

Inspection report for Huncoat Primary School & Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Accrington Huncoat Primary School URN:119182
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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 senior managers, children centre workers, health and education professionals, representatives of the local authority and spoke with users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Huncoat Primary School and Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in January 2008. The centre is located at Accrington Huncoat Primary School and shares an office, entrance and reception area with the school. The school has a pre-school attached but this early years provision is not officially linked to the centre. The linked provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements and the school was last inspected in November 2012. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre serves a mixed neighbourhood, ranging from relatively affluent areas of private housing to other localities where there are significant pockets of deprivation. The centre has recently acquired a wider reach area to include the ward of Baxenden which is a reasonably prosperous area. This area is located some distance away from Huncoat. Across the reach area, 22.5% of children live in workless households and a similar proportion of families are dependent on benefits. The reach area is predominantly made up of White British families. The centre serves a large established Traveller site, although it is situated in the reach area of another local children's centre. This is because the children from the site attend the local school.

The centre delivers the core purpose through a varied programme of activities and services to meet the needs of children and their families and the local community. These include stay and play type activities that are sometimes held in other locations in the community. The centre has recently undergone a change in management. Until March 2012 it was under the management of the headteacher and governing body of the school. The centre is now

managed by Lancashire County Council under a service level agreement with Accrington Huncoat Primary School. It is part of a federated model with Copperhouse Children's Centre which is located in the nearby town of Rishton. Over recent years there has been a high turnover of staff. The centre manager took on her responsibilities in March 2012 and other members of staff were also appointed in 2012. Most staff are very new to the centre or have recently returned after a period of absence.

Children's level of skills on entry to early years provision vary although the majority are below those expected for their age.

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

The effectiveness of the centre in meeting the needs of its wider community is satisfactory, although it is rapidly improving after a difficult period in its history. The new centre manager has quickly evaluated where improvements need to be made and formulated sensible plans for improvement that are being implemented steadily and securely. The ambition and determination to quickly bring about improvement is matched by other staff with leadership responsibilities. Staff from the more established centre that is linked to Huncoat have also contributed to the optimistic atmosphere and satisfactory but improving outcomes for families. The positive developments that have been secured in a very short time, particularly relating to improving the number of families who are registered with the centre demonstrate the centre's satisfactory capacity for further improvement. The centre recognises that more needs to be done to develop further the skills of staff who are very new to the centre and to improve parents' contribution to the governance of the centre.

New systems for making early contact with expectant and new mothers have improved registration rates. However, too many families with children aged under five do not make full use of its services. The centre provides a suitable range of good quality activities designed to improve families' well-being. However, attendance rates are relatively low. Those that do use the centre say that staff are accommodating and friendly. However, it is sometimes difficult for parents to find out about the activities on offer. The centre has not investigated whether some families with toddlers and children who are slightly older have missed opportunities to register in the past. Some families in the reach area find it

inconvenient to access Huncoat Children's Centre and live closer to other centres. Although the centre has started to take its services out into the local community, plans to locate some services in a hub building in an area of social housing have not yet come to fruition. The identification of target groups is improving and more is being done to address their needs. For example, young parents are appropriately supported. Although parents value the individual support provided in times of crisis, the way this work is recorded, the quality of written guidance provided for new staff and the rigour of supervision is not good enough. The centre offers a range of enjoyable activities and some, such as musical activities and events during the school holidays, are well attended. However, some sessions, such as the confidence building course, have few attendees. There has been an appropriate focus on improving children's skills, and additional funding from the local authority has allowed centre staff to provide extra support for children whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. Nevertheless, there is more work to be done to support children's communication skills. Not as much action has been taken to improve the skills of adults. Courses for adults are not always successfully completed and the progress of adults is not carefully tracked; work with Jobcentre Plus to improve employability is limited. The centre has successfully encouraged volunteering and this route, which is highly valued by those involved, has led to certification and an improvement in parents' levels of confidence.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance the number of families that engage with the children's centre by:
 - providing parents with better information about activities in the centre
 - checking if parents with toddlers and slightly older children have missed opportunities to register in the past and taking steps to rectify this
 - accelerating the development of provision out in the local community
 - involving more parents in the strategic development of the centre.
- Develop the skills of new staff and improve outcomes for families by:
 - improving the rigour of professional supervision and record keeping
 - providing staff with clearer guidance regarding levels of concern and actions to be taken in particular circumstances
 - placing a greater focus on how young children develop their speech and vocabulary.
- Improve the achievement of families and their long-term prospects by:
 - making certain that adults can access courses that improve their skills and that they are able to complete successfully
 - carefully tracking adults' learning
 - improving the centre's partnership with Jobcentre Plus.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Significant improvements have been made to the way the centre makes early contact with new and expectant mothers, although these are fairly recent and have not had time to impact fully. Centre workers are now present at antenatal and postnatal clinics and offer valuable advice about health matters, including breastfeeding and healthy diets. Parents say they are 'glad of the advice received and are able to ask questions in a one-to-one situation'. Rates for initiating and sustaining breastfeeding have improved but still well below national figures. For example, 55% of new mothers in the Huncoat area initiate breastfeeding, compared to the national figure of 73%. Rates of obesity for children in the Reception Year increased in 2012 to 11%. The centre is working hard to address the issue through 'Healthy Heroes'. The themes of this initiative are reinforced through sessions in the centre, including 'Stay and Play' and reiterated through the work of the co-located primary school.

