

Inspection report for Colne Valley Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	406998
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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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings or discussions with managers and staff from the centre and the local authority, parents, finance and data collection officers, a member of the advisory board, members of the Family Forum, childminders and a number of partner agencies including: health; commissioned early years staff; children's services; the Jobcentre; one headteacher and an early years consultant.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Colne Valley Children's Centre was designated in December 2007 as a phase two children's centre in a 70% least disadvantaged area. The centre served the community via outreach venues until the centre opened July 2008. The centre is open three days a week and is located on the ground floor of Slaithwaite Town Hall in the village of Slaithwaite. Local amenities include a health centre, leisure centre, fire station, doctors' surgery, church hall, village play group, community centre, library and shops. The centre manager has been in post for 17 months and is supported by two members of staff: a business support officer and the locality administrative and finance officer. The play and learning worker and community worker posts have been vacant for some time due to restrictions on recruitment during a review of services.

The centre's reach area forms part of the Valleys locality, which is the largest 'rural' locality in Kirklees, covering 40% of the district. It has one of the most settled populations in the district with 66% of residents having lived in the area for more than 10 years, against the Kirklees average of 56%. There is a demand for, but lack of, affordable housing and rented

accommodation. Fifty six per cent of the housing stock in the centre's reach area is terraced housing compared to the Kirklees average of 39%, the majority of which is situated along Manchester Road A62 and falls within the 30-40% Super Output Area.

There are currently 1049 children aged 0-4 living in the centre's reach area. The very large majority (90.1%) of children living in the area are from White British, Irish or other White heritage. The next largest ethnic group is mixed White and Black Caribbean. The numbers of teenage, lone and disabled parents are low compared to local and national figures.

Approximately 28% of children aged under five years are identified as living in the least 30-40% deprived wards in England. Fourteen per cent of children in the area are living in households dependent on workless benefits. Data show that one in four households in the Colne Valley area have an annual income of below £20,000.

The centre delivers both universal and targeted services from the hub site in Slaithwaite Town Hall but also in a variety of outreach venues in Slaithwaite, Marsden and Linthwaite. Travel across the rural area is difficult which results in access issues for people with disabilities, families with young children and those on low incomes.

Children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills broadly in line with those expected for their age with some slightly below in communication and language and personal, social and emotional development. There is no formal linked early years provision but childcare is provided by providers affiliated to the centre, including childminders.

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

1

Main findings

Colne Valley Children's Centre is a good centre with a number of outstanding features. There have been significant and rapid gains in registration and engagement, particularly with target groups, in the last 17 months since the current centre manager came into post. Centre users report that the centre has 'taken off' since her appointment. Robust strategies to lay firm foundations for development and progress have been implemented well,

including detailed and comprehensive assessment systems to effectively evaluate provision and services and accurately identify key priority targets. This has resulted in the centre being able to target exceptionally well those most in need. The centre management sets highly ambitious targets and all staff have a shared vision for the future. Staff show determination and tenacity to bring about further improvements. Rapid recent gains and well-targeted priorities, together with excellent leadership and management demonstrate the centre's excellent capacity to sustain improvement.

Exceptionally strong provision ensures that the centre offers an excellent range of services and activities, carefully designed to meet individual needs. These are highly regarded by users and take up is high. As a result, outcomes are good overall and some are outstanding. The centre has correctly identified where and how they can support families to improve outcomes further in relation to being healthy and staying safe. They are tackling these issues with well-targeted support and their actions are beginning to show results.

Children are making good progress in the activities provided or commissioned by the centre and parents report an increasing knowledge and understanding of how to support children's learning at home. Children are developing skills which equip them for school, although some transition arrangements with some schools and the private, voluntary and independent sector are still being developed. In addition, the intended tracking system to identify the centre's impact on children's progress over the longer term has yet to be implemented.

Parents are developing their parenting skills well, particularly in relation to behaviour management, and have access to wide range of support to improve their economic and social well-being very effectively. Those accessing services say their confidence has increased immensely and many are extremely active on the family forum and advisory board. There are very many opportunities for users to shape services by challenging and supporting the centre, which they do exceptionally well. Members of the family forum and advisory board report that the centre always takes full account of their views and they proudly talk of contributing to the centre and 'giving something back to the community'.

Although the centre is open only three days per week, the range and quality of services on offer compare extremely favourably with those open longer. In addition, centre staff are highly trained and multi-skilled and, despite having vacant posts, universal and targeted services continue to flourish. Consequently, the centre offers excellent value for money.

