The centre is located across two sites and provides a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment for children and their families. Users told the inspectors that the centre is an important part of their lives, making comments such as, ‘The centre is my lifeline’, and, ‘I couldn’t live without all of the support that I have been given’. The centre’s overall effectiveness is good despite only engaging with 42% of families living in the area. This is because the focus of support has been targeted effectively towards families that have been identified as being in the greatest need. The effective deployment of resources means that the centre provides good value for money. Partnership arrangements with a range of agencies are good. Highly committed and dedicated staff work well together through a shared vision for the centre to improve the lives of families, including those with circumstances that make them the most vulnerable, in the reach area. Families appreciate the excellent, care, guidance and support that are provided to help them make positive changes to their lives.

Data show that 64% of children’s skills on entry to school are at a level expected for communication, language and literacy, numeracy and personal and social development. The centre has a positive impact on children’s readiness to learn. They develop good personal, social and emotional skills through participation in activities at the centre. Key groups are accurately identified, for example, boys have lower attainment in language and literacy which has led the centre to provide activities such as ‘Rhyme Time’ to successfully reduce the achievement gap between boys and girls.

Safeguarding of children, families and the staff team is good. Staff and volunteers, have a good understanding of their own roles and responsibilities. They all receive high levels of training and development in safeguarding through Action for Children and the local authority. Robust recruitment and selection procedures ensure that all staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children.

The centre successfully increases parents' skills, development and confidence through the range of opportunities for them to attend accredited and non-accredited training courses. All courses including those 'for fun' such as 'Fun with fabrics', 'Fun with flowers' and 'Healthy Cooking' all contain elements of literacy and numeracy to improve parents' skills. Parents also have the opportunity to gain literacy and numeracy qualifications at levels 1 and 2.

Families appreciate the services offered by the centre and the high levels of support they receive. They respond well to group activities, which are well attended, and one-to-one support with family support workers. Parents feel that they are regularly consulted regarding activities provided by the centre. However, they are not represented on the advisory board and, although they have heard about the possible start up of a parent forum, this has not yet happened.

The day-to-day running of the centre is well managed. The local authority supports the centre well, regularly monitoring its performance. Evaluations from parents and data from the local authority are regularly received. However, they are not sufficiently analysed to provide information or actions to inform self-evaluation or the service delivery plan. Managers have a broadly accurate view of the centre's strengths and areas for development though the self-evaluation is descriptive with too little evidence of data being used to support judgements. The centre works well with partners but not all relevant information regarding families is shared between partners, particularly in providing formal feedback such as written evidence. Centre managers and the local authority are aware of this and are planning improvements. Because of this, the centre shows that it has good capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and partner services to ensure all relevant information about supported children and their families is shared.
- Improve the use of data to inform self-evaluation and the service delivery plan.
- Recruit parent representatives to the advisory board and introduce a parents' forum to enable parents to engage in the governance of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

Parents confirm the benefits of attending the centre, making comments such as, 'I get two hours of me time, time to do things for myself knowing that my daughter is safe in the crèche', and describing the centre as their lifeline. Families enjoy the time that they spend at the centre. Parents are able to attend non-accredited and accredited courses, many of which have a positive impact on their economic well-being. Healthy outcomes are promoted through courses such as 'Healthy Cooking' and activities such as 'Mini Movers'. These help families to understand the importance of staying healthy through a range of activities to improve children's and parents' confidence, self-esteem, social interaction and to reduce the risk of obesity. Although sustained breastfeeding rates have decreased, the centre staff are vigilant in promoting breastfeeding and are investigating new ways in which to promote this. Health professionals deliver health visitor and midwifery clinics from the centre and chlamydia packs are freely available in the toilets for parents to have free and discreet testing of their sexual health. Support for the mental and emotional health of parents, particularly those with circumstances that make them vulnerable, in referral to mental health services and counsellors is highly appreciated by those accessing the services.

The centre is extremely safe and is regularly risk assessed. As a result, families report that they feel safe at the centre. Parents are comfortable and confident in asking for help and support for a range of issues. Children and families that need help are extremely well supported with targeted support through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process. The effective involvement of a range of agencies means that the number children subject to a child protection plan is very low. Many parents commented to inspectors on the highly successful first aid courses that they have attended and how this provides them with the confidence in providing first aid treatment to their children. Relationships between staff and families are secure. Parents receiving targeted support such as one-to-one sessions with family support workers work closely with them to build trust and to identify and reduce risks to children and their families. Participation in specific programmes for developing parenting skills is improving behaviour and relationships within families.

