

Inspection report for Carlisle West - Newtown Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
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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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and her team, partner agencies including representatives from health and education and senior officers from the local authority and Barnardo's, a voluntary sector organisation and the contract holders for this centre. They also had discussions with users, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Newtown Children's Centre is a phase two centre, one of two children's centres that together form Carlisle West in the south and west of Carlisle. Services and activities are held in 35 settings across the reach area through partnership working with health services, local schools, and the private and voluntary sectors. The centre manager leads and manages both the Newtown Centre and the Morton Centre. Staff work across the total reach area of Carlisle West, using the expertise of partners across all services. Following the re-designation of the reach area some 18 months ago, there are now 1259 children aged nought to four living in the area. Of these, 79% are living in the most deprived areas. Until April 2011, Newtown Children's Centre operated as a 'virtual' children's centre because it had no central building. Since the establishment of a central point for services and staff, the reach and impact of the centre has increased significantly.

The centre serves a community that experiences high economic and social deprivation and particularly high levels of mental ill health and domestic violence. The children's centre is located in a lower super output area which reflects the 10% most disadvantaged in the country. The most recent available information indicates that in this area over half of the children are living in families where no one is working and 50% of children are in receipt of free school meals. High proportions of families in the reach area are in receipt of benefit and

39% of children are living in families where there is at least one smoker. Those living in the most affluent wards in the area are living on average 12 years longer than those in the most deprived wards. Families attending the centre are predominately from a White British background, although the proportion of families from Eastern European and Asian heritage backgrounds is rising. For most of these families, English is an additional language.

The majority of children enter Early Years Foundation Stage settings with skills and abilities that are well below those expected for their age. The number of disabled children and those with special educational needs is above national averages. The centre is managed on behalf of the local authority by Barnardo's. Governance of the centre is through Carlisle West Advisory Board which comprises the centre leader, parents, representatives from local partners and the local authority.

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

This outstanding children's centre serves its community particularly well, delivering the highest quality services that enhance the lives of families. There is a shared and overwhelming commitment to improving the life chances of families within the area. Provision is excellent and increasingly well matched to the needs of the community and individual families. The centre places the highest priority on safeguarding and all users and staff are exceptionally well safeguarded. Rigorous lone working practices and risk assessments ensure that staff are never placed at risk. The inclusion of children and families is prioritised well. Disabled children and those with special educational needs, and their families, are particularly well supported. Numerous examples exemplify this, such as the excellent Portage service and the support to enable children in the local hospice to attend summer play activities. Parents feel very safe and exceptionally well supported by the centre. Parents, grandparents and other users told inspectors that, '...they can't do enough for you...they have really raised my aspirations...who would have thought I would be going to university'.

The centre manager and her team have a huge drive and passion for the work that the centre does. Senior leaders inspire all staff to work tirelessly to bring about sustained and

impressive changes for the locality that it serves. Targets for staff are set which link explicitly to centre performance targets. Supervision and support for staff are exemplary and very effectively challenge and motivate all staff. Opportunities for personal and professional development are excellent and wide ranging. Highly effective partnership working ensures that services are very well integrated and attendance is high. Monitoring of engagement rightly focuses on meaningful participation. This means that the centre does not automatically register all families in the area, but focuses rigorously on engaging and providing services for those in target groups. All of this serves to explain why this centre has outstanding capacity to improve.

Outcomes for most families are at least good and are improving. Intensive work to promote children's attainment across the Early Years Foundation Stage and at all other stages of their education is having a positive impact. This can be seen from the improving progress children are making from their start points. Schools report that children come to school more ready to learn and parents are more confident to engage with teachers. Through programmes such as 'Living for Sport' older children are gaining in confidence and their attendance and behaviour at school is improving. As one parent said, 'my child is now a different person...he is now willing to have a go...he is far less shy and has more confidence'.

The commitment to support volunteers, internships and those who are unemployed in the community is excellent. In 2011 all of those who engaged in the 'Future Jobs Fund' initiative moved into permanent employment, the majority progressing to further learning and qualifications. Not only do volunteers participate and help to facilitate a range of courses and activities, many move on to run their own groups such as the support group for speakers of other languages which is led and run by volunteers. The centre is working with partners to capture more robustly the impact of this and other work.

