

Inspection report for Lune Park Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire County Council
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's leaders and staff, health visitors, parents, members of the advisory board and a range of other partners including representatives from Lancaster Farms HMYOI. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Lune Park Children's Centre, a phase one centre, is located north of the River Lune in Lancaster. The centre serves the wards of Skerton East and Skerton West and covers nine super output areas (SOA's). Of these, five fall in the top 30% most deprived in the country and three of these are in the top 10% most deprived.

The centre is clustered with a phase two children's centre in Carnforth, and two phase three centres in Halton and Galgate. The cluster of centres is managed by one centre manager and a deputy manager, employed by Lancashire County Council. The centre has a memorandum of understanding in place with the local authority. Within the local area there are three primary schools, including Ryelands School, which is geographically close to Lune Park Children's Centre and serves a large area of social housing on the Ryelands estate.

There are approximately 1030 children living in the centre's reach area and the large majority (78%) of these children are of White British origin. The numbers of children of Black or minority ethnic heritage are low, with the next largest group of children being of White Eastern European origin (3%). Children's skill levels on entry to early years provision are below expectations for their age.

In 2010, there were 325 children living in workless households and in 2009 19.2% of families were benefiting from working tax credits in the local area. The local area has recently been accredited with the UNICEF 'Baby Friendly Award'.

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

The centre is making a positive difference to the lives of children and families. Committed and passionate leaders and managers, ably supported by effective staff, a local authority designated officer and advisory board, have driven improvements in outcomes. Together they have correctly identified a small number of priorities for further development. 'The staff have gone beyond the call of duty' and 'I have been attending regularly and would not know how I would cope without them' are typical comments from parents. Partners also speak highly of the centre, for example one stated: 'there is a generous notion of community at Lune Park Children's Centre.'

A large majority of families living in the reach area, and most of the families living in the three top 10% most deprived wards, are registered with the centre. The majority of these families access services regularly and the centre is making a marked contribution to improving children's achievement. The centre is making an excellent contribution to ensuring that children are safe and data show that joint working with the Fire and Rescue Service has contributed to reducing the number of house fires in the local area by 20%.

The centre promotes equality and diversity well and has effectively increased the engagement of target groups, including lone parents. There are currently 201 fathers registered and 34.8% of these attend regularly, an increase of 14% from 2010. However, in the three most deprived super output areas, there are a small minority of families who have not yet registered with the centre. Data indicate that the circumstances of these families may make them more vulnerable and the centre understands that it still has more to do to reach these children and their parents. Live birth data is not available to the centre and this is one of the factors restricting

outreach workers from increasing the centre's reach further. Breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are well below the national average and variable, despite a concerted and increased focus on breastfeeding promotion by staff and partners.

Care, guidance and support for parents are excellent. This is exemplified by an extremely wide range of support, for example, the accredited and oversubscribed 'Dads Course', which is delivered by centre staff in the local prison. This course effectively supports fathers to engage with their children and to develop their parenting skills whilst they are in prison. In addition, 12 families have been supported to attend the last centre family fun day at the prison. As one prison officer stated: 'The staff go out of their way to make the lives of prisoners and their families better.'

Provision for children to learn and develop is making a discernible difference to their achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, the centre does not always signpost learners to the range of learning opportunities for adults and training in the local area.

Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust. Staff receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training, which is shaped and delivered by managers and takes into account the learning from local serious case reviews. In addition, five of the centre's staff deliver free safeguarding training to other organisations in the local area and the centre makes a significant contribution to keeping children safe in the wider Lancaster area. The 'request for service' meetings ensure that families who are more vulnerable receive highly effective and coordinated support at the earliest possible opportunity.

Staff effectively track the impact of some of the activities that they deliver, for example the parenting courses. However, their ability to track the impact of provision over time is limited, as processes and systems are not fully developed. Leaders and managers have a strong track record of accurate self-evaluation and their ability to create focussed development plans demonstrates good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Obtain live birth data and breastfeeding data from North Lancashire Primary Care Trust so that staff can:
 - identify and target support to those families who do not currently access the centre, particularly those living in the most deprived areas
 - track the impact of support and improve breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks.

- Improve access to further education and training for parents by working closely with local training providers to signpost them to opportunities in the local area.

- Develop processes to track the impact of centre services on outcomes over time.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes are satisfactory overall. Breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are well below the national average and, despite the concerted efforts of the centre, do not yet show signs of improvement. More children living in the reach area are obese than the Lancashire and the national averages. However, obesity rates of children in the Reception Year are improving as indicated by the steady reduction from 14% in 2008 to 12.5% in 2011. The centre met its own target to increase the percentage of children who were of a healthy weight to 73%, and has correctly identified this as a continuing centre priority. The centre has effectively implemented 'Smile 4 Life' which has encouraged regular teeth brushing, helped families to access dental services, and shaped the centre's own policy on food and drink provided for children. Smoking cessation data indicate that the service, which is available to all adults living in the local area, is effective with over 50% of people abstaining from smoking after four weeks.

Children behave very well and a few parents are actively engaged in running the centre. In 2011-12, 12 parents were actively volunteering at the centre. The chair of the advisory board is a parent who regularly uses the centre and helps other parents to shape services and policies, such as the recently introduced charging policy. Economic well-being is improving steadily. The number of children living in workless households in the reach area has fallen from 350 in 2007 to 325 in 2010 and during the same period the percentage of families benefiting from working tax credits has increased slightly. The centre's work to support families to access benefits and reduce debt has been effective. However, the number of adults engaged in training and the number going on to seek employment is low overall.

