

# Inspection report for Earcroft Children's Centre

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Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	404419
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY357779 Earcroft Children's Centre Crèche EY262079 Kittens Pre-School

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 with parents, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, the management board and the local authority.

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

## Information about the centre

Earcroft Children's Centre is a phase two centre located in the Earcroft district of Blackburn with Darwen. The centre also provides services and activities to residents within Fernhurst, North Turton and Tockholes. The catchment area is economically diverse with some affluence and three Super Output Areas within the lowest 30% most deprived in the country. Centre data confirm that 44% of children aged under 16 years in the reach area live in poverty and 39% of children aged under four years live in workless households.

The large majority of families residing in the area are of White British heritage with an increasing number from Black and minority ethnic groups. Families in the area experience a range of social and economic difficulties associated with poor health, low levels of qualifications and some unemployment. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage often enter early years provision with below-age-related expectations in their development, particularly in their speech and language.

The centre received designation in 2007 and it provides a range of services to meet the core purpose. The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the local authority alongside a local management board which includes a range of representation by partners. The early years geographical manager leads the services provided by the centre and

coordinates those provided by its partners. The operational manager manages the day-to-day running of the centre. Centre services are supported and delivered by a designated geographical team of early years workers and a team of family support workers. The centre links with Kitten Pre-School which is based on the same site. The centre also has responsibility for a registered crèche provision. Inspection reports for both these settings are available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

**The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management**

**3**

## Main findings

Earcroft Children's Centre is well established within the community and this is confirmed by the number of families registered and engaged with the centre and strong testimonies from parents. Parents referred to the centre as 'a welcoming and friendly place where there is always somebody to talk to even if you only want to use the community café'. Provision for families is good, although the centre is not able to demonstrate the full effect of this on outcomes for families because evaluations to measure the impact of provision are not systematically recorded or sought from partners. Consequently, outcomes are satisfactory overall, with some aspects that are good.

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory, although safeguarding arrangements and the extent to which users engage with the centre and share their views are good. Satisfaction surveys are very positive and parents report that they have a voice and that their views are respected and used to shape services. The recent loss of two management board parent representatives has driven plans to develop a volunteer framework to nurture new parents into governance arrangements. However, these plans are still evolving. The centre operates within a geographical model working closely with four other children's centres in particular and within a much wider network across the borough. This provides good opportunities for managers and staff to share and disseminate good practice, avoid duplication of services and provide a wider range of provision which families readily tap into.

The management board is well established and includes some key partners. The board is chaired by an active member of the community who provides a clear strategic steer with regard to the needs of the community. Development planning led by the local authority is robust due to precise and measurable targets which enable the centre to demonstrate performance effectively. However, such arrangements at a local level are not as rigorous because pertinent data are not systematically used to inform plans, measure success and set future targets. In turn, this compromises the quality of information available to the management board, hindering its ability to hold the centre to account more effectively. As a result, the centre's overall effectiveness and capacity to improve are satisfactory.

Assessment processes and referral pathways to support are a particular strength of the centre. The use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedure is robust and leads to well-organised and swift interventions. Managers hold a firm vision for the future and are intent on extending their reach into the wider community and to those harder to engage. As a result, outreach work is developing and the geographical team is successfully raising the profile and access to the centre. Managers are beginning to use engagement data to monitor participation of target groups, although they do not drill further to establish the quality and purpose of the engagement, how well it provides for their needs and the progress individuals make over time. Similarly, the centre has yet to establish systems to track the progress young children make from their starting points.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve outcomes, provision, and leadership and management of the centre by:
  - implementing systems to systematically track the progress from starting points that children and their parents make in their personal and educational development
  - working with the full range of partner agencies to refine the collation and analysis of data and information, particularly about the engagement of target groups, to inform the evaluation of outcomes more meticulously
  - working with the local authority, management board and centre partners, use data and information to set ambitious targets within sub-group plans and systematically monitor success towards these plans to sustain a rapid pace of improvement and hold the centre more rigorously to account.

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

<b>3</b>
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Outcomes for families engaging with the centre are variable. However, the extent to which the centre promotes families' health and safety are particular strengths. The good range of provision and the delivery of campaigns and activities help to educate parents about the dangers of smoking, current government guidance about weaning and safe practices for bottle-feeding and healthy eating. As a result, parents are more aware of how to cook

healthy meals on a budget and they seek help from the health visitors before considering starting weaning too early. There is a firm strategic approach to improving low breastfeeding rates in the area. This, coupled with a weekly support group, is increasing the numbers of mothers who sustain breastfeeding up to six to eight weeks after their babies are born and beyond. Equally, the new 'Lazy Town' initiative is helping to tackle obesity levels in school-aged children.