The impact of the centre's work on improving outcomes for families, including those for health, is reduced by relatively low attendance at sessions. For example, only two mothers attend the calming, baby massage sessions which focus on improving the emotional well-being of mothers and babies. Families that attend the centre feel safe and their children enjoy the activities that are provided. Parents are helped to provide clear routines and structure for their children and learn how to effectively manage their children's behaviour. The numbers of children who are subject to child protection plans is small. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is used appropriately to deliver a package of support, and when necessary, centre staff work closely with staff from social services to make sure that children are kept safe. Centre staff successfully support access visits for children who are looked after by the local authority. The views of families are sought and contribute to decision making. The parents' forum is starting to develop, however Huncoat parents are not adequately represented on the joint advisory board.

The proportion of children who reach expectations for their age in their personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved year-on-year. However, the proportion is still well below the national average in many areas of children's development, including language and literacy. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile had narrowed steadily until 2012 when it widened. Additional funding has helped staff to assist children in the Nursery and Reception classes of the co-located school and to support the development of children's reading. However, there is more work to be done to improve the way new staff support the development of young children's communication skills. The centre's work with Traveller families, in association with the school and the local authority, has been particularly successful in encouraging regular attendance at school and raising levels of attainment for these children.

Parents are given suitable advice in times of financial hardship, such as meeting experts from the Citizens Advice Bureau that helps them to manage their situation. Parents can

access some courses that enable them to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, although these are not always well attended and parents are not always gaining accreditations. The centre has not yet done enough to help parents plan clear routes to improve their educational attainment and employability skills. In this respect, the partnership with Jobcentre Plus is underdeveloped.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3
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?

3

Parents say that activities are 'brilliant' and that 'more should come'. The range of activities and services provided at the centre is becoming better matched to the needs of users as the centre extends its understanding of local needs and target groups. Families' needs are suitably assessed and appropriate priority is placed on children's health and well-being. The centre manager is taking robust action to increase registration rates which have improved by approximately 10% in the last six months. However, there is more to be done to identify and contact families who may not have been contacted in the past, and to encourage more to attend sessions in the centre. Parents are not always aware of what is going on and this information is not provided on the internet. Part of the reach area is beyond the boundaries of other children's centres. The centre is exploring ways of taking services to this area. However, leaders are aware of the likelihood that families may prefer to attend other centres which are more convenient for them. Work to develop a hub in the local community has been slow due to circumstances beyond the centre's control. However, the centre's commitment to this project demonstrates the vision of senior staff to meet the welfare needs of local families.

Users report they enjoy the learning opportunities on offer. Activities for children are carefully planned and meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children's learning is carefully tracked and their next steps in learning are well considered. 'Learning journeys' provide a record of children's progress. Many staff are new to their roles and their

quality of interaction with children, including the way they model language and work to extend children's vocabulary, is variable. Although staff plan well for purposeful learning, the impact of sessions on children's development is restricted by low levels of attendance. The use of prior learning to set goals for adults and to track their progress is not as successful. When families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable contact the centre, they receive satisfactory individual support through outreach work and by attending the centre. There are a small number of examples of good continuity of care, although the many staffing changes in outreach workers have hindered this work. None the less, the centre has worked diligently to sustain support for these families. However, the quality of its record keeping is variable. Occasionally, records lack clarity and the format restricts the amount of detail that is given. Inexperienced workers have been successfully supported by their more experienced colleagues, but there is a lack of clear written guidance to help outreach workers recognise when concerns should be taken forward.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The new manager has worked diligently to establish better systems of working. The views of the local community have been sought and have been used to inform development planning; some of the requests have already been acted upon. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate, although some judgements are too positive. The centre has identified sensible priorities for improvement, which are being addressed. Systems of governance and accountability are clear. The centre's work is appropriately appraised by partners in the local authority. The joint advisory board provides some challenge that relates directly to outcomes for families in the reach area. Some parents are helping to inform the strategic direction of the centre; leaders aware of the need for more families to be involved and contribute to decision making. The local authority and the centre manager are ensuring that the centre provides satisfactory but rapidly improving value for money. Good day-to-day management ensures the centre runs smoothly and that new staff are appropriately supported. The centre recognises that there are still gaps in staff skills and systems for professional supervision currently do not involve enough senior staff or have sufficient rigour.

