

Inspection report for Horwich and Blackrod Children's Centre

Local authority	Bolton
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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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 covers 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre and staff, representatives from the local authority, representatives from the advisory board, various health professionals, frontline workers and centre partners, parents and other users of the centre's facilities. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Horwich and Blackrod Children's Centre is a phase two centre located in West Bolton. The centre operates as a campus model: providing services and activities from Horwich and Blackrod libraries and health clinics, Brazley Community Hall and Horwich Resource Centre. The majority of the catchment area is within the 70% most deprived in the country, although there are three super output areas which are in the top 30%.

The area has seen a significant rise in unemployment with an estimated 15% of children under 16 in the reach living in poverty and 17% of children under four years living in households dependent on workless benefits. Although both are below the Bolton average, rising unemployment and the prevalence of families experiencing crisis is increasing. The very large majority of families residing in the area is of White British heritage with an increasing number from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Three traveller communities are known to reside in the area.

The centre received designation in 2008 and it provides the appropriate range of services to meet the core purpose. The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the local authority alongside an advisory board. A recent restructure of services has seen children's centres, Social Care Family Support, the borough-wide Contact Team and Sponsored Childcare Service combining to become the 'Children & Families Support Service'. The

Children's Centre Network Manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of this centre alongside a phase one centre and a phase three centre. The assistant manager, Children and Family Support Services, provides line management to the family support team which works across two designated reach areas and is based at Westhoughton Children's Centre. Partner agencies include health professionals, the speech and language service, the Jobcentre, Family Information Service and the Food and Health Team.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Horwich and Blackrod Children's Centre achieves satisfactory outcomes for children and families that they work with. Parents describe the centre as a 'godsend' and they return to the centre because of its 'warm welcome and friendly staff'. Centre data confirm a steadily improving trend in relation to breastfeeding, obesity and a narrowing of the achievement gap. The centre has established a sound volunteer pathway and plans are in place to build on current consultations tools with parents to engage them in governance arrangements, but these plans are in their very early stages.

A local authority re-structure has delayed the progress of the centre. However, staff and partners have confirmed a firm sense of confidence in the new working model and the positive impact for families. In addition, the local authority is a 'payment by results pilot' which is beginning to lead to a sharper focus on evaluating the impact of services on outcomes for families. However, much of this work is not yet embedded as the centre is yet to develop a consistent and collaborative approach with partners, to collating and analysing data and information. As a result, it is unable to show the full impact of its work on outcomes.

The advisory board has experienced changes and inconsistencies within its membership, preventing rigour in holding the centre to account for its work and in driving improvement. The day-to-day management of the centre is sound, with an experienced Network Manager and a clear line management structure within the wider team. Arrangements for staff supervision and their continuous professional development are secure, ensuring that staff

have the right skills, expertise and support to undertake their challenging work effectively. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory overall and meet requirements.

Outreach work is developing steadily with provision now in place across six sites across the community. However, staffing vacancies are having an impact on the centre's further capacity to promote centre services more systematically. The profile of the centre within the community is not secure, as many families are yet to register and access services. Furthermore, the process to register families is problematic, which results in some continuing to access services by chance or anonymously. This, coupled with the lack of accurate information and data about user groups within the community, prevents the centre having a thorough understanding of families' needs, potential lifestyle trends and the services they may require to keep them safe and improve their lives. Consequently, the centre's overall effectiveness and the centre's capacity to improve are both satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Undertake a thorough analysis of the profile of the community to identify needs in the wider community and rapidly increase registration and engagement across all target groups in particular.
- Strengthen partnership working across all sectors of the centre's work to secure a collaborative approach to monitoring and evaluating outcomes for families.
- Work with the local authority to recruit to current staff vacancies to enable the capacity for further improvement and extend outreach and centre services.
- Develop the role and effectiveness of the advisory board by establishing a secure and consistent membership to the board and its role in holding the children's centre to account.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Children are safeguarded well due to the effective targeting of services for the most vulnerable families, such as those experiencing domestic violence, children on protection plans and looked-after children. In these circumstances, multi-agency working alongside targeted family support has proved to be effective, resulting in children being returned home from local authority care or action taken to secure their future well-being and safety. In the same way, the effective implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) underpins the initial assessment of need and the co-ordination of appropriate services which are successful in getting families back on track.

