

Inspection report for South Whitehaven Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	384218
Inspection dates	8-9 August 2012
Reporting inspector	Janet Stacey HMI

Centre leader	Russell Norman
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Howgill Family Centre 14 - 15 Howgill St Whitehaven Cumbria CA28 7QW
Telephone number	01946 62681
Fax number	01946 694242
Email address	russell.norman@howgill-centre.co.uk

Linked school if applicable	Valley Primary School and Nursery 134214
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Howgill Kabin EY377422

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: August 2012

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



No.100080

© Crown copyright 2012

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 senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with the Chair of the School Governing Body, local councillors, a headteacher, representatives from the local authority and parents. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and the centre's equality and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

South Whitehaven Sure Start Children's Centre is situated in Whitehaven, Cumbria. The centre was originally established in December 2005, covering the whole of Whitehaven. In 2009 the centre reduced its reach to cover South Whitehaven. The centre is on the site of Valley Primary School and Nursery. Childcare provision is provided in The Howgill Kabin. The linked provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The school was last inspected in January 2012 and the childcare was last inspected in May 2009. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. Early years services are also provided by private and voluntary early years organisations in the local area.

There are approximately 655 children under five years of age living in the reach area. The centre serves the wards of Mirehouse, Kells and Sandwith. The communities covered are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The main social issues affecting these areas are a high number of families on benefits and living in workless households, and a relatively high number of teenage parents. Families face a range of challenges in the local area including domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, high incidence of crime and significant levels of maternal mental health issues.

Family support, health, parenting programmes and early years advice are offered by a multi-disciplinary team based at the centre and also through outreach, group and home visiting programmes. The majority of families are of White British heritage. The reach area is

characterised by a mix of private and social housing. Data show that most children in the reach area enter early years provision with a range of experiences and skills well below those expected for their age. The centre operates some groups and activities on site and in designated sites across the community. The centre takes referrals from and supports families with children in four local schools.

Governance of the centre is provided by Howgill Family Centre which is a registered charity and Company Limited by guarantee. A range of professionals are represented on the developing advisory board and multi-agency support team (MAST) meetings, including children's services, education, youth providers, elected members, health, police, parents and other services.

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

South Whitehaven Sure Start Children's Centre set out to establish itself as a place at the heart of the community. It has achieved these aims. Through concerted efforts made by centre staff and key partners, data show that the numbers of families who are registering and engaging with centre activities, particularly those families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, are increasing month by month. In addition, the number of families who are making self-referrals is also increasing. This demonstrates good capacity for sustained improvement.

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good because of the effective leadership and governance of the centre. Leaders are extremely effective in raising funds to help its disadvantaged communities tackle the causes of poverty and deprivation and to bring about real improvements to their communities. Users of the centre have an extremely meaningful influence on how the centre operates and how resources are determined and agreed. The highly effective parents' forum, with the support of centre staff, is proactive in designing leaflets, questionnaires and approaching parents across the reach area to encourage all families to engage with the centre. They have a true voice at a strategic level; their views are listened to by the very proactive and supportive governing body.

Parents and children have a good understanding of safety and the centre ensures all users are well safeguarded. However, social services do not always utilise the expert knowledge that the family support workers hold on the families that they work with.

Through the excellent support from family support workers, families who are considered most at risk receive timely intervention. The support for these families is exceptional, particularly for adults and young children who have suffered bereavement. Parenting plus staff are highly skilled and play a pivotal role in helping adults develop an appropriate understanding of how they can assist with their child's learning and development. However, not enough parents, schools and early years providers are engaged in the transition into school programme. As a result, many children in the area are not sufficiently prepared to enter school ready to learn. The centre supports a very successful volunteer programme which provides a great number of adults in the area with the skills they need to enter the workforce or further education and training.

