

# Inspection report for The Grove Youth, Community & Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Lancashire
<b>Inspection number</b>	404475
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 September 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Philip Ellwand

<b>Centre leader</b>	Ms Stephanie Critchley
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, senior leaders, representatives from the local authority, members of the advisory board and a range of partners, parents and service users. They observed the centre's work, accompanied staff on home visits and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The children's centre serves a number of rural villages in West Lancashire including Burscough, Rufford, Newburgh, Parbold, Scarisbrick, Holmeswood and Lathom. It is a phase two centre which opened in October 2008. It is in a building which also houses youth, community, advice and learning activities. It has exclusive use of the main space for two days each week, offering antenatal sessions, early years activities, adult learning activities and access to drop-in advice and guidance services. The centre also provides information, outreach and family support services at other times, with additional sessions in community and school venues throughout its reach area. Its core purpose does not include early years education or childcare provision. The centre has a range of activity, learning and confidential interview spaces as well as a sensory room and a public access point to the county's information services for children's services. There are four staff in the centre providing sessions, outreach and family support services. The manager of the centre also manages a phase one centre in Skelmersdale and a phase three centre in Hesketh Bank. There is some overlap in the three centres' reach areas, and sharing of staff and resources between them, including support from an early years teacher. There are approximately 845 children under five living in the reach area. It is mainly in a less-deprived area, but there are small pockets of higher deprivation where the centre focuses much of its outreach work. In 2010, 115 children under five were living in workless households but in the last two years there has been a further increase of 24% in the West Lancashire area which includes the reach of the centre. The centre's reach has also had a very recent decline in the numbers of families able

to access working tax credits and a rise in the take-up of free school meals. Most of the families in the area are of White British heritage, but there are settled Traveller communities and transient communities, mainly of Eastern European and Portuguese heritage. The centre is run directly by the local authority in conjunction with an advisory board comprising parents and representatives of community and partner organisations. Early years settings in the area report that children's levels on entry to their provision are broadly below those expected for their age, with concerns in communication and language skills, personal and social development and the promotion and management of positive behaviour.

## 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

'All the staff are fantastic, they could not do more to help.' was the typical comment of one centre user. The centre's overall effectiveness is good. The information provided, as well as the guidance, care and support are of good quality and are trusted and appreciated by centre users. The centre is well directed by the manager and her team, with the local authority, partners and advisory group ensuring challenge, supervision and accountability at all levels. Outcomes for families are good and improving, with measurable improvements in children's personal, social and emotional development and in their communication and language skills. 'Best Start' and similar projects are helping to raise overall achievement. The well-targeted use of resources is also helping the lower 20% of achievers to make even greater gains, so as to close the achievement gap.

The centre meets fully the statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding, diversity and equality. It has established itself at the core of a series of scattered communities, developing good partnerships and local knowledge. It has been resilient through a recent period of change and has adapted to undertake new, demanding projects and targets. Accurate evaluation of its work and the overall self-evaluation make good use of available data in setting targets for improvement and extending service delivery. The centre has a good capacity to make further improvements.

Some of the health data have become available only recently, such as notifications of pregnancy and live-birth information. These have been well used and ensured that not only

has the centre met the targets set for increasing its registrations overall but, additionally, that over 85% of new births are registered. The authority is concluding protocols with partners on the fuller sharing of data, but this has yet to take effect. The absence of some information limits the detail to help set precise targets or to adjust service delivery.

The centre has good user involvement, with parents represented on the advisory board, and has encouraged users to develop further initiatives, such as mutual support for carers of children with additional needs, or extended activities during the holiday period in isolated areas of the reach. The parents' network is less active. This limits the link between centre users and the advisory group, for example, in filling vacancies for parent members of the board or in helping to promote the work of the centre and celebrating achievements.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve the collection and analysis of data from partner organisations by the centre and local authority and so create more precise target-setting at each stage and more detailed planning for development.
- Widen parental representation in decision making and strengthen the parents' network to bring together the views of centre users.

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

<b>2</b>
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'It is priceless.' is how one mother summed up the impact which the centre's support has given her family. Many families described how they have gained confidence and skills through the centre's work and the difference it has made to their lives. The centre provides antenatal sessions, resulting in better encouragement of breastfeeding, earlier notification of pregnancy and improvement in the take-up of health services, including attendance at developmental checks at six to eight weeks, which have now risen to 100%. The centre staff visit nearly all families with live births, make safety visits to households at six months, welcome new families to drop-in for advice, or attend sessions which build confidence. They cover topics such as healthy eating, smoking cessation, oral health, baby brain development, feeding options, maternal mental health and safe sleeping.