Parents describe how safety activities and campaigns have raised their awareness of how to use car seats safely. In addition, parenting courses encourage positive behaviour

management strategies which promote a more settled and calm environment within the home. Some parents have accessed guidance via the Royal Society of The Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), leading to improved safety within the home. This is possibly having an impact on the reduction of hospital admissions within the reach area, although it is difficult for the centre to demonstrate this impact securely due to the lack of evaluation around this work. A good range of health provision is improving the prevalence of breastfeeding and reducing obesity in children in their Reception Year. However, both remain below the national averages and so remain a priority within current action plans. Equally, little information is collated about the impact of signposting to smoking cessation or any potential impact on teenage pregnancies following sexual health advice and teenage parent interventions.

Signposting to the Jobcentre for employment and training advice is routine and, as a result, parents access information about job vacancies and some take up 'better off calculations' which lead to more information about access to childcare, benefits and pathways to work. The centre confirms that 100% of three-year-olds in the area are accessing free nursery education entitlement and only a small number of teens are not in education, employment or training of some kind. However, the lack of tracking prevents the centre from demonstrating the impact of its interventions on rising unemployment or its work to increase economic stability and independence.

Parents speak highly of the centre and some have reported 'it's a great place to be, we get loads of information about training... and how to help with our children's development'. The focus placed on 'gap-narrowing activities' is leading to stronger Early Years Foundation Stage provision; the benefits of which are beginning to be seen in an improving trend within Early Years Foundation Stage profile results. In addition, parents are more able to support their children's language development from an early age and improve their readiness for school. However, the newly-established tracking systems for children's learning are yet to be implemented across all groups, preventing the centre from demonstrating the progress children make over time. This is equally so for disabled children accessing services.

'The Friends and Family Support Group' enables parents to progress from intensive family support to less targeted provision and ultimately meet new friends. Parenting courses are available, although drop out from the most recent course was relatively high and is not explained within course evaluations. Some parents have become actively involved in the delivery of services through volunteering roles within 'Tiny Treasures' and others have been pivotal in the development of the 'Let's Play Together' group ensuring that some are making a positive contribution to service delivery. Systems to engage parents in more formal decision processes are a feature of the centre's action plan.

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	3

The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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.	3

How good is the provision?

3

Data sets provided by the local authority and health are improving and are increasingly being used to identify needs in the community and link provision. This is seen in the range of healthy lifestyle opportunities such as 'Cook 4 Life' and 'Baby's First Foods' courses which are helping to reduce obesity levels. Local health clinics provide a routine base for 'Well Baby Clinic', 'Baby Club' and breast feeding support and in the main, these are well attended. Secure links with the Family Information Service ensure that families receive up-to-date information about activities for older siblings during school holidays and contact with BACPAC (Bolton Area Council for Parents and Carers) ensure that parents with disabled children are signposted to a range of universal, targeted and specialist provision, as appropriate. Designated provision is in place for fathers and teens and centre data confirm a steady increase in the registration and engagement of most groups, particularly those in the most deprived areas. However, the centre has limited information about traveller families potentially residing and settling in the area.

Assessment of individual cases is robust, especially for children and families referred to the centre through the Multi-Agency Referral Panel and the subsequent support through Child Action Meetings and CAF. The provision for family support work is swift and effective and this is confirmed by parents' personal testimonies and case studies. 'I'm much more confident....I feel independent and happy and able to return to college'. Parents value the care, guidance and support they receive. They state that they feel safe and able to share their problems with staff and take positive steps to tackle them. However, the centre is not established at heart of the community. Inconsistent registration processes, the lack of live birth data from health and missed opportunities to register new parents continue to hinder its position in the community.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage attending activities are generally well-supported in their learning and development, although the quality of Early Years provision tends to vary from group to group. Volunteers running the 'Tiny Treasures' group are receiving training to implement a 'steps and stages' tracking system and children's progress is now being recorded within 'Wow Books,' but this is not yet replicated across all groups. Parents are known to access a range of courses provided by external training agencies and library staff support parents with computer skills and curriculum vitae writing. In some cases, parents are directed to a range of summer adult learning courses provided by the

local community college, although the impact of signposting is not known because take-up of adult learning in general is not systematically tracked.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The Children's Centre Network Manager and her team of experienced staff are fully committed to supporting families to make positive changes in their lives and secure a better future. The restructure of services is complete, although some staff and teams are new to the community and systems to promote a more collaborative approach to multi-agency working are not fully embedded in practice. As a result, not all partners play a strategic and consistent role in the work and development of the centre and many do not contribute pertinent information about outcomes for families.

The performance management of staff is secure and includes a robust system to case-manage family support work, especially where families are particularly vulnerable. As result, outcomes for these families are good and staff receive structured and intensive support from their line managers. The leadership team is beginning to implement new systems for quality-assuring its work. For example, a more rigorous approach to target setting within action plans and pathways to track long-term achievement outcomes for children coming through the centre is in place, although extremely new. The manager and the local authority hold a realistic view of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and this is shown in the accuracy of their self evaluation. However, the drive for further improvement is hindered because the advisory board is not yet fully effective in its role.

