

Inspection report for Ashton Sure Start Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Wigan |
| Inspection number | 406930 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 January 2013 |
| Reporting inspector | Gillian Bishop HMI |

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| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
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| Linked school if applicable | St Thomas' Church of England Primary School 106455 |
| 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.

Report Published: January 2013

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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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, the collaborative leadership committee and the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Ashton Sure Start Children's Centre is a phase two centre located in Ashton-in-Makerfield and situated close to Ashton Town Centre. Although the centre is affiliated to St Thomas' Church of England Primary School the centre operates from Ashton Library and provides a range of provision across local schools and community venues. There are 880 children under five years residing in the reach area of which 68% are registered and 58% are actively engaged with services. The catchment area is economically stable and there is a generally decreasing trend of worklessness. Only one of the ten super output areas is within the lowest 30% most deprived in the country. Centre data confirm that 14.2% of children aged under four years are living in household's dependant on workless benefits. This is much lower than the Wigan figure of 24.8% and the national average of 22.4%.

The large majority of families residing in the area are of White British heritage with a very small number of families from Black and minority ethnic groups. Some families in the area experience social and economic difficulties associated with poor health and some unemployment. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage usually enter early years provision in line with age-related expectations in their development although some children experience difficulties in their speech and language development.

The centre received designation in 2007 and it provides a range of services to meet the core purpose. The strategic management of the centre has been delegated by the local authority to the headteacher of St Thomas' Church of England Primary School, who undertakes the

role of head of centre. A Collaborative Leadership Committee (CLC), which includes a range of representation by partners, provides strategic support alongside the local authority. A children’s centre coordinator manages the day-to-day running of the centre.

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

Ashton Sure Start Children’s Centre provides well for its community and this is reflected in good quality universal and targeted provision, secure leadership and good and improving outcomes for families engaging with their services. ‘This place is worth its weight in gold...I’m a different person because of it,’ confirms the sense of value and praise which parents hold for the centre. Despite the significant upheaval to new premises at Ashton Library in October 2012, the centre has continued to sustain and increase its membership and engagement with families. Careful consultation and effective use of their views, concerns and ideas has resulted in their full cooperation with the move and their contribution to the use and safe management of the building. Subsequently, the centre’s overall effectiveness and capacity to sustain further improvement are good.

Families benefit from a wide range of provision which is well planned, appropriate to their needs and carefully located to tackle barriers and reluctance to engagement by some families in the wider community. As a result, participation by most target groups is increasing. However, the centre has still to reach more families in their most deprived area and fathers; particularly those who are workless, are not making the best use of services. The centres good reputation and knowledge of the community alongside increasingly good partnership working with schools, health and private and voluntary sector organisations is improving the quality of provision across the reach. Furthermore, the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the centres contribution to this process and referral pathways into the nought-to-19 Gateway service, ensures family’s needs are appropriately assessed and used to inform and coordinate pertinent levels of intervention and support.

The centre is working hard to tackle poor health trends through a combination of good partnerships with health professionals, targeted commissioned services and local healthy living campaigns, with evidence of some impact on obesity in Reception Year children.

Equally, a successful breastfeeding group promotes parents' understanding of the benefits of breastfeeding increasing the length of time this is sustained. However, the prevalence of breastfeeding past six-to-eight weeks is well-below national averages and not improving rapidly enough.

One of the strengths of the centre is the extent to which it consults with parents and provides meaningful ways for them to be increasingly involved in the strategic development of the centre's work. Opportunities for parents to volunteer and support and run services are good. Volunteering opportunities lead to secure outcomes in relation to parents' confidence, levels of qualification and employability skills, as they often move on to higher level education and employment. However, despite a good range of adult learning opportunities, the centre are unable to demonstrate the extent to which adults gain employment because this information is not systematically tracked.

Firm leadership at both governance and management levels ensures a secure strategic and operational steer and a sharp focus on the priority given to the engagement of target groups and those families in greatest need. The local authority and the CLC provide good levels of support and newly established performance management systems alongside key performance indicators are improving opportunities to hold the centre to account. However, improvement plans are not sufficiently robust or ambitious preventing a more rigorous approach to driving improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further improve outcomes, provision and leadership and management by:
 - refining the collation and analysis of data and information to inform the evaluation of outcomes more meticulously particularly in relation to progression into employment and to further expand the centre's reach into the most deprived areas and across all target groups, especially fathers
 - working with the local authority, collaborative leadership committee, centre partners and the parents forum, and improve the use of data to set ambitious targets within improvement plans, particularly in relation to breastfeeding
 - systematically monitor success towards these targets to sustain a rapid pace of improvement and hold the centre more rigorously to account for its work.

How good are outcomes for families?