Leaders and managers successfully promote equality and respect for diversity. They work hard to include those identified as being at risk and to support those families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable. The centre manager is effectively supported by a joint advisory board made up of the multi-agency support team and an extremely active parents' forum. All have a clear view about their role and have a strategic part in decision making at the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and with partners in schools and local nurseries to identify actions to narrow the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest.
- Build on the good links with social work professionals to ensure that centre staff are consistently invited to attend relevant meetings where they can share pertinent knowledge about the families that are known to them.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for users are good. Evaluation forms confirm high levels of confidence and satisfaction. Typical comments are: 'There were times when I had lost all hope, this centre saved me' and 'It's great to get out and meet other mums'. Children and families who attend the centre make the most of a good range of activities helping them lead healthy lifestyles. Activities such as 'HENRY' help parents learn the benefits of healthy eating and how to cook cheaper and healthier food options. 'Baby Picasso' sessions enable very young babies to explore textures and try puréed food, such as green beans and red peppers. While trying the food they also create wonderful pieces of art with the food. This is then placed onto a canvas so that parents can keep and display their children's art work. 'Infant

Massage' sessions are popular and help parents to learn the positive value of physical stimulation including holding, movement, touch and relaxation techniques.

A specific programme for promoting parenting skills helps to build bonds between parents and their children and provides the security that young children need to thrive. Fathers are seen regularly in the centre and attend a good range of activities with their children. Users say they feel completely safe when accessing activities at the centre and in the community. Where families need specific support the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used effectively to identify their needs. Due to this work there is good evidence of improved outcomes for those subject to a child protection plan and for looked after children.

Teenage parents are extremely well supported through the 'Teen Mums' group. Here they can talk to staff in confidence, seek professional support and discuss any weaning, eating, sleeping and behavioural concerns that they may have. Health service links provide good access and support through the ante-natal and post-natal clinics. The centre has made a concerted effort to improve breastfeeding and has trained and supported local volunteers to act as breastfeeding support workers. As a consequence, while still below the national average of 45.7%, mothers who are breastfeeding has increased over the last three years from 5% to 12% and currently stands at 19%. This is a real success for the centre as bottle feeding babies is historically accepted as the norm in the community.

Through 'Story Sack' sessions and 'Carer and Toddler' groups parents learn useful skills and activities they can try out at home to support their child's learning. Data show that the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest has narrowed overall across the area from 42.8% in 2008 to 32.2% in 2011. However, this is still well above the national average of 12%. In addition, the transition into school programme is currently only operating in one of the four schools that the centre works with. These children are supported by the implementation of a specific programme for promoting language and communication skills and are already showing rapid improvement in their speaking and listening skills. However, the skills and knowledge of children when they enter school varies considerably between different parts of the reach area. Adults have a good range of opportunities to gain skills and experience in a wide range of volunteer roles, such as administration, gardening, driving and family support. In addition, the centre works closely with Lake College where parents can access courses such as literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, and childcare at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level.

Users have excellent opportunities to contribute their views and influence the decision making and governance of the centre through the very active parents' forum. They have proposed suggestions for further activities such as cooking courses, a fundraising stall at the annual maritime festival, family swim days and the summer activity programme. The parents' forum was instrumental in establishing the children's charity shop that is now well established in the town centre. This thriving project is helping to raise funds for projects in the community.

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	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	1
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?

2

The centre is a very welcoming place. There is a good mix of consultation and training rooms which are used effectively by a wide range of partners to meet the needs of families in the reach area. The resources throughout the centre and its designated sites are of good quality. The centre ensures that a wide range of information about many aspects of parenting, including advice about how to keep children healthy and safe, is freely available to parents.

The centre provides a broad range of integrated services and activities, which has resulted in an increasing number of families accessing what is on offer. For example, data show that, at 69%, the large majority of families in the reach area are registered and actively engaged in centre activities. Outreach is a vital and extremely successful part of the centre's work and its involvement in the community. The centre successfully ensures that families benefit from a highly coordinated approach, and for those who cannot attend the centre joint home visits are made to provide excellent support and encourage engagement with other services. Staff have a very good knowledge about local families and individual children through their willingness to draw on local knowledge. As a result, the care, guidance and support offered to families are outstanding.

The centre has many examples of improvements made through its work. The area has recently suffered several tragic events, where many families lost loved ones. The centre was pivotal in reaching out to these families, offering one-to-one support in the home and facilitating the 'Harry Hedgehogs Time to Share Bereavement Group'. As one parent put it, 'Without the support of this centre I don't know what we would have done'. The whole community is very proactive in supporting this group and many fundraising events take place; the recent fundraising event enabled parents, grandparents and children to spend a day out in a theme park.