The centre adheres to local safeguarding policies and procedures and staff confirm that they are well-equipped for their roles within child protection. Records confirm that appropriate suitability checks are undertaken for staff, volunteers and partners in keeping with mandatory requirements. Intensive family support work ensures positive outcomes for children at risk and for families experiencing significant crisis in their lives, such as domestic violence. Health and safety staff work hard to ensure that the building is safe and fit for purpose. However, the implementation of safeguarding policies across some sites is sometimes less robust than for others. The management is now aware of this and procedures are being reviewed.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Community cohesion and respect for others is promoted well via the 'Multicultural Fun day' and the good array of positive images displayed around the buildings'. Priorities are clearly focused on increasing the engagement of target groups with evidence of some success with teens, disabled children, dads and Black Minority Ethnic groups. However, the centre acknowledges that local data and intelligence is not providing them with an accurate picture of families in the reach area and the centre does not systematically track the outcomes for particular groups to monitor engagement, confirm impact and be sure that services are effectively targeted.

Centre and Library staff display great pride in their efforts to provide well-kept and welcoming environments for families and in some cases this is helping to overcome some barriers to families' engagement within library premises. However, Blackrod Library does not have a local authority children's centre sign, which prevents parents from being aware that it exists. Staffing vacancies following the restructure remain, delaying work to increase registrations and preventing the availability to provide crèche facilities to support targeted activities. Satisfactory outcomes and low engagement confirm that the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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	3
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	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	3
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.	3

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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Horwich and Blackrod Children's Centre on 14 June 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, and the staff and volunteers who work with you. We found that staff work hard to provide you with services and activities which meet your needs, but we also found things which we would like the centre to improve. For example, staff provide you with lots of information about how to lead a healthy lifestyle and keep safe and this is helping to reduce obesity levels in the area and raise awareness of things such as road and car safety. Activities such as 'Toddler Tales' and 'You Make a Difference' courses are helping to support children's early language development and parents report that such activities have improved their understanding of how to support their children's learning at home and prepare children for school. However, we found that the centre does not always receive useful information about all the activities parents and children access or the progress they make afterwards.

Parents reported, 'this is a safe and welcoming place to make new friends and get help if you need it', 'it's a godsend' and 'the help I've received has given me confidence and independence'. We found that the centre has some secure systems in place to meet with families at home, assess their needs and where necessary provide personalised family support. However, we found that there are many families in the community yet to register with the centre or use its services. Therefore, we have asked it to find out more about the people in the wider community so it can make sure that families from all backgrounds and cultures know about and benefit from what the centre has to offer.

The centre has made good use of the library buildings, health clinics and other buildings within both Horwich and Blackrod to provide services and activities which everybody can access and some of these are well-attended. However, the centre is carrying some staffing vacancies which is preventing it from being more visible in the community, which in turn hinders its ability to tackle low engagement with the centre. In the main, we found that parents are able to share their views about services and those we spoke to, stated they had

a voice in developing activities to suit their needs. For example, a father attending the Dad's Group stated, 'the group is 100% ours and we can develop the activities as we please, we have trips and sports as well as more structured activities because that's what we need'. A few parents are developing work-based skills due to volunteering opportunities within 'Tiny Treasures' and they have contributed to the local authority food and drink policy for children's centres. However, parents are not yet engaged in governance arrangements, although the centre has action plans in place to tackle this.

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory overall. The Children's Centre Network Manager and her team have experienced a major re-structure of services which has hindered more rapid development of the centre. Furthermore, the advisory board is not yet fully effective in its role because membership of the board frequently changes; this prevents the board from offering robust support and challenge and for holding the centre accountable for its work.

During our discussions we found that some partnership agencies work particularly well with the staff team; for example, the health visitors provide baby clinics and weaning groups for local families and this is helping staff to meet new families. Equally, the family support workers work closely with families who need specific services and they provide a good link between these families and other professional services. As a result, children most at risk of harm receive the right support and protection. However, not all partner agencies work well with the centre because they don't always provide information about services local parents are engaged with, so the centre does not know if these families make positive changes or progress in their lives. For example, staff know that some parents are accessing courses such as English Speakers of other Languages courses and computer courses but they are not always told how many completed courses or how many went on to other things. This prevents the centre from knowing if its work with partners is making a positive difference.

We really enjoyed our time at the children's centre and we thank you for taking time to speak with us.

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