

Inspection report for Duke Street Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	383430
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Reporting inspector	Tara Street

Centre leader	Susan Conron
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Duke Street Nursery School 119066
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Duke Street Dragonflies EY387779 Duke Street Children's Centre EY373959

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 co-located/partner nursery 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 senior managers, centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners, including health, education and children's social care professionals. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Duke Street Children's Centre is a phase two centre which is situated in Chorley, Lancashire. It was designated in 2007. It fulfils its core purpose by providing a range of services which include health services, social care, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult education and outreach services. Services are provided at the centre as well from a range of other outreach venues which include: Cotswold Supported Housing, All Saints' Church of England Primary School, St Gregory's Catholic Primary School, Duke Street Primary School, Gillibrand Primary School, Mayfield Special School and St Georges Church of England Primary School.

The centre covers a densely populated area and serves a community which experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage. There are 1265 children aged from birth to five in the reach area, 78% of whom are registered with the centre. Of these, 52% are children who live in the top 30% most deprived areas. Within the centre's reach area, there are significant issues relating to mental health, housing, dental decay, obesity, unemployment, substance misuse, domestic violence and low levels of literacy and numeracy. The population is mostly White British with smaller percentages of families from other ethnic groups, some of whom speak

English as an additional language. Levels of unemployment are high and many of the existing jobs are low paid. Housing is mostly social or private rental accommodation with a small amount of privately owned housing. Most children within the area enter early years provision with knowledge and skills that are significantly below expectations for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. The centre has links to six local primary schools.

Governance of the centre is provided by Duke Street Nursery School. The nursery school and children’s centre are an integrated service led by a multi-disciplinary senior leadership team. The centre is on a campus shared with Duke Street Primary School and is managed by the Nursery School Head Teacher and governed by a joint committee which includes governors from the nursery school and the primary school as well as providers, delivery partners and members of the local community and users that attend the centre.

The centre’s early years and childcare provision is delivered by Duke Street Dragonflies, which is integrated into the nursery school. In addition, a crèche facility is offered while parents are accessing services or courses at the centre. Both settings were visited as part of this inspection.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

‘I can relax when I know a family is accessing services at Duke Street Children’s Centre.’ This comment, made by a social worker, reflects the very high regard in which this outstanding centre is held within the community. Typical comments from parents include: ‘I don’t know what I would do without it,’ and ‘Without the centre I would not still have my son’. Staff have worked relentlessly to achieve an exceptional level of trust, acceptance and respect among local families. Their unfaltering dedication and commitment have ensured that outcomes for the very large majority of people living within this locality have greatly improved, often in the face of the most challenging of circumstances. The actions taken to improve outcomes for

families in relation to their safety and well-being are exemplary, particularly for those where children are subject to a child protection plan. However, managers are aware that not enough is done to increase the proportion of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. Adult learners, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are making good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills. They are supported effectively to access employment advice and training opportunities. However, the centre does not do enough to track the progress of individuals towards achieving qualifications and employment.

The senior team leads with a clear vision for excellence and a firm commitment to improving the life chances of every local family. Leaders are focused on developing a centre which delivers a holistic service that ensures the development of sustainable families who are empowered to make informed choices about the future direction of their lives. Systems for monitoring and evaluation are highly sophisticated and reflect the very high priority given to self-reflection and self-challenge. Managers have worked hard to develop effective systems for data analysis which clearly reflect the impact of the excellent work undertaken. As a result, services and provision can be carefully planned and targeted to achieve maximum impact. This ensures the centre has an exemplary capacity for improvement.

Provision is outstanding, both in relation to the high-quality activities delivered within the centre and the flexible, individualised work carried out by outreach workers in families' homes. The importance the centre gives to reaching out into the community is excellent and ensures that services are provided to those families most in need of intervention and support. The expertise and breadth of knowledge demonstrated by every staff member within the centre are impressive and have ensured the provision of first-class support and guidance to all families. The deeply embedded sense of security which emanates throughout the centre ensures parents have the confidence to ask for help and support, increasingly before they reach a point of crisis.

The centre has a genuinely inclusive ethos, as a result of which the gaps in both the achievement and engagement of target groups of families are narrowing significantly. The positive impact of this work is reflected in the increasing number of adults who have become volunteers. Others have joined the centre's community group which actively contributes through fundraising and bidding for funds to pay for some projects, such as cookery courses and holistic therapy sessions. Equality is promoted sensitively, and there are robust systems in place to identify and tackle any forms of discrimination. The impact of exemplary partnership working which promotes children's and families' emotional well-being is also evident across the work of the centre. For example, specific programmes for promoting parenting skills are hugely successful, as illustrated in the comments of parents, such as: 'It was fantastic'; 'I learnt so much'; and 'I don't think I have raised my voice to my child since.'

