

Inspection report for Thornton Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	404476
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2012
Reporting inspector	Michael Blakey

Centre leader	Tracey Baker
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Heys Street Thornton Cleveleys Lancashire FY5 4JP
Telephone number	01253 863169
Fax number	01253 821128
Email address	Tracey.Baker@lancashire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Thornton Primary School URN: 119148
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.



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
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, representatives of the local authority and the governing body of the co-located school and a wide range of partners including local headteachers, health visitors and midwives. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Thornton Children's Centre, a phase two centre, was built onto Thornton Primary School in 2006. The centre is situated in a residential area of Thornton about one mile from Thornton village in Lancashire. The centre serves a predominantly White British community. A small number of Traveller families now live within the reach area. Within the reach area, there are both pockets of affluence and deprivation. The most recent data available (2009) shows that 27% of eligible families benefit from Working Tax Credit and the proportion of children living in workless households is higher than average. One of the Super Output Areas (SOAs) served by the centre is in the top 30% most deprived in England. The other SOAs are in the remaining 70%. There are 797 children under the age of five living in the reach area. Children's levels on entry to early years provision are below those expected. The linked provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements and the school was last inspected in the summer term of 2012. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The headteacher of the school, who took up post in January 2012, is the head of centre and day-to-day management is provided by the children's centre coordinator. At the time of the inspection the extended-services manager was on leave. Governance of the centre is provided by the school governing body and Lancashire County Council.

Thornton Children's Centre provides a core purpose of services including family

support, universal services such as stay and play groups, and health services including midwifery and ante-natal classes. The centre works closely with a range of different partners from health, education and social care. The centre operates a number of outreach activities from other venues: these include Red Marsh School; Thornton Youth and Community Centre; Thornton library; and Royles Brook Primary School.

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

Thornton Children’s Centre is a bustling hive of activity where administration staff, outreach workers and leaders and managers work seamlessly with partners to ensure children and parents feel welcome and supported the moment they walk through the door. ‘It’s a lot more than somewhere to go. I come because I really want to. It helps so much.’ is a typical view of parents. When asked what makes the centre special, parents and partners agree that it is the staff and their ability to build relationships. The support provided to disabled children and those with special needs is high quality and parents and partners alike speak passionately of the impact of this aspect of the centre’s work.

The centre has established itself at the heart of its community and delivers a good range of services which are well attended and which make a very positive difference to families, particularly those with circumstances that make them most vulnerable. The number of children and families registered with the centre is increasing steadily. A large majority of children living in the reach area are now registered and the majority have attended activities or services over the last two years. The centre effectively engages its target groups; for example the number of fathers registered has increased from 140 to 216 over the last 12 months. In the most deprived area that the centre serves, the proportion of children registered has increased from 33% in 2010 to 53% in 2012 and 69% of these attend services. However, a minority of families living in this area have not yet registered with the centre. The centre is very effective at engaging and supporting disabled children and those with special educational needs. Some of the most popular and very well attended activities and

services include the 'Childminder Drop In', 'Jo Jingles', 'Mini Movers' and 'Stay and Play'.

The excellent parents' forum has developed quickly and now shapes activities that the centre delivers and helps to drive improvements. For example, parents suggested the recent open mornings and Saturday sessions and the forum has secured funding to purchase an outdoor canopy so that children can play outside on rainy days. Parents volunteer in extremely meaningful roles at the centre, for example, attending visits with outreach workers to encourage new families to attend. However, access to employment and benefits advice has recently been reduced and parents have a limited number of opportunities to access training to develop or enhance their skills for work.

Staff promote healthy lifestyles through a range of effective and fun activities. For example, outreach workers deliver 'Wacky Workout' at a local primary school that serves the most deprived part of the reach area. At these sessions, toddlers and their parents have fun on a mini assault course and drink milk and water to rehydrate. These activities, which are well planned, help children to develop their coordination and balance. Families with children under the age of one are given access to six free swimming sessions at a local swimming pool. The impact of these exercise sessions can be seen in the falling obesity levels of children in Reception class, which are now below the Lancashire and national average. However, health outcomes are satisfactory overall. Breastfeeding rates have remained stubbornly well below the Lancashire and national average. Health data available to the centre is not recent or specific enough to enable staff to target their breastfeeding initiatives further. The local authority is in the final stages of agreeing an information sharing protocol to improve this aspect of leadership and management.