The self-evaluation makes excellent use of a good range of data, case studies and analysis of individual progress. Similarly, programmes and activities are planned following rigorous analysis of public health 'observatory' data. However, the centre does not have as much data at a locality level as it would like to enable it to analyse and monitor in detail the progress that families are making across all outcome areas. Centre managers and the data analyst rightly recognise this as a high priority and are working closely with the local authority and health partners to ensure that they have even better and more specific information.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend further the leadership team's ability to fully measure the impact of all its work by:
 - continuing to work with the local authority and health partners to develop further data collection
 - capturing the impact of the centre's excellent work across all activities through these data.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The promotion of healthy lifestyles threads through every activity, from inspiring 'Cook for Life' and 'Henry' programmes to well-attended baby massage sessions. The newly-established Zumba classes at the centre and in local schools are providing children, parents and grandparents with a superb and fun way to exercise and keep fit. Local schools have commented that this and other activities are really encouraging the families who most need to access services to do so and to continue to attend. Due to the centre's very effective health-related provision and its strong collaborative working with health visitors and other partners, outcomes for children in the area are improving. In the period June 2011 to June 2012, breastfeeding rates increased by 5%. In the same period, the proportion of Reception-aged children who are obese was 6.2%, the second lowest in the Carlisle area.

Parents say they feel safe at the centre. Work with individual families whose circumstances make them vulnerable is particularly successful. The Common Assessment Framework is used well to support those families who are experiencing a range of difficulties. The impact of this sensitive early intervention work is excellent and it prevents many complex situations reaching crisis point. The centre is working hard with partners to increase the impact of this work even more so that the number of children on a child protection plan who are re-registered continues to reduce.

Children and their parents enjoy attending the centre and benefit from high quality and innovative activities. The 'Narrowing the Gap' course has improved not only the behaviour of Early Years Foundation Stage children, but has significantly improved the involvement of parents with the school. The fun activities provided by the centre enable parents to grow in confidence and to become more involved in their child's learning and development. Many parents told inspectors how much they valued the activities. They spoke of the impact of the activities in helping them to understand the importance and value of play. They particularly value the strong emphasis on making use of free resources through activities such as the Forest School events.

Families have many good opportunities to make a positive contribution. Children display exemplary behaviour and are learning to share and take turns. Families develop strong

respect for the centre and are exceptional at supporting others in times of crisis. Opportunities to provide feedback are wide-ranging and the centre is particularly effective at capturing the views of younger children through information and communication technology. Increasing numbers are involved in the newly reformed parents' forum named 'Parent Power' and the many activities it is beginning to offer such as the safety fun day. Although parents are involved in the advisory board, centre staff recognise that there is further work to do to ensure that they are able to attend and participate regularly.

Families improve their economic position well as a result of the work of the centre. Opportunities to develop skills through volunteering are excellent. A well-thought-out range of courses from 'My Life' to 'Employability Skills' support progression into further learning, higher education and employment. The numbers of parents engaging and progressing in learning has improved consistently over the last three years. Completion of parenting courses and other activities gives parents confidence in enabling their child's development, as well as helping them to set boundaries for behaviour. One parent commented, 'My husband and I now manage behaviour in the same way', and another reported that 'I can now say no, mean it, and stick to it.'

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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.	2

How good is the provision?

1

The provision offered by the centre is excellent because a wide range of activities and services are readily accessible across the area. The main centre, with its wonderfully welcoming reception staff, is well used. It offers a good range of health and education services such as antenatal checks, weaning advice and breastfeeding support. Childminders attend the main centre often and are well supported. Consequently, the reception area is bustling, rooms at the centre are full to bursting and outcomes for families are good.

The centre staff have achieved an excellent balance of universal and targeted provision in its many settings and through its very effective outreach service. Attendance rates are high and increasing rapidly particularly amongst the centre's priority target groups. For example, the

number of families from Black and minority ethnic communities increased by 81% between June 2011 and June 2012. Services are constantly under review to ensure they meet the needs of target families. Much of the provision is developed as a result of feedback from families. The very well-attended and much-loved 'DAFT Saturdays' were developed in response to families identifying the need to have activities that could be accessed by families together.

The centre promotes involvement in many exhilarating community events and has firm plans in place to use these as a tool to engage even more families. Programmes and courses are carefully planned to support parents to progress in their learning. The structure, content and particularly the delivery of these courses has a significant impact on raising aspirations and, because of this, some 17 parents progressed to further accredited learning in the last two years.