The centre staff are particularly successful in empowering members of the community to take charge of their projects. For example, the Greenbank Community Play Scheme is run entirely by parents. With the help of the centre they gained charitable status and are now very skilled in raising funds to offer a wide range of activities in their community. This helps to bring families together to play and, as one child said, 'it keeps us off the streets and gives us lots to do'. The 'Arts Project Team' are very visible in the area and work with children and adults to create some inspiring art work. The team also use art as a medium to help parents and children who are suffering extreme stress and anxiety.

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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

High expectations are shared by all staff. The centre manager is extremely well respected by all users and key partners; his drive and commitment to improve the outcomes for children and families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable is clear for all to see. All leaders channel their efforts to good effect and manage themselves and others well. For example, the performance management of staff is rigorous and arrangements for supervision meetings and appraisals are thorough. Meetings with staff, key partners and parents have helped to effectively identify the key strengths and weaknesses of the centre's services.

Governance is good. The centre's work is well supervised by the governing body and the local authority. Both are rigorous in the way they monitor and challenge the centre. The advisory board is currently being devolved further to bring together the key partners who attend the multi-agency meetings and parents' forum in order to offer additional challenge and support to the governing body. The centre provides good value for money.

Partnerships are pivotal to the centre's good work. Work with the health team is extremely effective; they provide vital information to the centre to ensure that the staff are aware of all new births in the area. While the social services professionals work closely with the centre, they do not have a consistent approach to including centre staff in key meetings where they can share pertinent knowledge about the families that are known to them. However, the centre has a conscientious approach to safeguarding. All staff and volunteers are vetted and carefully checked. The centre successfully promotes equality and diversity. The inclusion of all children and families is central to the centre's work. All members of staff demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusion and to tackling any discrimination. Careful consideration is given to the design of the centre and sites used by the centre so that all

users can gain full access. Centre staff and partners provide a very good level of service for families with disabled children and those with special educational needs.

User engagement is exceptional. The centre consistently seeks the voice of parents and children through regular questionnaires and surveys. The 'Family Tree' provides an interesting and creative way for parents and children to share their feelings and views on all aspects of the centre's work. Young people took an active part in the 11 million take-over project and contributed to the programme delivery for the centre, offering many suggestions on how to stimulate interest and engage more families at the centre.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which 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	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.	1

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. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the South Whitehaven Sure Start Children's Centre on 8 and 9 August 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us during the inspection. We spoke with a number of you about the centre's work and looked at the comments you made on feedback sheets and evaluations. We really enjoyed talking to you in your activities and around the centre in the community groups. You expressed your opinions very clearly and they were very helpful to us. We were delighted to hear how helpful and friendly you find all the staff. Like you, we were greeted with a warm welcome when we arrived at the centre and found all the staff very communicative and helpful.

Many of you told us that the staff are friendly, hard working and give you good support. We agree with you. Families who are facing complex or difficult times receive strong and very effective support. It is clear to us that staff know local families and the wider community very well and we can see how the centre is working hard to reach all of you to ensure that they do everything they can to make a positive difference to you and your children's lives. Those of you that we spoke to clearly appreciate the outstanding guidance and support on offer and you gave us some excellent and very moving examples of how the centre has helped to change your lives for the better. This support is particularly evident in helping those families who have suffered bereavement. It was encouraging to hear that some of you feel less isolated in the community and have been able to socialise more by attending courses at the centre. We were particularly impressed by the work of the parents' forum that is not only helping you to have a real voice at the centre but also demonstrates outstanding commitment to help others in the community.

We have said that some elements of the centre's work need to improve. While some children are entering school ready and keen to learn, this is not the case for all children. Therefore, we have asked the centre to look at ways they can work with the local schools, early years providers and the local authority to ensure that all your children are better prepared for school and to start their learning journey. We found that the caring approach by all the adults working in the centre is reflected in the good safeguarding procedures that help your families to live and learn safely. However, we have asked that the centre and social services work more closely together to ensure that any pertinent information is shared effectively. We have raised these issues because, once they are in place, the centre will be in an even stronger position to see how well they are meeting all of your needs.

It was a pleasure to meet some of you during the inspection. We hope that you, your children and many more parents who live locally will continue to enjoy and benefit from all of the services available to you in the future.

Thank you for your contribution to the inspection. We are very grateful and wish you every success in the future.

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