The centre's arrangements for safeguarding are in place and practice meets requirements. All staff are suitably vetted, have completed appropriate training and are suitably aware of safeguarding concerns. However, there is lack of written guidance to remind staff about

levels of concern and the circumstances when actions should be taken. The centre works well with other agencies, such as health and social care, to make sure that children on the child protection register are safe and cared for well. Some staff have expertise in tackling issues relating to domestic violence and the centre is involved in delivering specific programmes designed to empower these users and support their emotional well-being. Overall local partnerships are developing well and improving. Work with health partners has been particularly effective for example, the centre's involvement in delivering the 'Bumps, Babes and Beyond' programme helps the centre to make early contact with families. The close working relationship between the school and the centre has been sustained during this period of change. The centre has an inclusive approach and is committed to promoting equal and diverse opportunities and provides adequate support for families with disabled children and those with special educational needs. For example, it has an easily accessible sensory room that is used by local families. The centre's work with children from Traveller families has been particularly successful and there is now a focus on closing the attainment gap for boys.

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	3
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	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	3
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.	3

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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Accrington Huncoat Primary School and Children's Centre on 15-16 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those parents who spoke to us when we inspected the centre. Some of you told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very useful.

As you know there have been many recent changes at the centre. The leaders are bringing about important changes for the better. The leaders know where improvements are needed and have made sensible plans that are starting to make a real difference to the quality of provision in the centre and outcomes for local families. The new joint advisory board is already starting to provide leaders with challenge because very specific questions are asked about the work at the children's centre but there are not enough parents involved in this important work. We have asked the centre to improve this.

Not enough families have registered with the centre although earlier contact with mothers to be and new mothers is helping to improve registration rates. There is a range of suitable activities designed to improve the well-being of local families and many of them are of good quality. However, some of these activities are poorly attended and families are missing out on valuable opportunities to develop their skills. Some parents have reported that they find it difficult to find out about activities and they are right when they say information about activities is not available on the internet. We have asked the centre to improve this and to make sure that those who were not contacted in the past now have the chance to learn about, and hopefully use the facilities at the centre. Some families in the reach area live a considerable distance from the centre and would pass other centres in order to access this one. Therefore, we have asked the local authority to reconsider how the reach area is organised. That said the centre has started to develop links with voluntary groups in this area. The centre is aware that some parents are reluctant to visit the centre and has started to develop a 'hub' on a local estate. This important project has moved along slowly due to circumstances beyond the control of the centre leaders. The centre is focusing on improving the lives of target groups. The new manager of the centre has listened carefully to the views of families and together with staff is working hard to improve the quality and range of what is on offer at the centre. The musical activities are particularly well attended and highly

valued by parents because they are active and fun. Parents also enjoy attending activities during the school holidays. Some lovely sessions such as baby massage are attended by very few mothers, which means that some local mothers and their babies are really missing out.

Outreach workers in the centre are able to provide advice to parents about how they can keep themselves and their families fit and healthy. Although lower than the national average rates for breastfeeding are improving. Obesity rates at the end of the Reception Year increased recently and the centre is addressing this by making a greater effort to promote healthy lifestyles.

The centre used funding from the local authority to provide extra help for some children in the school's Nursery and Reception class and has focused on supporting their reading. It is now helping boys to do better and has successfully improved outcomes for children from Traveller families. However, there is the potential to do more to improve children's communication skills including doing more to improve children's speech. The centre has successfully contributed to raising achievement for local children, but has done less to improve the skills and employability of adults. Although there are some courses for parents, they do not always complete these courses and gain qualifications. The centre is not doing enough to check on the progress of adults or to plan clear ways that would enable users to improve their employability. Its partnership with Jobcentre Plus is limited. So, we have asked the centre to improve these aspects of its work. Rapidly increasing numbers of parents volunteer to help. They have been able to attend a course that has given them more confidence, as well as extra qualifications.

We judged the care, guidance and support provided by the centre to be satisfactory. A few of you told us that the centre provides you with valuable personal support, especially when times are difficult. Workers have helped parents to improve the way they manage their children's behaviour and routines. The quality of record keeping is variable and records sometimes lack precision. Less-experienced outreach workers have been supported by their colleagues, but there is a lack of written guidance that would help outreach workers to recognise when concerns should be followed up.

We would like to thank everyone who was willing to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and wish you every success in the future.

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