Evaluations show that parents have learned about keeping their babies healthy and safe and how to help with their development. Health partners refer families to the centre for baby massage sessions to help parents to bond with their children. One mother described how responsive the staff were in bringing sessions to her home, when her baby was very distressed with severe colic, and the enormous improvement since. The centre's many activities reinforce healthier lifestyles, so that obesity has dropped in the reach area at a faster rate than the district average, to less than 5.4%, and there has been an improvement in the numbers of mothers continuing to breastfeed. Successful weaning and food hygiene sessions are provided by staff and partners. Emotional health is well supported, with well-considered support for younger parents and for isolated and vulnerable parents, including

those of children with additional needs. The centre's early-language programmes provide guidance and basic assessments. They also enable fast-track referrals where specialist speech and language therapy services are required.

Families feel safe in the centre and have good relationships with staff so that they are confident to ask for support if they have concerns. The centre works well with partners in social care, health and specialist agencies so that children subject to a child-protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework processes are well supported, and have improved outcomes. Home safety checks are used to improve family safety with some referrals to the fire service for additional advice and help. Sessions and road-safety schemes all underline safer practice and parents are given written guides, which they find to be helpful reminders. There are also first-aid courses for parents. As a result emergency admissions of children under five to hospitals in the reach area have dropped by 10% over the last three years.

Centre staff work well to improve children's readiness to learn. The proportion of children in the reach area achieving at age-expected levels on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile has risen by 10% over the last five years. The greatest rise in achievement has been by children receiving free school meals, many of whom are targeted under the 'Best Start' initiative in order to narrow the achievement gap with other groups. The centre has worked well with schools to prepare children for transition. It has delivered the 'Tatty Bumpkins' programme in schools, with further success in measurable improvements in the confidence, self-esteem and language skills of children, especially those identified as shy or withdrawn. Evaluations also show improvements in children's behaviour in school and with their families. The centre has very good support from the employment adviser and 66% of single parents have moved into paid work within a year of starting to receive benefits.

Parents are active in the centre and reach area and are represented on the advisory board. The parents' network is currently less active as many of the formerly active members no longer have children at the centre. The centre still gathers and makes good use of parents' opinions but there is insufficient formal consultation. The centre has been very successful in supporting a parents' initiative in running 'Chatt' – good quality family activities in isolated areas – during the holidays. The centre is also key to the development of 'One Voice', an organisation of parents of children with additional needs. They typically commented, 'If it wasn't for the centre supporting us, we would have struggled'.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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

<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>2</b>
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Staff use assessment well to plan provision. They develop good relationships with families before using a 'getting to know you form' to assess needs and to help users to express their needs and preferences in comfort and confidence. Users of the centre say how much they value the caring and encouraging attitudes in the centre: 'They always have time for you, and if they don't know the answer, they'll take you to someone who does.' Staff work well with partner organisations so that assessments and referrals are thorough and information and guidance are appropriate. Staff pay particular attention to building positive relations with members of hard-to-reach target groups and are successfully increasing their involvement in centre activities. One mother described how her son had been reluctant to engage in some of the activities and exercises to improve his speaking. The outreach worker identified her son's fascination with a particular story and game and built those elements into the work which he was then happy to follow.

The centre also makes good use of assessments in planning sessions and in supporting families, including through outreach work. The managers review thoroughly all family files and ensure the strong quality of assessment, recording and outcomes. Some of the advice agencies operate very closely on the same premises, providing support with money advice, sexual health and young people's projects that meet users' identified needs.