The care, guidance and support offered to children and their families are exceptional. Particularly well-tailored support ensures that the large majority of users make good progress across all outcomes. Peer support workers provide excellent support for breastfeeding, both at the centre and in the home at all times of the day and night. Parents of disabled children and those with special educational needs are extremely well supported. Importantly they have access to an excellent range of inclusive and targeted services. In times of crisis, families report that they feel particularly well supported. This can be best summed up in the words of one parent who said, 'They have supported me when I was totally alone...they let me stay at the centre all day and made sure I had somewhere safe at the end of the day...'

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	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

Inspirational leadership and management enthuses all staff to be aspirational for themselves and for the families with which they are working. Staff are committed to engaging with the local community and have an excellent understanding of their roles and responsibilities and how these relate to wider priorities. Supportive but challenging supervision, excellent staff development opportunities, and rigorous appraisal processes are the key tools that inform improvement.

Locality working and excellent partnership arrangements, driven by centre staff, maximise the use of centre and shared resources. Priorities for the centre are developed very

effectively with partners through rigorous evaluation and ambitious target setting. The centre listens to families well and is developing an increasing range of methods to enable them to participate even more in self-evaluation and the planning of provision. Priorities are firmly grounded in a detailed analysis and understanding of the needs of the local area. As a consequence of this, the numbers of families accessing services, particularly those in the most need has increased by over 200% in the last two years.

Despite the economic recession and the significantly broadening remit of the centre, the centre continues to sustain and develop further services. Excellent cluster working by staff across Carlisle West ensures all families across the reach area have access to a wide range of professionals. Highly effective management and pooling of resources, the rapidly increasing numbers of target groups who are meaningfully engaged with the centre and the exceptionally well-located activities across the reach area are all reasons why the centre provides outstanding value for money.

Equality and inclusion for families are a high priority for the centre. All staff undertake equality and diversity training annually. Increasingly the centre is engaging a greater proportion of users from the most disadvantaged communities. Collaborative partnership working is beginning to improve the life chances of all communities in the reach area, resulting in the gap narrowing between children's outcomes. In particular, data demonstrate the success of the centre in increasing the number of disabled children who access provision.

The centre's approach to safeguarding is outstanding. Early intervention and early referrals are priority actions for staff and their partners. Multi-agency working is highly effective and is led and promoted robustly by the centre staff. Partnerships with agencies that specialise in domestic violence are excellent and consequently these families are exceptionally well safeguarded and protected. The training of staff on safeguarding and related topics is prioritised and many staff are qualified to level three or above.

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 secures 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	1
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	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.	2

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

No other information was used.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Carlisle West-Newtown Sure Start Children's Centre on 20 and 21 June 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you for your very warm welcome to your centre and for the time you spent with us during the inspection. We particularly would like to thank those who came to talk to us at times when you would not normally be at the centre. As well as talking to you we read your many comments about the centre and also many of the case studies about the progress you have made. We can see why you thoroughly enjoy coming to the centre, really appreciate the support and drive of the staff, and we could really see and understand the amazing difference that Newtown Children's Centre is making to your lives.

We were bowled over by your passion for the centre and the impact that you told us the centre has had on your lives and those of your families. Many of you told us that your involvement with the centre has developed your confidence and helped you to find ways to improve your lives. We feel privileged to have heard your different stories of how the centre has helped you. We were astounded by your enthusiasm for the centre during our meetings and the openness with which you spoke. We totally agree with you that the centre is a very warm and welcoming place to be and that staff listen to you when you need them most. It is clear that you really benefit from the many opportunities that the centre provides for you and that the centre is helping you to be emotionally strong and to support your children's development.

We were really impressed with the progress that those of you whose first language is not English are making and in particular your determination to keep improving your English. My colleague very much enjoyed spending time with the grandparents' group, baby massage and the many courses that you are able to access. I was delighted to be part of the presentation of certificates to those of you who have successfully completed your 'My Life

Now' course. During our visit we saw and heard about lots of good provision to help your children do better at school. In particular, we were very impressed by the Forest Schools activities and the 'Narrowing the Gap' project.

The people in charge of the children's centre are doing an excellent job. We found that all staff and managers are truly committed to providing you all with an outstanding service that fully reflects your needs and ambitions. Staff have developed excellent links with local partners to ensure that you have the widest, most accessible range of provision possible. Staff have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve services even further and they are determined to make your lives the best they can be. To help them do this we have asked leaders and managers to work with health and education partners to develop the information available to them even further so that they know even better the impact that their work is having on your lives.

Thank you all once again for making our visit so enjoyable. We wish you all the very best for the future.

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