

# Inspection report for North Allerdale Surestart Children's Centre

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Local authority	Cumbria
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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 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.

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector. The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, staff, parents, members of the advisory group and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health, children's services and education professionals and representatives from local training providers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

North Allerdale Children's Centre is located in the north west of Cumbria and serves a large rural area of over 720 square miles. Its reach includes 11 super output areas, two of which fall within the top 30% of deprived wards in the country. The reach population of the centre is just under 1,200 children aged under five years. Recent figures show that over 23% of households are lone parents with dependent children. Estimated weekly income is slightly above the Cumbrian average and the percentage of children aged under four years living in households dependent on workless benefits is just below the Cumbrian average. The majority of local families are of White British heritage. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The area contains one of the highest proportions of children subject to child-protection plans in Cumbria. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age. The proportion of disabled children and those with special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is in line with the County average.

North Allerdale is a phase two centre, serving communities in the 70% most deprived wards in the country. The main centre is located in the market town of Wigton, on the Greenacres housing estate. This site, known locally as 'The Family Place' was originally a Barnardo's Family Centre and consists of two houses converted into one. Since 2000, it has been extended to incorporate a crèche room and outdoor play area. There are two further

satellite centres situated in the market towns of Silloth and Aspatria. Given the rural nature of the community it serves, service delivery is both centre and outreach based, staff use a wide range of community venues to host events and activities. The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery at North Allerdale Children's Centre is the responsibility of Barnardos on behalf of Cumbria County Council. Governance arrangements for the centre are provided through the North Allerdale Advisory Group.

## 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

North Allerdale Children's Centre is a good centre. Leadership and the way that partners and the centre's staff work successfully to improve outcomes for children and their parents, are particular strengths. A warm and friendly welcome awaits all who access the wide range of services and well-resourced activities available across the local community.

Motivational leadership has harnessed staff' and partners' enthusiasm to reach out into the community and raise aspirations and achievements of all, particularly those families who are most disadvantaged. Outcomes for users are at least good and some are improving rapidly. The proportion of children achieving an average level of attainment in the early learning goals when they leave Reception Year is improving well. Headteachers report children entering school who have attended activities in the centre are more ready for school and achieve well from their individual starting points. Breastfeeding rates have also improved steadily over the past three years, with the latest figures showing that 47.1% of mums continue to breastfeed their baby beyond 6 to 8 weeks.

Through a thorough analysis of local and individual needs and consultation with children and their families the centre is able to provide a good range of activities that meet the needs of their diverse community. Partners and centre staff provide timely, sensitive support to families and children who are facing significant or temporary challenges in their lives. Given the rural location of this centre, staff are adept at ensuring that they take activities out into the community, so removing the greatest barrier facing many families in this footprint, that of access to services.

Leadership of the centre is good and governance arrangements are improving following a period where there has been some change in membership. The advisory group, who act as the advisory board, are fully supportive of the work of the centre and meet regularly to monitor what the centre is providing. However, their ability to fully evaluate and challenge the impact of the centre's work is less well established. This is due in part to the fact that management information systems do not always accurately reflect the full impact of the centre's work. Leaders and partners are fully aware of what is working well and what needs to improve and, as a result, self-evaluation is rigorous and inclusive. Whilst the large majority of services are increasingly integrated to good effect, there is a need to further develop protocols to enable the consistent sharing of relevant information between appropriate agencies. This will facilitate the centre's ability to target services and further improve their reach, particularly for those families most in need of intervention and support. Safeguarding is given a high priority and safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements and are good. Given the collective impact of the centre and its partners' actions to improve the life chances of their children and families, the centre's capacity to improve is good.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Strengthen the advisory board's ability to evaluate the impact of the centre's multi-agency work by further developing management information systems that more accurately record the full impact of the centre's work.
- Work with the Children's Trust to ensure the ongoing development of protocols which enable the consistent sharing of information between relevant agencies, so enabling the centre to increase their reach further, particularly in relation to those families with circumstances that make them vulnerable.