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Build upon existing good practice to increase the proportion of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks.
- Develop systems with partner agencies to improve the tracking of the progress of individuals towards achieving qualifications and employment.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

An impressive feature of this centre's work is the very good attention it pays to the emotional health and well-being of families. High priority given to weaning ensures that new parents are given accurate, timely information ensuring babies receive healthy, balanced and nutritious foods from the earliest age. The long-term impact of this work is reflected in the low incidence of obesity among Reception children which, at 9.8%, is lower than other top 30% centre averages and is in line with the Lancashire average. However, centre staff are not complacent and a wide range of activities, such as cooking courses and 'Tiny Trekker' organised walks, are in place to further promote this area. The centre actively promotes the benefits of breastfeeding through its 'Milky Way – Breastfeeding Support' group and its breastpump loan scheme. However, despite this, current data show that only 23.3% of mothers sustain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks, and centre staff recognise that there is more work to be done.

There is an ongoing commitment to the promotion of issues around child safety, and outreach workers remain extremely proactive in targeting parents who may need support to develop a better understanding of these issues. Excellent use is made by staff of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) tool. As a consequence, the centre is highly effective in supporting those families experiencing domestic violence, with life-changing results. Exemplary multi-agency support also ensures that children subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are extremely well supported.

Adults and children clearly enjoy the outstanding range of activities offered by the centre and, as a result, demonstrate extremely high levels of confidence and independence. Data show that a large majority of children, at 76.2%, achieve at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales. Recent initiatives to work alongside local schools to provide early support for children and their families is already starting to make a significant impact on reducing the achievement gap between the lowest-achieving 20% of children and their peers. The outstanding enthusiasm and dedication of the outreach staff ensure the provision of high-quality education and learning experiences for all children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs. A large majority of adults regularly access learning opportunities in order to improve their skills, for example, 'Family Learning' and 'Play Together' sessions and adult literacy and numeracy courses.

However, staff recognise that not enough is done to track the progress of adults towards achieving qualifications and employment.

Extremely strong commitments are made to seeking the views of users. For example, evaluations of all centre activities are analysed extensively, and parents and children are encouraged to express opinions and views through 'participatory appraisals'. Parents state that their contributions are highly valued and they feel that their opinions really count. Due to staff support, the parents who sit on the centre's committee and focus groups have felt particularly empowered in contributing to the decision-making process and governance of the centre. This is a reflection of the importance the centre places on ensuring these key partners are able to contribute in a meaningful way.

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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1
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?

1

The centre knows the very large majority of families in its reach area extremely well and has excelled in identifying those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. As a consequence, outreach staff are often involved in a significant amount of very intensive family support work. It is as a result of the staff's creativity and outstanding partnership working that, despite the intensive work, they continue to deliver both a targeted and universal range of services. Rigorous assessment is a significant strength of the centre and one of the reasons why its work in meeting the needs of individuals and the community is so successful. Vulnerable families are exceptionally well supported in times of crisis with skilled and committed staff successfully empowering and enabling parents to make significant improvements to their lives.

The centre has made substantial progress in reaching out and making contact with families across the local and wider area that it serves, particularly with fathers, young

mothers and lone parents. Parents were eager to tell inspectors how much they enjoyed time with their children both at the centre and at home. The activities provided promote great enjoyment and offer excellent learning and development opportunities for all users.

The recent development of the 'Portage Group' for disabled families and children and those with special educational needs provides a much-needed lifeline, facilitating opportunities for families to meet others in a similar situation, and reducing their sense of isolation. All staff are highly sensitive to the role of parents, ensuring they feel able to make informed decisions regarding the packages of care put in place for their children.

The personal testimony of families who receive support from the centre demonstrates that when care, guidance and support are most needed, the response from the centre is exceptional. 'The staff never give up; there is a real drive forward regardless of difficulties,' said one mother. A wide range of parenting courses is provided and the majority of the vulnerable parents attending have gone on to volunteer, gain qualifications and return to work. By holding sessions in the centre and in local schools, parents have the opportunity to meet with others, thereby reducing the sense of segregation and isolation they feel. As one father who attends the 'Men Behaving Dadly' group said, 'I get to do fun things with my children that I could not afford to do on my own as well as meet other dads.'

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre manager and her senior team lead with vision and inspiration, ensuring the morale of staff remains high. Their work is underpinned by excellent communication with partners, alongside highly effective monitoring and evaluation of the services provided. Through a continuous cycle of review and reflection, managers ensure that all services have a clear purpose, measurable outcomes and meet the needs of users exceptionally well. The local authority plays an active role in overseeing the centre's performance, providing excellent challenge through regular meetings and a formal annual conversation.