Governance is strong. The local authority performance management processes are effective at driving improvements and helping the centre to focus on a small number of priorities. However, processes to evaluate the impact of services and interventions are less well developed and the centre is not always clear which services and activities have the greatest impact. The centre strives to be the best it can be with the limited resources it has, and value for money is good. As one school governor, and member of the committee (advisory board), said, 'We can't sit here and say we are good and not aim to get better.' As a result the capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement a consistent approach to evaluating the impact of services and interventions on children and their parents. This should include tracking the progress of children who access centre services through to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

- Review the current development plan and available data and set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic targets that include:
 - increasing the registration rates and engagement of families from the most deprived SOA and those from the pockets of deprivation in the wider reach area
 - improving breastfeeding rates so that they are at least in line with the Lancashire average
 - improving access to employment advice and adult learning, and tracking the progress of parents who access these services.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Children and parents are safe at the centre. As one parent said, 'I feel safe and everyone looks out for each other.' Paediatric first aid courses for parents are effective at helping them know how to deal with accidents and emergencies. One father said, 'I thought I knew about first aid, but paediatric first aid is different, and thanks to the course I now know what to do.' The centre responds quickly to requests for help from families. For example, during an outreach visit to a family home a mother was provided with safety gates to help keep her children safe at home. However, emergency hospital admissions are rising steadily in the local area and the centre has correctly identified that it needs to analyse these incidents to identify trends and plan interventions appropriately. All of the children living in the reach area who are subject to child protection plans are registered with the centre and well supported. The centre engages fully with local Common Assessment Framework processes and has recently begun to offer supervised contact visits for families of children who are looked after.

Children achieve well in the reach area. Over the last three years, a large majority achieved at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least six in each of the scales in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. At 71%, this is well above the national average of 59%, and Lancashire average of 59.4%. The achievement gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers has narrowed, from 31% in 2010/2011 to 23% in 2011/2012. However, opportunities for adults to learn are less well developed.

The centre promotes breastfeeding appropriately and runs a breastfeeding support group, which is well attended. However, breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks after birth are low in the local area at 33.8% in 2010 and data available to the centre is not recent or specific enough for staff to establish whether their interventions are effective.

The number of children living in workless households has risen steadily from 85 in 2007 to 130 in 2010. Advice on benefits, employment and training, and the centre's tracking of the progress of parents who access these services is limited, which impacts on families economic stability and independence. However, the centre supports some parents to set up their own businesses and runs an annual enterprise

evening where parents can sell their own products. One mother described passionately how she had, 'used every service on offer' and how she had been supported to set up her own dance school. Another parent told inspectors how she had returned to University to undertake a Masters degree. Parents regularly volunteer and make an extremely positive contribution to the centre through their roles on the parents' forum and supporting outreach work for example.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	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	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	3

How good is the provision?

2

'When you come here it's like seeing an old friend when everywhere else is just a facility.' is a typical view from parents. Antenatal clinics are delivered at the centre and midwives ensure that all mums-to-be are registered at their first appointment. Referrals for family support are made by a range of partners. For example, a recent referral from a health visitor stated, 'I am requesting home support as the family is feeling isolated and staying at home too much of the time. They need help with behaviour, routines and safety.' Needs are appropriately assessed and recorded. The number of children and families, including those in target groups, registered with the centre has increased steadily. However, a minority of families living in the most deprived area have not yet registered with the centre and the leaders and managers have correctly identified this as a priority for development.

The Best Start Lancashire initiative is beginning to have a positive impact on families. The centre holds funding for each four- to seven-year old who is eligible for free school meals and coordinates interventions in the local area. The recent 'Fly to the Moon' sessions have enabled staff to identify needs early and provided funded nursery places for younger siblings. Parents speak highly of these activities, 'I listen to what my children say now.' and 'We are using language more all of the time in a fun way.' are typical views expressed.

