

# Inspection report for Lakes Sure Start Children's Centre

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Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	383854
Inspection dates	19 - 20 June 2012
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Centre leader	Liz Brennan
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Goodly Dale Primary School 112191
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.

**Report Published:** July 2012

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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 primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

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

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, advisory board members, health professionals, voluntary and statutory partner organisations and two local headteachers, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation

## Information about the centre

Lakes Sure Start Children's Centre is based on the site of Goodly Dale Primary School and is one of four in the Cumbria South Lakes cluster of centres. It is a phase two centre, managed by Barnardo's on behalf of Cumbria County Council. It is a small centre and most of its targeted services are delivered on an outreach basis in venues such as church halls, schools, libraries and baby clinics. A crèche is provided to support parent courses. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision and childcare is provided by Goodly Dale Primary School and other providers in the area. The children of the most vulnerable families that the centre is working with generally enter early years' provision with knowledge and skills that are below expectations for their age.

The centre serves a rural community in some of the most affluent wards in the county: Coniston, Hawkshead, Lakes Ambleside, Lakes Grasmere, Windermere Bowness North and Windermere Bowness South. Overall, deprivation data show the area is fairly affluent, health is good and employment levels are high. However, local employment is mainly in the tourism sector and largely seasonal and there are few well-paid jobs for young people. As such, many families have difficulty accessing affordable housing. Long waiting lists for

housing mean that some young children are living in cramped, poor quality, private rented accommodation. Poor transport links results in insufficient access to many services for those users who are most in need.

Out of the 314 families registered with the centre from the reach area, 22 are lone parents. The centre has 221 children under the age of five, with 14 from minority ethnic backgrounds, six children attending have some form of learning difficulty or physical disability. Nearly all families are of White British heritage. A small number of families are Eastern European, mainly Polish. The team leader is responsible for the day-to-day operational running of the centre and is managed by the Children's Services Manager from Barnardo's. The governance of the centre is managed by Barnardo's and is supported by a partnership advisory board.

## 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

This is a good children's centre overall. Some features are outstanding because of excellent governance and accountability arrangements. It is effectively reaching most of the vulnerable families in the target areas, including disabled children and those with special educational needs. Consequently, outcomes for adults and children are good and improving. Children make good progress in their learning and development. For adults there is good development of self-esteem, social, personal and parenting skills. Some parents have good opportunities to become volunteers and contribute to the centre's activities.

Health outcomes, including sustained breastfeeding, reduction in obesity and oral health are good overall. The centre is highly committed to promoting healthy lifestyles, with a good focus on improving physical health. Similarly ensuring the emotional well-being of children and adults is given a high priority by the centre, especially for those who have disabled children and those families facing personal difficulties. The centre recognises that whilst the tracking of children's progress is robust through the use of 'Learning Journeys', there are currently few formal systems for following up how many of adult learners return to education or work as a result of the centre's efforts.

Users appreciate the good range of tailored services which are enjoyable and purposeful. These include the one-to-one sessions provided in the home to support individual needs. One user described the centre as a service where everybody's needs are met and nobody is left out. The outreach services are good and consistently reaching more families including those identified with circumstances that make them vulnerable.

The level and quality of care, guidance and support provided by the centre staff and its partners are excellent, both transforming and making a positive difference to the lives of the vast majority of families and users. For example, there is excellent support for the families undergoing bereavement or facing a personal crisis or dealing with domestic violence. The centre is extremely well-led and managed, with outstanding teamwork, accountability, and performance monitoring. This ensures centre staff meet and support the needs of all users exceptionally well. Excellent review systems ensure high levels of efficiency in providing services and maximising the use of resources, including staff and accommodation. Equality and diversity is promoted well with an inclusive approach focussed on supporting those who are most needy. Effective partnership working enables the centre to work collaboratively with a number of agencies to bring services to the local community.

The centre's approach to safeguarding, child protection, safe recruitment and its comprehensive monitoring arrangements are outstanding. Self-assessment is robust with managers having a clear view of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. There is good consultation and engagement with users. However, the management recognise that there is insufficient use of responses from users and partners to inform self-evaluation and to help further shape future services. The good quality of provision and outcomes for users and highly effective leadership and management team demonstrate the centre's good capacity for sustained improvement.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve the tracking of achievement for adults including progress into employment and further education, to accurately evaluate the impact of the centre's work on improving the economic stability of families.
- Increase the involvement of users and partners in the self-assessment process and governance of the centre to further determine and shape its services.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

2
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Users demonstrate much improved parenting skills, knowledge of healthy eating and lifestyles and positive relationships. Parents speak glowingly of the gains in their lives, their increased self-esteem and personal development after taking part in activities which are enjoyable and have enabled them to learn new skills. In particular, adults and children enjoy the community 'Fun Days', 'Stay and Play' sessions and holiday activities provided by the centre.