Excellent systems are in place to protect those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, with very robust staff vetting arrangements and safeguarding procedures in place. Referral procedures are clear, with centre staff having a thorough knowledge of the centre's safeguarding policy. In addition, the centre's safeguarding responsibilities are discussed with all users, thereby ensuring that families have a clear understanding. Centre staff work particularly well with health and children's social care to protect vulnerable children and clear records are maintained relating to those involved in Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop further the transition arrangements to support children in moving on to their next stage in learning.
- Implement the planned tracking system to identify individual children's progress over time once they have moved into school in order to clearly measure the longer term impact of centre services.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents report that their behaviour management skills have significantly improved as a direct result of the training and support offered by the centre. One said, 'the training was fantastic and really helped me understand why he was behaving the way he was. It has helped me remain calm during his tantrums'. As a result, children behave very well. The centre is extremely effective in building adults' confidence and giving all users many opportunities to contribute to shaping centre services. Feedback on activities is very forthcoming and users make their feelings and ideas known through the very attractive 'listening tree' where parents and children comment on what they like or what they would like to see being offered. In addition, the centre's 'you said, we did' board prominently displays parents' requests and the centre's responses to these. Parents take an exceptionally active role on the family forum and the advisory board. Many spoke of how the centre has made a considerable difference to their lives by giving them the confidence to speak about issues which affect them.

Children make good progress in developing their skills and abilities in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Centre activities, including the very popular 'Stay and Play' and the crèches organised to support adult activities, are planned with children's levels of development in mind. Children are encouraged to be independent and have many opportunities to explore and become active and inquisitive learners. Additionally, parents are effectively learning how to support their children's development at home. Data show that the percentage of children who achieve 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with at least six points in personal, social and emotional development and communication language and literacy is increasing year on year and is now at 69.6%, which is above the local authority average. In addition, the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is decreasing, albeit slowly. However, the centre recognises that transition arrangements vary across the reach area and it has yet to implement its intended tracking of children once in school, so is not able to identify clearly the difference that centre services have made.

The centre has correctly identified the need to further support families to develop healthy lifestyles and this is being tackled through a range of initiatives including 'Cook and Eat',

'Cooking on a Budget' and 'Let's Get Healthy' courses. Early findings show promising results, although whether improvements are maintained cannot yet be measured. However, through the good advice on weaning and the information available to them on healthy eating, parents and children are developing a good understanding of how to live more healthily. Families report that their diets have improved and they are increasing their daily portions of fruit and vegetables towards the recommended 'five a day' and parents say they now regularly read food labels in order to make healthier choices. In addition, the centre is working collaboratively with health services to encourage more mothers to breastfeed their babies. Initiation rates at 69% are lower than national rates, although the percentage of infants being breastfed at six to eight weeks is in line with national figures at 47%.

Extremely comprehensive risk assessments of the centre premises, outreach venues, activities and resources ensure the safety of families and young children. Additionally, the centre provides information on domestic violence against both men and women and lip moisturisers with the domestic violence helpline printed in the form of a barcode. The centre is effectively supporting families to improve their knowledge of how to keep their children safe through first aid training and the 'safe at home' scheme which supplies and fits safety equipment to the homes of targeted families. This is in response both to health data which show a high number of emergency hospital admissions, and requests from parents for further advice and support.

The centre has extremely well-established links with Jobcentre services, debt counselling agencies and offers opportunities for families to access free initial legal advice. Data show that despite most families being financially stable with at least one parent in employment and a higher than national percentage of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, the confirmed benefit gain for last year was £10,742. So far this year it stands at £18,000. A large majority of parents in target groups report that they have significantly benefited from the highly popular training in budgeting and managing family finances. Many are also developing excellent work-related skills from their involvement on the advisory board and the breast feeding peer support group currently has a waiting list of volunteers.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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.	1
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How good is the provision?

1

Assessment is used extremely effectively to determine the needs of families within the community. Consequently, the centre knows the community exceptionally well and ensures that services successfully meet individual needs. There are exemplary welfare support systems in place to help those in need of support. Parents, particularly from target groups, benefit from an extensive library of information and exceptionally well targeted support from a wide range of professionals including health, social care, legal and community services. Additionally, excellent care, guidance and support and effective collaborative working with partner agencies secure swift support to families in times of crisis. For example, emergency food parcels ensure that families receive appropriate support when they need it.

There are many examples of excellent outreach and support work, including the regular 'Stay and Play/One Stop Shop' sessions, parenting programmes, training on budgeting, infant massage and baby yoga. The centre signposts teenage parents to an existing young parents' group run by youth services. Adults are given a wide choice of learning opportunities which are well attended and completion rates are high.

Experienced staff work tirelessly to make contact with hard-to-engage families carrying out regular community consultations, dropping leaflets and knocking on doors to raise the centre's profile very successfully. Staff are described by parents and carers as 'very helpful' and 'so welcoming'. The centre is very aware of the difficulties and challenges faced by families within its reach area, such as those who feel isolated in the community, and work very effectively to support and encourage them to join in activities and establish their own support networks. Past difficulties with encouraging families in nearby Marsden to come to the centre have been overcome and increasing numbers of families make the journey to the centre to engage with one another. Those accessing the centre report that they feel extremely well valued and respected.