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

<b>2</b>
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A clear focus and determination to improve the health of families living across the North Allerdale footprint has ensured that obesity levels in reception-aged children remain below the national average at 7.1%. 'I'm now more aware of the salt content of foods I buy.', 'I have more confidence about how to wean my baby.', were typical comments made by parents when asked about the difference the numerous health-related activities had made to them and their families. The outreach team incorporate a range of fun, physical activities into their programme, including 'mini-movers' and 'creepy crawlers', all of which are designed to show young children that exercise can be fun. Inspectors were impressed by the 'sport on the Garth activity' which enabled children and their families in an outlying village to participate together in a range of sports and games.

Robust policies and effective procedures ensure children are well-safeguarded. Security across all buildings is good and this is underpinned by effective risk assessments. As a result

the large majority of parents say they feel safe in the centres and are confident turning to staff for support if they have concerns. Regular events such as summer safety week and visits from the local police and fire service ensure that families gain a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe. The centre has been proactive in ensuring that children subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework processes are well supported. An improving partnership with children's services has facilitated effective multi-agency working, ensuring improved outcomes, including for some children on child protection plans.

The proportion of children achieving at age expected levels on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is above the Cumbrian average at 51.5%. The Early Years Adviser has empowered staff with the knowledge of how to consistently apply good practice in the implementation of systems to track children's progress and effectively identify next steps. Productive partnerships with local schools ensure that children are very well prepared for this transition. Case studies and discussions with parents reveal the positive impact that parenting skills courses have had on parents and their children's personal development, learning, behaviour and well-being. One parent told us that without the support of the centre she would have, 'had no future at all'.

Many parents, including some lone parents and dads, commented on how their confidence as parents has improved through their participation in activities offered by the centre. Parents say they feel their voice is heard through participation in the parents' forum, and there are some good examples of how parents have had opportunities to influence the design and setting up of services. For example, the ongoing provision of the stay and play group at Aspatria. Some parents are also represented on the advisory group and this reflects the centre's commitment to parents to contribute in a meaningful way.

The centre's focus on raising self-esteem and confidence has enabled many parents to take steps back into learning, training and employment. The successful volunteer programme has been pivotal in enabling a number of parents to access a wide range of training opportunities. A large proportion have gone on to secure employment as a result, many within the children's centre. One parent talked enthusiastically about her completion of a finance management course whilst another told us how the support she had received from the centre had motivated her to become a volunteer. Centre staff are fantastic role models and have inspired many parents to believe that anything is possible with the right support and access to training.

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>	2
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	2
<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>	2

<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>	2
<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>	2

## **How good is the provision?**

**2**

A wide range of services and activities are imaginatively delivered across the reach area, and these reflect the diverse needs of this widely dispersed community. Effective partnerships have been established with the local police, schools and housing association, with regular meetings enabling the centre to better assess the needs of families with circumstances that make them the most vulnerable members of its community. Parents told us of the life changing support they had received and the confidence they had gained, enabling them to move forward successfully. 'I owe them my family.' said one dad, whilst another spoke of being more confident to set boundaries and relate to her children. Practitioners engage sensitively with families to help them overcome any anxieties and parents visibly relax in the welcoming, safe and comfortable surroundings.

Home visits from family support workers have led to the successful engagement of many hard to reach families, enabling them to access a range of services. These visits cover a wide range of issues including emotional health and parenting support. The level of personal support received by families is greatly appreciated and has contributed to the genuine sense of trust in and respect for staff. The centre continually evaluates its range of good quality provision and ensures that activities are well located and effectively engage the majority of target groups.

Provision to help children learn and develop is good and helps to ensure that the achievements and aspirations of children are raised. Parents say that they feel empowered and comment on the real difference the centre has made to their own confidence and learning. One parent at a 'family fun' session confidently supported her child to write her name, and was able to celebrate this key achievement with centre staff. The celebration of achievements is an integral part of the culture of this inclusive centre.

Good care, guidance and support together with effective multi-agency working are ensuring that families are accessing sensitive, individualised support. This is particularly demonstrated through the shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Effective working partnerships have been established between relevant external agencies including portage and the speech and language team, ensuring the provision of appropriate support and advice. Staff demonstrate a wide breadth of knowledge on a range of topics including smoking cessation, safety and feeding. This combined with the hard work of the Participation and Information Officer and the availability of good quality literature ensures that families have access to timely advice.