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and those who attend local childcare provision are good. The proportion of children achieving 78+ points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales with at least six points in each of the scales for personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy has increased. For example, one delighted mother told us that her child had transformed from, 'a shy quiet boy to a little explorer'. The centre effectively uses the 'Learning Journey' documentation to show children's progress from their starting points and plan their next steps.

The centre's effective promotion of healthy lifestyles underpins much of its work. Families' knowledge of a healthy diet is reinforced through cooking demonstrations at home and the snacks provided to children in the crèche. Outcomes in reducing obesity and sustaining breastfeeding are good and improving. For example, last year the proportion of children who were obese at Reception Year was 7.2%, in the Lakes region, which is lower than the countywide average. The good focus on physical well-being means families appreciate the enjoyable physical activities the centre has successfully packed into the family fun days which support behaviour changes and contribute to reducing obesity.

Users increase their knowledge of how to keep their children safe both outdoors and in the home and make good use of safety equipment in their home, such as stair gates. The centre has instigated many excellent initiatives to promote safeguarding across all its services. For example, many parents now appreciate the dangers of feeding babies by propping them up and have changed their practice accordingly. Early intervention strategies by the Multi-Agency Team ensure that children are fully protected against harm. Centre staff work exceptionally well with the intervention team, have an excellent understanding of the Common Assessment Framework process, and make effective use of it, such as the maintenance of records to ensure that those children most at risk receive well-targeted support at an early stage.

The centre's good focus on building positive relationships and supporting families' emotional well-being is much appreciated especially by women experiencing personal difficulties, such as those dealing with domestic abuse or postnatal depression. One mother expressed delight in her increased confidence and personal achievements. 'I have learnt to cook, how to play with my children and to bond as a family' she told the inspectors proudly. Some parents have made positive contributions to the life of the centre, for example, some parent volunteers work as ambassadors by helping to support other users. One parent told inspectors, 'We have cascaded what we have learnt to other friends'. Other parents are actively involved in helping to raise funds for the Barnardo's charity and contribute their views through the 'Parents Forum'. Currently, there is one parent member on the advisory board who is very active and whose contributions to the centre's decision making process helps to shape its services.

The economic and social well-being of many families, in particular those who experience isolation, is greatly improved because of their engagement with the centre's services. A recent course aimed at improving adults' employability skills has been well attended. Parents are directed to a range of adult learning courses provided by other partners. However, the

impact of signposting is not known because take-up of adult learning in general is not systematically tracked. The centre managers recognise the need to improve the collation and tracking of adult users' achievements and progress, in particular data for progression into employment and further education to give a better overview of the impact of the centre's work on outcomes for adults.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

Participation rates of users across the range of services have increased well over the last year. The centre's provision is well matched to the needs of its users through a broad range of activities and services that are effectively targeted according to need. Users highly appreciate the good, purposeful learning opportunities which enhance in particular, their parenting skills. Similarly the broad range of enjoyable children's activities such as 'Stay and Play' makes a strong contribution to improving the communication skills of children who attend the centre. Specialist activities, such as 'Dads Baby Massage' a group for fathers, and 'Koalas' a group to support families with children with additional learning needs, effectively support these target groups.

The outstanding intensive family support programme and highly sensitive outreach work enables many parents, including lone parents, to engage in beneficial activities in their home, such as cooking and learning how to play with their children. The centre excels in providing high quality support, advice and guidance to women facing personal difficulties and to disabled children and children with disabled parents. For example, one lone parent expressed how grateful she was in having help not only with fuel costs but also having the support of another adult who understood. Furthermore, the centre provides a free taxi service for those most in need in order to make its centre activities accessible and to prevent the isolation of those hard to reach families and those who live in very rural areas. The highly personalised support at times of crises means users are exceptionally well supported when they need it most. One parent explained 'The fantastic staff helped my son

by playing and doing different activities with him at home.’ Many women users have been helped by the self-empowerment programme. This has greatly developed their confidence in dealing with domestic violence, sharing experiences and gaining new friends.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

The excellent team work of the Children’s Services Manager, the centre leader, the local authority and Barnardo’s underpins the maintenance of high standards across all aspects of the provision. The centre’s accountability, vision, performance, management systems and regular supervisions of staff are outstanding. The strong focus on professional development and appraisals has successfully raised staff’s skills and ensures that they carry out their work effectively.