There is an excellent range of professional development opportunities for staff which are linked to robust strategies to monitor the quality and impact of their work. This

includes regular scheduled one-to-one meetings to discuss caseloads, thereby ensuring all staff remain accountable for the achievements and progress of individual families. As a result, staff have a wide breadth of knowledge, and teamwork is exceptionally strong. An extensive range of specifically targeted meetings further ensure that all partners and staff are aware of what is happening across the area, which facilitates excellent partnership working and prevents duplication.

The joint committee which governs the centre is very well established and has extremely effective representation from a range of partners, including parents. This is complemented by the very effective focus groups where parents actively share their views alongside a wide range of professionals. The committee itself has an excellent understanding of its role, not only in supporting and challenging the centre's leaders, but also in suggesting possible future initiatives and directions for development. Resources, including staffing, are extremely well deployed to ensure that delivery of services is as effective as possible. The building is clean, bright and extremely welcoming, and every space is used to maximum effect. The budget is carefully deployed and focuses support where it is needed most; as a result, the centre provides outstanding value for money.

The centre is extremely proactive in promoting equality and diversity. The staff's excellent knowledge of the community and dedicated approach to taking activities out into the community have been central to its ongoing success in engaging many of its harder-to-reach groups. As a result, the centre continues to reach those families whose circumstances make them vulnerable, narrowing the achievement gap for those most disadvantaged. This is further facilitated through highly effective protocols and partnerships with relevant organisations, including the Cotswold Supported Housing, Home-Start, Post Adoption Service and Citizens Advice Bureau.

Safeguarding is given the utmost priority, and there are highly effective policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and protection of both families and staff. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out for all who work or volunteer at the centre. Outstanding early intervention and a multi-agency approach underpin all that the centre delivers, and this is central to its success in meeting the needs of those within its reach area. Excellent partnership working promotes the swift exchange of information for the most vulnerable children, including those assessed under the Common Assessment Framework and those subject to a child protection plan. Risk assessments are rigorous and the comprehensive lone-working policy and procedures ensure staff are safe when visiting families on their own.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and	1

effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	1
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	1

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

An inspection of Duke Street Nursery School was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the children's centre and relevant findings from that inspection were taken into consideration. In addition, the most recent inspection report for Duke Street Dragonflies was considered during the inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Duke Street Children's Centre on 10–11 May 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

The centre provides a wealth of excellent activities aimed at helping families improve their lives. You told us that you are happy with the activities you attend and the services you use because they have helped you in lots of different ways. For example, some of you have received excellent support to learn more about healthy eating, while others have found the opportunities to undertake parenting courses to be 'supportive' and 'timely.'

However, there are still too few mothers choosing to sustain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. We know outreach workers and health professionals are committed to passing on information about the benefits of continuing to breastfeed your baby and we know that some of you have found sessions to help pregnant and new mothers continue breastfeeding helpful and have valued the work of the breastfeeding volunteers.

It was good to hear about those of you who have undertaken volunteering opportunities and training to increase your confidence and develop your skills, which may help you secure employment in the future. However, we recognise that the systems to track your success are not as effective as they could be. We have, therefore, asked the centre to work with others to improve this information so that the centre can fully evaluate how well it is doing in helping you improve your economic stability.

Most importantly, you tell us that you feel safe at the centre and can trust the staff, particularly when you most need it. You appreciate the advice and help of the outreach workers and have welcomed home visits and the opportunity to go with someone to a group until you build your confidence and make new friends. We found that the centre is doing an excellent job of helping you at times in your lives when you most need it. We found that action is taken very quickly and that different people and organisations work exceptionally well as a team to support both children and families.

The centre is working extremely well with other partners, such as health visitors, speech and language therapists and social care teams. You told us that it is good to go to the many support groups and clinics and you welcome the opportunity to talk to the health visitor or the outreach worker in a relaxed, informal environment. A lot of you, especially those who are bringing up children on their own, told us that you feel really happy on the days when you have an activity to go to and have found the friendships made through the centre to have been long-lasting. There is exemplary support for disabled children and those with special educational needs and, as parents, you are encouraged to take an active role in meetings with professionals, ensuring you are involved in making important decisions about your children's future. You also clearly enjoy attending the extensive range of activities run by the centre.

We found that those in charge of the centre are doing an outstanding job. Managers, together with partners and other staff, have worked hard to make sure that everything the centre does for you will make a real, genuine and lasting difference to the area in which you live. We know that everyone who works with Duke Street Children's Centre shares this view. The centre has access to an extensive range of detailed information to help it plan future activities and we know staff listen to you because you enjoy attending activities they provide.

The centre has spent a lot of time ensuring that you are involved in making decisions about its direction and the different services it provides. We know that you feel genuinely respected and listened to as a result.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you all the best for the future.

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