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

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

**2**

Focused leadership and strong teamwork ensures the provision of effective support for families across the area. There is a coherent link between the Children's Trust, Children and Young People's Plan and the centre's action plan. As a result the centre's priorities link effectively to those of the wider area. The interface between the centre's targets and those set in addition by Barnardo's clearly adds value to the overall effectiveness of the centre. Senior leaders work hard to ensure that the profile of the children's centre is raised through representation on a range of strategic partnerships. However, there is still some inconsistency in relation to the establishment of protocols to enable the effective sharing of information between relevant agencies. At times, this limits the centre's ability to effectively reach some of those in their community.

Performance management arrangements are robust. Lines of accountability across the centre and partners are clear, understood and followed. Supervision and appraisals take place regularly and outcomes feed into evaluations of the centre's work and the development of future priorities. Clear and succinct action plans stem from supervision, evaluations and the centre's key plans. These are reviewed quarterly with key partners including the local authority's Lead for Children's Centres and Commissioned Services. The advisory group understand their responsibility to challenge the impact of the centre's work. However, there is a recognised need to further develop some aspects of the management information system so that it more accurately records the full impact of the centre's work.

The centre promotes equality, tackles discrimination and celebrates diversity effectively. Activities are provided to support community cohesion and break down those barriers to access which the rural geography of the reach area presents. This concerted action to improve the life chances of all communities has resulted in the gap narrowing between children's outcomes in this footprint and those across the county, particularly in relation to educational achievement of children. Safeguarding is given the highest priority and recruitment and vetting procedures are robust. Children's centres are seen as playing an integral role in the County's delivery of its early intervention and prevention agenda.

Resources are managed and used to best effect across this vast rural area. Productive partnership working helps to sustain some key services where additional needs are identified. This, combined with effective outreach work and well-attended activities in local community venues, extends the reach and impact of work of the centre successfully. As a result the centre provides good value for money.



Leaders actively seek out the views of families to ensure activities meet their needs and interests. For example, following parent requests, disabled children and their families now have a regular opportunity to meet together. Families comment that they are able to contribute to the work of the centre through regular discussions with staff, the parents' forum and evaluations of activities.

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>	2
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>	2
<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>	2
<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>	2
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	2
<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>	2
<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>	2

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

North Allerdale Children's Centre hosts a sessional pre-school provision for children aged two to school age. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections has been taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in this report.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the North Allerdale Surestart Children's Centre on 1 and 2 August 2012. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and centre staff. Following this work, we have judged that the centre provides good support to you and your families. Some of the things that the centre is doing well includes the support provided to ensure the safety and well-being of local families. Activities and actions taken to promote yours and your children's learning are also good, as is the quality of care, guidance and support offered by centre staff.

We found that the centre works well with other partners including the police, housing and children's services. This ensures that those families who are experiencing challenge in their lives are well supported. The children's centre offers a number of activities to help people in your community lead healthier lifestyles and many of you have participated in these, including family splash and mini movers. We know family support workers are committed to passing on information about the dangers of smoking in pregnancy and that some of you have found sessions to help pregnant and new mums stop smoking helpful.

Most importantly, you tell us that you 'feel safe at the centre,' and can 'trust the staff'. You particularly appreciate home visits and the opportunity to go with someone to a group until you build your confidence and make new friends. We found that the centre was good at helping people in their lives when they most need it. Once families are known to the centre we found that different people and organisations worked well together to provide support. However, there is some work to do to ensure that information is shared appropriately between agencies to ensure that even more families are able to participate in the good quality activities offered.

We found that those people in charge of the children's centre are doing a good job and we know you agree because you told us this. Managers, together with staff, are determined to improve provision ensuring it meets your needs more effectively. The centre has access to lots of detailed information to help them plan future activities and we know they listen to you because you enjoy attending activities they provide. We have asked the centre to look at further developing the way it records the impact of its work, so that it more accurately reflects the good work done. This will in turn help the advisory group fulfil its role to effectively challenge the impact of the centre and the activities and events it provides. The centre continues to look at ways in which it can further increase the involvement and influence you as parents. One such way is through your active participation in the work of the advisory group. We hope that this is something which more of you might be interested in becoming involved in.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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