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	1
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.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leadership and management have many strengths. The centre manager has a clear vision and communicates high expectations to staff and families. All staff are committed to improving the life chances of families in the reach area and they understand how they contribute to this. Their willingness to develop their skills in order to work flexibly is commendable. Day-to-day management, accountability and strategic leadership arrangements are clear and effective. Development plans are based on comprehensive evaluation and the priority targets are drawn from an accurate assessment of community needs. There are clear links between strategic planning and service delivery so that outcomes for the large majority of families are at least good. The wide range of high quality provision and services are used well by the large majority of families in the reach area and meet the needs of all target groups extremely effectively, despite the centre being open only three days per week.

The advisory board and family forum are exceptionally strong in challenging and supporting the centre. Members of the family forum say that they play an effective role in helping the centre to improve and develop. One parent identified the centre as 'an invaluable resource which belongs to the community' and the overwhelming majority of users report high levels of satisfaction with the centre. The inclusion of all children and families is prioritised well and the centre fulfils its statutory duties effectively. Staff ensure that all children and families have equal access to the provision available. Activities are accessible for people with disabilities and there is increasing engagement with families with disabled children.

There are robust systems to check the suitability of those working with families. Safeguarding training is comprehensive and significantly enhances staff awareness of their safeguarding and child protection responsibilities, which are clearly displayed throughout the centre and are shared with families. Staff demonstrate excellent knowledge of safeguarding procedures and carry a copy of the safeguarding flow chart on the back of their ID badges for reference when delivering outreach activities. Robust procedures and clear protocols for sharing information, together with strong partnerships with other agencies, ensure that needs are prioritised extremely effectively. A safeguarding champion offers support to centre staff and to those working in the private, voluntary and independent sectors.

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	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1

The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	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 Colne Valley Children's Centre on 19 and 20 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall with a number of outstanding features.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of children and adults, including parents and carers, staff, and partnership workers. We were pleased to speak to so many of you about the centre's work and to listen to your views, which you expressed very clearly.

The centre has been extremely good at encouraging more families to join in activities. This has been particularly noticeable over the last 17 months since the new centre manager came into post. You told us that the centre has 'taken off' since her appointment and we agree. Centre staff are extremely good at taking account of your views and evaluating what services and activities are on offer to you. They use this information well to accurately identify what they need to do to make things even better for you all. They are particularly good at making sure that those of you who are in most need of support receive services that are individual and tailored precisely to needs. Given the centre's recent track record of improvement and the clear plans for future development, we believe the centre can continue to move forward to make things even better.

We observed and learned about the excellent range of services and activities which are available to you, all carefully designed to meet individual needs. You told us that you think the activities are 'fantastic' and we could see how popular they are with so many of you. As a result, you are learning new skills and are increasing your knowledge of how to support your children's learning at home. The centre has correctly identified where and how they can support you further in adopting healthy lifestyles through offering you a range of opportunities in which you learn how to cook healthily and make healthier choices when shopping for food. Many of you told us how these have helped you and your children increase the amount of fruit and vegetables that you eat. In addition, you asked the centre to help you increase your knowledge of how to keep your children safe at home. They responded by offering first aid courses and the 'safe at home' scheme supplies and fits safety equipment in the homes of those who need it. You told us what a difference this has made to you and how you feel more confident in protecting your children.

We saw how your children are making good progress in their learning through the many good quality activities and play opportunities provided by the centre. Many of you who spoke to us told us that you are developing your parenting skills well, particularly in relation to behaviour management and that your confidence has increased immensely. We were pleased to see so many of you being extremely active on the family forum and advisory board. There are very many opportunities for all of you to share your views with the centre and we could see how your views are helping the centre to improve services further. Members of the family forum and advisory board told us how the centre always takes full account of their views and they proudly talked of contributing to the centre and 'giving something back to the community'.

Although the centre is only open three days per week, we saw how the range and quality of services on offer compare extremely favourably with those centres which are open longer. Also, centre staff are highly trained and have a wide range of skills which allow them to be involved in many different activities with you. Consequently, the centre offers excellent value for money.

Centre staff are working very hard to make the centre as good as it can be. They know what the centre's strengths are and what areas can be improved. The centre's advisory board, of which some of you are members, effectively supports and challenges the centre to do more. To make things even better we have asked the centre to make sure the planned tracking of children's progress once they move to school is implemented and extend the arrangements with schools and local childcare providers to support your children as they move on to the next stage in their learning.

Thank you for your welcome and your willingness to talk to us. We can see why the centre means so much to you and we wish you every success in the future.

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