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'This centre is the best, we couldn't do without it' and 'I'm a more confident and different person in just four months because of the support and guidance from staff'. Such testimonies from parents confirm that the centre successfully nurtures families through difficulties and change. The effective use of the CAF ensures a coordinated multi-professional approach to the early delivery of services. Consequently, good outcomes are sustained for children and families being removed from child protection plans. Parents'

demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe. For example, they were instrumental in the decision to install a child safety gate within the new library premises and they often self-refer to parenting courses recognising they want to do more to manage their children's behaviour more positively.

Consistent messages about how to lead healthier lifestyles are beginning to increase parents' awareness of how to keep fit and well. For example, 'Family Cycling', 'Physibodies' and 'Healthy Me Healthy You' courses have changed families cooking and exercise habits for the better. In addition, one volunteer has established her own 'Parent Weight Loss Support Group' and is helping other parents to gain a better understanding of how to eat in moderation and not adopt bad dieting habits. An increased strategic focus on improving low breastfeeding prevalence is beginning to have an impact and mothers' report that the weekly group has ...'kept them going when it was highly likely they may give up'. As a result, their babies are healthy, thriving and content. The centre is aware that progress towards improving breastfeeding trends is slow hence this is a priority within improvement plans. However, the lack of challenging targets with the plan is preventing a more concerted impact.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good developmental progress in their learning and development. Activities such as 'Jo Jingles' and good quality story and rhyme sessions delivered by the library all provide enjoyable and stimulating activities which promote children's early language, interest in books and motivation to listen and learn. In addition, the achievement gap is narrowing and a targeted approach to improving children's personal, social and emotional development across reach provision has improved Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores. Disabled children and those with special educational needs accessing services benefit from an individualised approach to their learning and support. Careful arrangements for their transition to school alongside tracking of their progress through Reception Year confirm that they, too, make equally good progress given their particular needs and starting points.

Parents benefit from a broad range of family and adult learning opportunities which improve their ability to support children's early literacy and reading at home and where necessary, provide access to accredited literacy and numeracy courses. In some cases, these opportunities have enabled parents to progress to more challenging learning opportunities such as the 'Helping and Working in Schools' course as a means to secure teaching assistant positions. However, the impact of the centre's work with the Job Centre and progression into employment for learners in general is less well evidenced and too few workless fathers are engaged in training. The 'Being Involved Group' (BIG) provides an effective forum for parents to actively voice their views and ideas leading to community and family events, services for older children and weekend and evening services.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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| 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 | 2 |
| 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?

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The centre has taken good measures to address low levels of engagement with evidence of success. Services are extended into the wider community and are constantly developing to meet need. A recent consultation with non-centre users has led to a more intensive marketing strategy raising the profile of the centre, however, attendances by fathers remains low despite targeted provision. Increasing access to live birth data and a more consistent approach to registration by health professionals has shown a 10% increase in registrations within the most deprived area in the last quarter of the year. However, the centre recognises that more needs to be done to tackle the remaining reluctance of some families to engage and this is linked to their development plans.

Parents consistently describe the centre as 'the best, because of friendly, approachable staff who always have a big smile and more importantly, they know your name'. The large majority of groups and services are well attended. The link worker routinely visits the local coffee shop and volunteers attend the baby clinic in their attempts to seek out new families not yet benefiting from the centre. Referral pathways to support and systems to assess need are now embedded following the development of the nought-to-19 Gateway early integration and prevention service. As a result, there is a multi-agency approach to the delivery, monitoring and impact of services.

Good-quality play and learning activities and the skilful direction from the deputy headteacher of St Thomas' School ensure children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in their learning and development. Steady improvements in the quality of planning and assessment within centre activities and across private, voluntary and independent childcare providers brings good levels of consistency within early years practice. As a result, children eligible for two-year funded education that require careful monitoring in their learning access good early years provision. Commissioned services such

as 'Jo Jingles' and crèche' provision follow Early Years Foundation Stage guidance ensuring children benefit from stimulating and well-planned activities which have a positive impact on their behaviour, concentration and readiness for school.

Parents access a good range of training including first aid, work clubs and literacy classes carefully located to enable access to those who may need it most. Parents accessing parenting courses adopt positive strategies for managing their children's behaviour and report, 'I've learnt that positive praise works'... 'I'm much calmer and so are my children'. Volunteers including some from particular target groups, undertake an extremely good range of training alongside work-based experiences, such as running the busy coffee morning session and supporting parent craft classes. Thus increasing their aspirations and confidence to pursue entry to university and seek employment.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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| 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

Governance and accountability arrangements are secure, with experienced day-to-day leadership and the increasingly effective role of the CLC. Staff are well supported through supervision arrangements and continuous professional development to ensure they are well equipped for their particular role and develop new skills. Although parents are not currently represented on the CLC, they have good opportunities to shape and develop services via their contribution to planning and development meetings and their engagement in 'BIG'. For example, they have used local data to assess health and adult learning needs and subsequently develop provision.