Parents express their views through regular written evaluations of courses and in ongoing consultation with staff regarding future planning for activities. However, they are not represented on the advisory board and are unaware of when the parents' forum is to begin, although they are aware that this will commence shortly. This impacts on their ability to effectively engage in the governance of the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	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	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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is aware of the needs of the local community including those in targeted groups. There is a good range of integrated and universal services that are carefully tracked through the service delivery plan. Regular meetings with key partners enable the centre to make informed decisions on the needs of individuals and groups accessing services. Care, guidance and support provided by the centre are excellent. Outreach work with children and families identified as needing targeted support is outstanding. The family support worker team provides exceptionally high levels of support to families with circumstances that make them vulnerable. Parents' feedback includes comments such as, 'I don't know what I would have done. It's about getting to know people and the right people', and, 'Without this place I don't know how I would have coped. Some days I could have given up. The staff get me through'. All groups including lone parents, fathers, and disabled children and their families are very well supported by the centre. To support disabled children and those with special educational needs a 'Little Rainbows' session has been effectively developed. Parents are appreciative of this highly specialised activity, reporting that 'The centre is my lifeline, my child is disabled and the support provided here is fantastic'.

A wide range of activities are provided across the two sites. Specialist sessions promote activities such as 'Fun with Fabrics' and accredited literacy and numeracy courses and all have good attendance rates. Events such as family fun days develop relationships between Keswick and Cockermouth families and encourage groups such as fathers to attend. The centre makes excellent use of advice leaflets and information about relevant topics and parents are also able to access the 'Parent Information Point' for a range of information including that of Jobcentre Plus.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The day-to-day running of the centre is effective. A team of dedicated and professional staff supports the cluster manager. Governance of the centre is through the advisory board that meets regularly to review the work and performance of the centre. The local authority who reviews the centre's action plan and service delivery plan also robustly monitors their performance. Although leaders and managers receive data from a number of sources, they are not always effectively used to inform self-evaluation or the service delivery plan. Recently increased use of data shows that provision is meeting the needs of the reach area and targeted groups effectively but it is still not been used rigorously enough. Due to significant funding cuts, managers have had to prioritise services delivered by the centre. Resources have been deployed effectively, leading to positive outcomes, particularly for vulnerable centre users. Finances are well managed and the centre provides good value for money.

Safeguarding procedures and processes are robust. Risk assessments for all activities and venues are thorough and are regularly updated. Staff and volunteers are involved in regular supervision sessions and are aware of protocols for disclosure of safeguarding issues. Vetting of staff and volunteers is thorough and all attend regular training sessions to support their personal and professional development.

The centre is fully inclusive. It effectively promotes equality and diversity and ensures that no families are discriminated against. There is equal access for all groups. For example; specialist services are provided, such as, support for families with disabled children and targeted support for families that are disadvantaged or have circumstances that make them vulnerable. User engagement is good. Parents provide feedback in the form of written evaluations at the end of each activity, the results of which are used to shape future services.

Partnerships with other agencies are good and services such as midwife and health visitor drop-in sessions are run from the centre. Partners such as the health visitor team refer families who need support to the centre, where they are allocated a family support worker. The worker then supports the family through a range of challenging circumstances. When the case file is eventually closed, the family support worker will informally discuss the outcomes with the referrer if they are available. They do not, however, provide the referrer with written documentation of the aims, support and outcomes of the work with the family. The local authority is aware that channels of communication need to be more responsive in reducing risk for children and their families.

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
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The effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	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

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaints procedure: raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted* which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Derwent Valley Sure Start Children's Centre on 26 and 27 April 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with us and sharing the many positive experiences that you have about the centre, the staff and the volunteers that work there that provide support to you and your families. We appreciate that you were so open and honest with us. You really like the centre and many of you say that it is your lifeline and you do not know what you would do without the support that you are given. Many of you told us about the difference that the centre has made to your lives in terms of your confidence, the way that you play with your children and in your parenting skills. For those of you that experience difficulties at times in your life, the centre works very well with you,

your families and other professionals to give you the support that you need to get you back on an 'even keel'.

The centre welcomes everyone that comes through its doors. Some parents did not know anyone else before they came to the centre, some were new to the area and felt very isolated but now they feel much happier. They have the support of the staff and the other parents as their friends. The staff listen to your opinions and you are encouraged to complete evaluation forms. However, none of you are members of the advisory board that make decisions about what happens at your centre and we have asked the centre to look at how it can improve this.

The centre's leaders and managers are dedicated and committed to supporting the community and improving the service that they provide. However, they do not always use the data that is available to support them in doing this. For example, by using this information more effectively when they look at and evaluate how good the centre is and when they are looking at the service delivery plan.

There are many good things that your centre does. They plan and deliver the activities that you most want such as 'Mini Movers' and mathematics and English classes. The activities help your children to develop a good range of skills that will help them settle into school. Partnerships at the centre are good. Many of you go to the drop-in sessions to see the midwife or health visitors and know you can pop in at any time if you need to speak to a member of staff. You think that the family support workers are brilliant and that they provide phenomenal support, advice and guidance. We agree with this and that is why this area was graded as outstanding. The staff help to keep you and your family safe and work closely with you. When they get a referral from a partner such as the health visitor, they open up a case file with you. All of your notes are in the file and you get a copy of them. What does not always happen though is that the person that referred you to the centre is provided with a summary of the support that you received after your case file has been closed. We think that this is important because all of the people involved with your family need to be kept 'in the loop' to reduce risks to you and your family.

Thank you once again for your help with the inspection. We could not have done it without you. We are very grateful for your views and opinions and 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.