The centre's two outreach workers are currently working with 16 families who face a range of complex issues including domestic violence, mental health and unemployment. The quality of support they provide is very well thought of by parents and includes one-to-one visits, support with nursery funding, clothes for interviews and food-bank parcels. In some cases, this support has ensured that families known to be at risk by social care are no longer a cause for concern. Care, guidance and support are good overall. The centre has a wide range of information leaflets available and the support offered to those families with circumstances that make them more vulnerable is of a high quality. Support for families who have experienced domestic violence is particularly effective. Between November 2011 and September 2012, 12 referrals to the centre were made from the local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference and all of these families were offered support.

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	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Safeguarding is promoted and prioritised well by all staff and volunteers. Centre staff are regularly supervised and their individual performance targets are clearly linked back to the centre's priorities and development plan. For example, outreach workers have specific targets to increase the number of families receiving 'Book Start' packs, designed to encourage young children to read. Supervision records show that staff regularly discuss keeping children safe. Staff and volunteers undertake regular training and appropriate recruitment checks are undertaken, including Criminal Record Bureau disclosures. Recently, the centre has begun to work closer with social care services to provide supervised contact sessions. Partnerships with other agencies contribute well to keeping children safe, through for example the local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences and Common Assessment Framework processes. The centre staff knows every child subject to child-protection plans and ensures that they receive additional support if required.

Self-evaluation processes are accurate and the leaders and managers know the centre's strengths and areas for development. However, systems to track the impact of services and interventions on children and their parents are less well developed and some priorities in the development plan lack the clarity and detail to drive improvements swiftly. Governance arrangements are effective, particularly the support and challenge provided by the local authority through the annual

performance processes. Equality and diversity is promoted well. The achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers is narrowing and is now well below the national and Lancashire averages. Services for families of disabled children and those with special educational needs support an integrated approach within the centre.

Leaders and managers have driven improvements in both registration and attendance rates and the majority of outcomes, so that the overall performance of the centre and value for money are good. As a result capacity for sustained improvement is good.

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 secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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	2

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

The inspection report of the co-located Thornton Primary School, which was inspected in the summer term of 2012, was taken into account.

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 Thornton Children's Centre on 12–13 September. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre is a bustling hive of activity, where administration staff, outreach workers and the children's centre coordinator work seamlessly with partners to make you feel welcome and supported the moment you walk through the door.

Everyone we spoke to was very positive about the centre. One of you told us, 'It's a lot more than somewhere to go. I come because I really want to. It helps so much.' When we asked you what makes the centre special, you told us that it was the staff.

The centre has established itself at the heart of your community and delivers a good range of services which are well attended and which make a positive difference to families. The centre is very effective at engaging and supporting disabled children and those with special educational needs. Some of the most popular and very well attended activities and services include the 'Childminder Drop In', 'Jo Jingles', 'Mini Movers' and 'Stay and Play'. However, nearly half of the families living in the most deprived area are not yet registered so we have asked the centre to do more to engage these children and their parents. You can help them by sharing your positive experiences and encouraging them to attend.

The parents' forum has developed quickly and now shapes activities that the centre delivers and helps to drive improvements. For example, some of you suggested the recent open mornings and Saturday sessions and the forum has secured funding to purchase an outdoor canopy so that children can play outside on rainy days. Some of you volunteer in meaningful roles at the centre, for example, attending visits with outreach workers to encourage new families to attend. However, access to employment and benefits advice has recently been reduced and you have a limited number of opportunities to access training to develop or enhance your skills for work. We have asked the centre to improve this aspect of its work.

The centre staff promote healthy lifestyles through a range of effective and fun activities. For example, outreach workers deliver 'Wacky Workout' at one of the local primary schools. At these sessions, toddlers, parents and grandparents have fun on a

mini assault course and drink milk and water to rehydrate. Breastfeeding rates have remained stubbornly well below the Lancashire and national average and we have asked the centre to also look at this aspect of its work.

The centre strives to be the best it can be with the limited resources it has, and value for money is good. As one school governor, and member of the committee (advisory board), said, 'We can't sit here and say we are good and not aim to get better.' However, some of the processes to evaluate the impact of services and interventions are less well developed and the centre is not always clear which services and activities have the greatest impact. We have, therefore, asked the centre to put in place a way of working out what works best for you and your family. The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.