There is particularly good partnership work with colleges and projects in information, guidance and support for adult learning. Many case studies show that these improve skills and successfully lead to further study or work. Parenting skills' courses and many of the other structured activities help parents to understand better their child's development and how they can assist. Parents value highly the success of the centre's work, and many comment about the enjoyment they and their children experience. As one mother said, 'He thinks he's playing. You wouldn't think it would bring his learning on, but it did.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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

<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>2</b>
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## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre is well managed with clear arrangements for professional supervision linked appropriately to governance and accountability. The advisory board looks closely at the self-evaluation and development plans and is closely informed about the challenging targets that are set with the local authority. The West Lancashire Children's Trust has a direct link with the centre. It supports effective communications between partners as well as identifying links to strategic planning and to additional resources. Partnerships are well developed with good sharing of expertise. Some data are well used, such as information which enabled the centre to increase registrations and make earlier contact with families. Other information from partners is not currently available at the level of the centre so that target-setting and monitoring is insufficiently detailed at each stage. There is good coordination of activities between centres in the district to avoid duplication and to meet the needs of users in the most efficient way.

Financial control is robust and the centre provides good value for money. Managers make rigorous use of evaluations and feedback from the parents and partners about the effectiveness of the sessions to design efficient changes in delivery. Partners praise the centre and its management for their responsiveness and their positive commitment to partnership working. The centre gives strong priority to inclusion, to the promotion of equality and the celebration of diversity. The centre successfully makes special efforts to engage disadvantaged groups such as young people, families where parents or children have additional needs, Traveller families and families who speak English as an additional language. The centre also promotes community cohesion well, creating opportunities for communities to work together, such as through participation in the holiday projects.

Safeguarding is thorough and the centre and its partners follow rigorous procedures of checking suitability of staff to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults. Staff are fully trained to ensure safeguarding, and they make good use of systems for recording and checking the work of agencies providing early intervention in support of families. The centre recently reviewed procedures and changed the way it shares access to the building in order to further improve safeguarding of centre users. There is very good support for families at risk of domestic violence and the centre is similarly rigorous in its review of risk and the management of health and safety of families and staff. The centre involves local communities and centre users in planning its services and in encouraging fuller access to services. It encourages representation on the advisory group at the centre and has built up strong and trusting relationships.



These are the grades for leadership and management:

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

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

None.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected The Grove Youth, Community & Children's Centre on 17 to 18 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Firstly, thank you for your comments, either if you met us during the inspection, or if you filled in evaluations or wrote to us. We were greatly helped in our inspection by the views that were shared with us. You told us that the centre is well-regarded and, as one parent said, 'All the staff are fantastic, they could not do more to help.' You told us that you value and trust the information and advice the centre provides: 'They always have time for you,

and if they don't know the answer, they'll take you to someone who does.' You had special praise for the good quality of care, guidance and support that centre staff provide.

We found that the centre is well run by the manager and her team. We also saw how well the local authority, the partners in health organisations, social care and community groups and in other agencies all help by reviewing the work of the centre and holding it to account. This is partly done through the advisory group, and some of the users of the centre are members of this. We have recommended that more of the users of the centre are encouraged to take part in the parents' network and in the advisory group to make sure that your views are heard in planning the centre's services and activities.

We judged that families get good results from their contact with the centre and that these continue to improve. We saw how there were measurable improvements in the personal, social and emotional development of many children. There were also improvements that we could see in many children's speaking and communicating skills. We saw how 'Best Start' and similar projects are helping to raise the levels of children's skills. We also saw that those children who needed the most help were making the most progress and were being helped to catch up.

The centre gives priority to keeping you and your children safe and our inspection judged that safeguarding was done well. We also found that it promoted equality well and aimed to be fully inclusive of all communities. The centre has gained the trust of the area and works well in partnerships with other providers. It had some changes to make, but it has done well and taken on new projects and targets to help children make better progress in their learning and in their family life.

We judged that the centre is good at reviewing its work and at setting targets for improvement or extending what it does. So, we concluded that the centre has the capacity to make further improvements. We saw that where the centre had all the necessary information it could plan well, as now it knows more about all the children due to be born in the area and can plan to visit all those families. Some information is not so readily available. We are recommending that the local authority and the centre get together with partners to make agreements about sharing this information. That way the centre can plan better and work out, a step at a time, how it can provide a better service.

We saw the good work being done by volunteers in running projects. For example, befriending newcomers to the centre and helping them join in, or helping other parents of children with additional needs. It was good to see how many people are involved in the life of the centre, and we hope that more can take part in the parents' network and advisory board.

There is a great deal to celebrate in the centre's work: all the skills of being more confident parents who know more about your children's development and how you can help. There are many of you who are going on to gain skills and qualifications. We were pleased to meet you and hear your views of your centre and we wish you well in the future.

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