Parents report that the friendly centre has helped them to 'trust staff and get help to solve their problems' and this has often helped them to protect their children more effectively. Parenting courses are delivered on a one-to-one basis with good effect. 'I've learnt how to raise my children right because I'm a better parent', states one proud parent. Such provision has been particularly effective for parents who have lived in care and who have limited experiences of positive role models in their lives. The CAF process is well used to assess and plan for complex needs and allocate appropriate resources. Furthermore, collaborative working with children's social care, in particular, ensures that looked after children, children in need and those subject to child protection plans benefit from increased family stability.

Activities such as 'Rhyme Time' and 'Stay and Play' provide activities which children enjoy and which promote their learning and development. In turn, newly established 'Play and Learn' sessions and 'Book Start Corner' are beginning to raise parents' awareness of how to support children's learning at home and prepare them for the transition to school. Disabled children are fully engaged with services and are closely monitored in their educational journeys by a range of support agencies. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores confirm that children in the area achieve good levels of development appropriate to their age. However, the centre does not use these data to monitor trends in children's learning, nor have they established a system to track children's progress over time from their starting points.

Well-established collaboration with Jubilee Credit Union, Jobcentre Plus and local adult learning providers is beginning to enhance parents' ability to improve their own economic well-being. Parents recognise the importance of saving and safe borrowing, therefore avoiding further debt. Welfare reform guidance, alongside 'work club' sessions and signposting to various training courses, improves parents' readiness for work. In some cases parents have gained qualifications leading to work in administration and catering and two parents are now volunteering in the centre with a view to their future engagement on the management board. Another parent has set up her own social enterprise and runs a successful 'Baby Sling Library' from the centre. However, the centre does not track retention rates for courses or learning outcomes for adults. This prevents the staff from measuring the full and long-term impact of the signposting to adult services.

Parents confirm how happy they are with the centre and play an increasing part in shaping its future services. They make a positive contribution towards the centre's development through satisfaction surveys and by sharing their views on future provision.

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>3</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>3</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>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

Provision is rightly targeted within the most deprived areas; ensuring families who need them most receive the services and support they require. The centre has secured access to services by 100% of teenage parents and disabled children, and data confirm increased access to lone parents and families of East European and Asian heritage. Fathers attend universally, although a network, 'Fathers' Champion', supports their links with the centre. The centre is aware that some groups, such as teenage parents, prefer one-to-one targeted support. The centre knows that more work needs to be done to raise their aspirations and guide them into training and employment opportunities and the centre has plans in place to develop this work.

The care, guidance and support families receive are good. The range of literature, array of safety displays and constant support for families during times of crisis ensures that, once engaged, families develop a positive 'I can' approach to the challenges they face. Well-established inter-agency working between family support workers, early years workers, health professionals and social care, ensures tailored family support across all levels of need. Referral pathways begin with a 'sifting' process to determine the level of need and then referral to the 'multi-agency panel' for allocation to a wide range of partners and professionals. Outcomes for parents participating in the 'Think Family' programme are good because parents are referred into the programme when they have the emotional capacity to sustain the often significant changes in their lives. Parents welcome this approach and those whose children have been scaled down from requiring child protection plans state they 'can't wait' for 'Think Family' because they are ready to receive the positive changes it will bring.

The provision to help children learn, develop and gain skills for the future is improving satisfactorily. Good support and guidance from the children's centre teacher is improving the quality of Early Years Foundation Stage provision across all centre activities and within childcare provision in the reach area. Centre data confirm that the take-up of nursery entitlement is good, although the centre does not routinely monitor take-up or track the engagement of children who may be at risk of developmental delay without intervention.

Data provided confirm that 78 parents from the most disadvantaged communities attended a wide variety of training in the last year. These opportunities included first aid, food hygiene and basic computer skills. However, such data are not routinely sought or used to assess progress or build on the aspirations of target groups.

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>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**3**

Following a significant local authority restructure, staff roles are relatively new and are still in the process of becoming embedded. However, staff supervision and accountability arrangements have remained secure. Staff benefit from a continuous programme of professional development in addition to staff training provided by partners in relation to infant feeding, speech and language, and welfare reform. Managers and staff are passionate about their work and share the drive to improve the life chances and aspirations of the families they work with.