The effective communication and good relationships with partners and good use of the varied skills means services are targeted well to meet the needs of families. Target setting, data collection and its analysis are good and are used well to shape services to meet the needs of users, including target groups. Partnership arrangements with other agencies and community organisations make a significant contribution to the services enjoyed at the many venues. The planning of provision and self-evaluation process is robust, with regular updating of targets, clearly linked to key service priorities and annual reviews. Similarly, there is good engagement and consultation with users with regards to feedback on the activities they use. However, fewer users and partners engage in the wider self-evaluation process or the advisory board. The centre recognises that it needs to be more pro-active in encouraging more users and partners to take an active part in centre decision making. The management team are constantly facing challenging decisions about the use of its resources and accommodation. Despite these difficulties, the managers are extremely innovative in making excellent use of a range of venues within the reach area to extend the centre’s services and reach as many families as possible. Similarly, the management are very creative in using the skills and expertise of its staff. In spite of the reduction in staffing levels and undergoing a period of instability over the last year, staff morale is high and excellent team work ensures those from the target groups and those in most need of support receive excellent intervention. The impact on improving outcomes for families is good and the centre provides good value for money.



Safeguarding practices are exemplary and are given the highest priority by all at the centre. The rigorous monitoring of processes including the vetting of staff is excellent. Robust risk assessments ensure children's safety and ongoing training for staff ensures safeguarding is at the forefront of their work. Family outreach workers follow clear protocols and offer excellent guidance and support in making homes safe for young children and working with those children subject to child protection plans.

Inclusion, narrowing the achievement gap and meeting the needs of the hard-to-engage groups, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, is effective and a key priority for the centre. The varied range of multicultural resources, books and positive images reflect people from different ethnic minority groups and demonstrates the centre's strong commitment to celebrate diversity. As one user stated, 'Polish mums were integrated really well and are not left out'. Users recognise and value their differences and show respect for each other. For example, a parent sang nursery rhymes in Polish with children and another has translated course materials for the first aid programme, to make learning accessible for other Polish parents. This is one example of how community cohesion is effectively promoted through the centre's work with the local and wider community including families from other countries. All are made to feel welcome at this inclusive centre.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>2</b>

## **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 *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Lakes Sure Start Children's Centre on 19 and 20 June 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Your centre also has some excellent features. From our discussions, observations of learning sessions and meetings, including with some users, we know how much you appreciate the centre's services and the excellent support staff offer you.

We are delighted to learn that using the centre has made a positive difference to the lives of all of those that we spoke to, particularly in helping you to gain more confidence. You all said that you love using the centre and as one of you put it, 'Don't know what I would have done without it'.

You told us about the progress that you, your children have made in learning new skills as well as gaining knowledge, especially about health matters and healthy eating. You enthusiastically told us how the centre kept you 'moving forward all the time'. Some of you have become volunteers and help with some centre activities. This is helping you to develop useful skills and one parent has become a member of the advisory board.

The broad range of activities that the centre offers is very well matched to your needs. They are run by highly skilled and dedicated staff, including those who visit you at home. From these activities you have learnt about good parenting skills, budgeting, self-empowerment and how to deal with domestic abuse. You have also received information about jobs and benefits. Parenting courses in particular have helped you to learn about improving family relationships, how to support your child's learning and how to manage difficult behaviour. You also told us about the Fun Day's, which you all enjoy.

We are really pleased that the centre is extremely good at keeping you safe at the centre and teaching you how to keep your families safe. The staff work diligently to prevent you from becoming isolated. Some of you told us how the centre provides you with outstanding support both in the centre and at home. Some of this support includes: help with childcare; a range of information; borrowing of safety equipment; help with a personal crisis; showing you how to cook a meal; or even providing a taxi service to help you to access services.

Managers and staff, including those from other agencies know your needs well. The team leader is extremely skilled at running the centre and knows your local community well. The managers from Barnardo's and the local authority maintain high standards across the service, so that you get a good deal and high quality support and services at all times. To engage you further in the life of the centre and improve your skills the staff actively encourage you to contribute your views to the Parents' Forum and to act as volunteers. Your views are welcomed and mostly used well to develop the centre.

We have asked the centre to implement a system for tracking and gathering precise information about the activities or courses you have done and how many of you successfully return to work or education to improve your skills. We have also asked the centre managers to engage more parents and partners in the self-evaluation systems and decision making by becoming members of the advisory board.

It was great to listen to so many of your positive views. Thank you for welcoming us to your centre and giving us your valuable time.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).