The CLC are kept well informed in relation to the work and performance of the centre enabling the group to provide strategic support in addition to the local authority annual conversation procedures. However, they are yet to play a more challenging role within improvement planning. Development plans are appropriately targeted and feed from accurate self-evaluation but they lack rigour because the CLC and local authority have not ensured the systematic link to key performance indicators and use of ambitious targets across all plans.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are good and are in keeping with local authority requirements. Appropriate records are maintained including evidence to confirm the suitability of partner agencies alongside Criminal Record Bureau checks for centre staff. Well-established partnership working between 'WAVE' and the link outreach worker ensures

families experiencing domestic violence receive well-targeted support bringing safety and stability back into family life and preventing repeat incidents.

An increasingly strategic partnership between the centre and health professionals is aiding the registration of families at an earlier point. The 'Under 5's Working Group' alongside good relationships with childminders, schools and early years settings is having a positive impact on the quality of early education for children. Commissioned services provided by 'Action for Children' and 'Active Living' provide useful outcome evaluations of their service; however, some partner agencies, such as the Job Centre, provide limited evaluations of their work preventing the centre demonstrating the full extent of its signposting and engagement with this team.

Providing good value for money is central to the centre's work and success. The move into the library has cut costs, increased the visibility of the centre within the community and provided more space and resources to work with. Furthermore, the regular use of volunteers enables the centre to develop more sustainable activities whilst supporting personal progression for parents. The centre consistently strives to create an inclusive provision and this is seen within its persistence to track the engagement of particular target groups. Universal provision provides services for all including services for disabled children and adults and those with special educational needs provided at other local centres. In addition a discrete approach to targeting provision ensures families who need services most, are appropriately prioritised.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

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| 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 | 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

Consideration was given to the inspection report for St Thomas' Church of England Primary School during this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ashton Sure Start Children's Centre on 9–10 January 2013. We judged the centre as good 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.

We found that the centre provides a safe and welcoming place for you and your children and those of you we spoke with said that the centre had helped you to make some significant changes in your lives. For example, more of you are exercising after participating in 'Family Cycling' and eating more healthily after completing the 'Healthy Me Healthy You' course. One volunteer has also set up a weight loss group which is helping other parents to eat sensibly and not to adopt bad dieting habits. This is showing that the centre's work is beginning to tackle problems with obesity and poor health. Equally, the breastfeeding group is really helping mums to continue breastfeeding their babies for longer periods of time, which is better for their babies. One parent said, 'I would have given up without it'. However, breastfeeding rates are not improving fast enough so we have asked the centre to consider this more fully within their action plans.

We have found that the good care, guidance and support provided by the managers, receptionist and link worker have really helped you to increase your confidence, attend various training courses and in some cases, become volunteers for the centre. In fact, we found that those of you who do volunteer make good strides in your personal development because of the courses you do and the experiences you have. In some cases, this has led to employment, which is fantastic! However, the centre do not always track or get information from their partners about the difference training has made to others, particularly for fathers. So again, we have asked the centre to work with their partners to track parents' journey's after completing courses, workshops and training so they can show that more of you can gain work if you need it.

We also found that parents and children have access to a good range of services and activities both within the library premises and at schools and community halls in the area. In

fact, we found that the staff are working hard to attract more families to the centre and the work in the community is helping them to do this. Staff know, however, that they have more to do in order to make sure that all families use the centre, particularly those who need it most and they have plans in place to do that. You told us how much you enjoy activities such as 'Jo Jingles', 'Physibodies' and 'Library Story Sessions' and we can see why. These activities are exciting and they give you lots of ideas of how to support your children's learning at home which is why most children are well prepared for school.

The centre strives to keep families safe and some of you have helped with this by suggesting ways to keep children safe in the new library premises. As a result, a safety gate has been fitted across the children's area. The centre's work with families whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable is also good. Comments such as 'this place is worth its weight in gold' confirm how much parents value the centre's services and the work of its staff. This is down to assessing the needs of families well and working with other professionals to provide packages of support which best meet their needs. This work has been particularly good with families who have experienced domestic violence.

We found that the leadership and management of the centre are good. Managers and staff work hard to meet your needs and ensure that staff are properly trained to do their jobs. We were particularly pleased to see that some parents play an active role in the development of services through their role as volunteers or their representation on the 'Being Involved Group' (BIG). We also found that the role of the collaborative leadership committee (CLC) who provide governance to the centre, provide good support to the centre and they help to guide its work. However, they are less involved in helping to set performance targets in their improvement plan and this is preventing the centre from making improvements more quickly and from showing the extent to which they make a positive difference to your lives. Therefore, we have asked the local authority, partners and the CLC to work together to improve their plans and involve you in this process.

Thank you for talking 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.