The strategic steer of the centre replicates the local authority geographical model which includes sub-group committees. These include partners leading on aspects of health, safety, education and economic stability. The sub-groups ultimately feed into the local management board. They provide information to the board via quarterly manager reports and these help to provide board members with an overview of the centre's performance towards its business plans. The use of 'Report Cards' demonstrates where development planning is more rigorous and effective. However, the quality and effectiveness of sub-group plans vary and pertinent data to measure impact of services are underutilised, hindering the board's ability to hold the centre firmly to account for its ongoing performance. Furthermore, the centre has yet to devise a systematic approach to evaluating partner services in order to capture outcomes and demonstrate stronger performance.



The centre provides satisfactory value for money. The building is utilised well and is appropriately maintained. Financial management and the sustainability of services are a priority for the business team and they have begun to seek opportunities to be more cost-effective by hiring out training and meeting rooms to partners. However, the impact of resources and provision on outcomes is not well evidenced.

Safeguarding arrangements are good; particularly the arrangements to identify needs and support families through change. Parents are well advised about the centre's statutory safeguarding duties which ensure transparency in its role. This is respected by parents who have children subject to child protection plans as they are aware that they sometimes 'need others to intervene'. Procedures for undertaking Criminal Record Bureau checks are robust and arrangements for the case management of family files are equally secure. All staff receive safeguarding training pertinent to their roles and responsibilities.

The centre strives to provide an inclusive service from which everybody can benefit, hence its willingness to seek parental views and respond accordingly. For example, good partnership working between parents, the centre and health professionals led to a 'Twins Group' being established. In addition, regular consultation with centre users has influenced the range of the school holiday provision available and led to a road safety event. The centre's place in the community is secure due to its persistence and this is seen by the number of local volunteers and school children who recently supported the initiative to improve the centre's garden. The centre ensures all disabled children are provided for and their provision and progress are monitored through the 'Children with Additional Needs' network group. However, without rigorous processes to continually track improvements in family outcomes the centre is restricted in its ability to demonstrate its effectiveness in narrowing the achievement gap and health inequalities between all disadvantaged groups.

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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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**

Inspection outcomes for Kittens Pre-School and Earcroft Children's Centre crèche were considered as part of this inspection.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Earcroft Children's Centre on 29 and 30 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

As part of our inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff and centre partners who work with you.

During our inspection we found that the centre provides a good range of services and activities which you enjoy and which meet your particular needs. Staff are beginning to use other sites within the community, encouraging more families to use the services and engage in the centre's work. This is particularly so for parents who are bringing children up on their own and for families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable.

We found that the centre provides a safe and welcoming place for you and staff work hard to support and protect you during times of crisis and difficulty. In turn, some parents told us that it was the centre's persistence that encouraged them to seek help and find solutions for their problems. Comments such as, 'I couldn't have improved things for my children and myself without my family support worker, I know she is there if I need her', confirm this. The centre offers good levels of care, guidance and support, providing families with up-to-date advice about breastfeeding, weaning and how to prepare formula feeds safely. This helps new mothers to ensure their babies are safe and healthy. Equally, parents show an improved awareness of the dangers of smoking in the home so they have taken steps to smoke outdoors and not inside. Some have gone on to stop smoking completely.

We found that families using the centre really look forward to groups such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Rhyme Time' where they receive good advice about how to support their children's learning, behaviour and social skills. Staff provide exciting and stimulating activities for children which promote their interests, curiosity and willingness to play and learn. However, the centre does not track children's progress well enough to show how they have moved on in their development so we have asked them to do this. The centre is also beginning to provide new sessions such as 'Play and Learn' to really help parents to help children with their early language development and prepare children for starting school. However, these types of activities are relatively new and it is too early to see the difference these services make for families.

The centre works well with many partner agencies and this helps to make sure that you get the advice and support you need around saving and safe borrowing, pathways to work and training. Good links with Jubilee Credit Union and Jobcentre Plus help with these issues. However, the centre does not always get enough information from their partners to measure the difference these services make to your lives. Therefore, we have asked them to find a way to do this. A few parents have become volunteers and one is running her own group. You told us that you have lots of opportunities to share your views about the centre and how it is run and a few have previously had roles on the management board. The centre needs more of you to be involved in this way and they have plans in place to do this.

We found the leadership and management of the centre to be satisfactory. Managers know your community well and they are committed to providing activities and services which help you to improve your lives. They work closely with the management board and the local authority to make sure they have the right plans in place to continually improve your services and increase the numbers of families using the centre. In some cases these plans work really well but this is not always the case, so we have asked managers and their partners to improve planning to make sure the centre can measure how well it is doing more rigorously.

Thank you for speaking with us and we wish you all the very best for the future.

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