Children are extremely well supported to be safe. Parents undertake child protection training as part of the parenting programmes they attend and the excellent promotion of road safety ensures that children know how to keep themselves safe. Children who are subject to a child protection plan, those involved with Common Assessment Framework processes and any looked after children are very ably supported by the centre and case files demonstrate very positive outcomes for many of these children.

Children who access the centre make good progress overall. The whole reach area data show that 49% of children achieve the expected level of attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% and their peers is narrowing extremely slowly at 0.2% between 2010 and 2011. However, detailed analysis of data provided by the three local primary schools indicates that 63% of children who access the centre achieved the expected level in 2011. This is higher than the Lancashire average. Of this cohort, 55 of the 74

children live in the three most deprived Super Output Areas and the majority of these achieve well. The 'Best Start' programme is beginning to help the centre to improve the tracking of children to evaluate the impact of its services.

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	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	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	3

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff, in conjunction with the Citizens Advice Bureau, deliver highly effective support and guidance to families. In 2010, the centre's advisor provided support to four to five families per day on average. Of these, 57% were lone parents, 13% were parents expecting children and 45% were aged between 17 and 24 years. The impact of this service is clearly evidenced in the £78k reduction in debt and the £47k increase in benefit claims made by families during the same period. Parents speak highly of the service they receive; 'The advice and help I was given directly stopped me from losing my home.' Another stated; 'the advisor eased the stress and pressure I was under. They took rapid action to halt threatening letters and calls from people and companies I owed money to.'

Effective provision ensures children make good progress, as evidenced by improving achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The recently implemented 'Best Start' programme is beginning to make a positive impact on the lives of children who are eligible for free school meals. Evidence indicates that attendance is beginning to improve at the local schools and data sharing between schools and the centre has improved. Through the programme, staff have identified children who require additional support to ensure that they are safe. The centre has worked extremely hard to ensure that nursery places are available for two-year-old children whose circumstances make them vulnerable, including children from the Traveller community.

The centre delivers a range of highly-targeted training for parents, including

'Awarding and Supporting a Child's Development' which was over subscribed in 2011 with five lone and 10 teenage parents attending. The evidence based parenting programme is very successful at supporting parents to access training with eight parents now engaged in a range of National Vocational Qualifications, including advice and guidance, customer care and childcare. In addition, two parents have gained full time employment as a direct result of this course. However, the centre does not always effectively signpost parents to training or employment opportunities.

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

Leaders and managers ensure that the centre is continuously improving, despite recent resource reductions. Outcomes are good overall and demonstrate the centre provides good value for money. The local authority provides effective support and appropriate challenge to the centre. Records of the annual conversation show that data are used well to substantiate self-evaluation and judgements are appropriately moderated. The centre's leaders and managers have correctly identified highly focussed priorities and staff and partners know these well and how they contribute to achieving them. However, systems and processes for tracking the medium and longer-term impact of services are underdeveloped and this limits the centre's ability to fine tune activities to ensure they have the greatest impact. Some gaps in data, such as the provision of live birth data, inhibit the centre from identifying and reaching some of the families from the small minority who do not access the centre. However, overall the centre effectively engages families from target groups and those living in the most deprived areas.

An analysis of case files of children who are subject to a child protection plan demonstrates excellent and highly effective case management and supervision of staff. Case studies show that the centre effectively supports children and families, whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. Pre-Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and Common Assessment Framework processes are used exceptionally well and the weekly 'request for service' meetings ensure that families receive prompt support from a range of multi-agency services. Often, CAFs are jointly completed with Health Visitors to ensure a coordinated and appropriate response from the outset. Robust recruitment checks are undertaken on all staff and volunteers including Criminal Record Bureau checks. All staff and volunteers, are highly trained to safeguard children and deal with a range of issues, including

domestic violence.

Partnerships with a range of services and parents are effective. The centre has correctly identified improving health outcomes as a priority and has targeted resources appropriately. Based on evidence of a successful local programme, the centre has secured additional funding to appoint a salaried breastfeeding peer supporter to complement the work of the volunteer peer supporters at the 'Star Buddies' sessions. Equality and diversity is very effectively promoted by the centre. Disabled children and their parents are provided with support through the 'AOK' group for example.

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 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	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	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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Lune Park Children's Centre on 30–31 May. We judged the centre as good overall.

We were grateful for your help during the inspection and your views and comments helped us to reach our judgements about the centre. Many of you told us how grateful you are for the help you receive through the centre. 'The staff have gone beyond the call of duty' and 'I have been attending regularly and would not know how I would cope without them' are typical views.

We concluded that the centre is making a positive difference to the lives of children and families living in the local area, and that it is effective at reaching out to those of you whose circumstances may make you more vulnerable. Some of the data that we analysed show that the centre is effectively helping children to achieve well by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. We also judged that the centre is making an excellent contribution to helping children to stay safe.

The centre has committed and passionate leaders and managers, who are very ably supported by effective staff, a local authority designated officer and advisory board. Together they have driven improvements in outcomes and correctly identified a small number of priorities for further development. The centre's leaders and managers know what they need to do next to make the centre even better.

We judged that care, guidance and support for parents are exceptional. We were impressed by the wide range of support available including the 'Dads Course', which is delivered by centre staff in the local prison. This course helps fathers to engage with their children and to develop their parenting skills whilst they are in prison. One of the prison officers stated; 'The staff go out of their way to make the lives of prisoners and their families better.'

We have asked the centre to improve access to further education and training for parents by working closely with local training providers and signposting them to opportunities in the local area. This is because too few parents are engaged in learning. We have also recommended that the centre develops processes to track the impact of the services that it delivers. This will help the centre staff to know what works very well and target services further. Finally, we have asked the centre to obtain more data from the local health trust so that the centre can reach out to more new mothers and also help more mothers to sustain breastfeeding after birth.

Thank you for help. We wish you and your children well for the future.

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