

Inspection report for Dallam Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Warrington |
| Inspection number | 404546 |
| Inspection dates | 20 - 21 February 2013 |
| Reporting inspector | Gillian Bishop HMI |

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| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
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| Linked school if applicable | Dallam Community Primary School URN 110972 |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Little Treasures Neighbourhood Nursery EY346106 |

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 representatives from the local authority and advisory board, the centre manager and staff, health professionals, frontline workers and centre partners, parents and other users of the centre's facilities.

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

Information about the centre

Dallam Children's Centre is located in West Warrington and serves families residing in the areas of Bewsey, Dallam, Burtonwood, Winwick and Whitecross. It is a phase one centre which received designated in 2006. The centre provides a full range of services to meet the core purpose including outreach provision within a range of venues in the wider community. The centre is co-located with Dallam Community Primary School and Little Treasures Neighbourhood Nursery provides affiliated childcare. The linked provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre serves a population which includes over 1600 children under the age of five. The reach area spans 10 super output areas of which six are in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country and three within the lowest 10%. The unemployment rate for the centre's reach area is higher than the Warrington average at 24.5%. In addition, 7.3% of the working population are claiming jobseekers' allowance compared with 3.5% in Warrington. Many children in the area enter early years provision with skills and knowledge

below the levels expected for their age, especially in their communication and language, and personal, social and emotional development.

Families in the area experience a range of social and economic difficulties associated with poor health, high unemployment and domestic violence. The population of the area is culturally mixed and includes families from White British heritage and a growing proportion of Black and minority ethnic families from Asian, Pakistani, Indian, Chinese and Eastern European backgrounds.

The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the local authority alongside an advisory group. Services are provided collaboratively through the Prevention, Family Support and Youth Division. A designated manager oversees the day-to-day running of the centre and provides line management to a team of staff. Partner agencies include Brighter Futures, local schools, and health professionals, St Mark's Church, Home Start and the West Area Neighbourhood Board.

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

Dallam Children's Centre is a good centre which provides well for its community. This is reflected in good-quality universal and targeted provision, secure leadership and good and improving outcomes for families engaging with its services. The centre has experienced some difficulty establishing itself within the community, leading to a relatively slow start, but the rate of progress within the last two years has been concerted and effective. The centre understands the needs of the community well and works hard to tackle barriers to engagement associated with disengaged and rural communities. As a result, registrations across all target groups continue to rise and 70% of the reach population are now engaging with services.

Consultation with families is systematic and routine. Parents evaluate services and influence the design and organisation of new provision through the parents forum and their evolving

role within the advisory board. Pathways to education, training and employment are effective due to firm partnerships with adult learning providers and increasing opportunities for parents, including those from target groups, to volunteer and improve their employability skills. Children benefit from a good range of provision helping to narrow the achievement gap for the lowest 20% of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Well-integrated provision such as 'Tiny Stars' and 'Chatterbox' provided by early years practitioners, health professionals and the speech and language team is beginning to provide good levels of early help and improve parenting and, ultimately, school readiness. However, systems to track the progress children make in their learning and development from their individual starting points is only just evolving. Furthermore, the analysis of early years profile data is not robust, preventing the centre consistently demonstrating the impact for children who have accessed their services.

Referral pathways to family support are secure following the introduction of a Single Point of Referral process. Strong collaboration between a wide range of partners ensures early help is swift and targeted, leading to seamless and bespoke provision for children and families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable. Centre data confirm a steadily improving trend within some health priorities such as breastfeeding; however, families continue to experience poor health relating to oral hygiene, smoking in pregnancy and under-18 conception rates in particular.

The leadership and management of the centre are good. Staff are well equipped for their particular roles due to the priority given to their continuous professional development and robust supervision. The advisory board is well informed about the centre's ongoing performance and is therefore able to monitor its work and provide good levels of support and challenge. Business plans are rightly targeted and where ambitious targets are set this drives a fast pace of improvement. For example, the centre has exceeded its target to register and engage the large majority of children in the area. However, plans lack the same rigour in relation to health improvement. Although there is some professional health representation on the advisory board, the centre lacks strategic input from its nominated health visitors and midwives, which slows the pace of health improvement and prevents rigour in its planning.

The secure links with families accessing services in the reach area, good outcomes, and effective and well-used provision confirm that the centre's overall effectiveness and capacity to sustain improvement are good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop further systems for tracking the progress children make in their learning and development from their starting points and improve the analysis of the Early Years Profile data in order to demonstrate consistently good outcomes for all children accessing children's centre services.

- Work with the local authority to strengthen the strategic work with nominated health and midwife professionals in order to increase the rigour with which all health priorities are planned for and to reduce health inequalities more rapidly.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

'This centre is the best, I couldn't do without it' and 'I'm more confident and really proud of myself as a parent' are typical comments from parents accessing services. The effective use of the Common Assessment Framework alongside a coordinated multi-professional approach to the early delivery of services has resulted in good outcomes for children in need and those stepping up or down from child protection plans. Family first aid sessions and home safety equipment purchased via the 'Safe-Buy Scheme' have also helped to improve the safety and protection of young children. In addition, the health visitors' drop-in provides parents with guidance about minor illnesses and concerns, helping to tackle the over-use of the local hospital for advice in the absence of a local doctor's surgery.

Early help and support are beginning to increase breastfeeding rates, whilst signposting to smoking cessation has resulted in some parents stopping smoking. Parents are more knowledgeable about how to cook healthy foods from scratch and some parents attending the 'under-ones session' have developed a recipe leaflet containing their favourite healthy meals which they share with others. The centre has taken steps to promote good sexual health within the youth groups and improve parents' understanding of oral health in the absence of a local dentist. However, both the under-18 conception rates and the percentage of children with decayed and missing teeth remain very high.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress in their learning and development. Activities within the 'All Kinds of Play' sessions, 'Story Craft' and 'Explore and Discover' provide well-planned and stimulating activities which promote children's early language, interest in books and curiosity to explore. In addition, 'Chatterbox', 'Song and Sign' and 'Foundation Fun' provide a targeted approach to improving children's personal, social and emotional development, and communication and language skills, particularly for children who speak English as an additional language and those at risk of language delay. Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores are improving across the reach, although they remain significantly below national and Warrington averages. Furthermore, systems to record children's progress at an individual level are in their infancy and profile data are not used effectively to track the impact for children accessing services.

Raising parental aspirations, providing life-changing opportunities and closing the achievement gap are at the heart of the centre's priorities and provision. Consequently, centre data confirm that 86% of families accessing the centre have completed a range of family and adult learning opportunities. Five volunteers have recently gained employment and a further seven volunteers are engaged in maintenance, gardening, administration and

childcare roles. The newly established 'Brighter Futures Team' are successfully re-engaging parents, especially young parents and local youths who are not in employment, education or training, with education, youth volunteering and mentoring. Consultation with parents is pivotal to the centre's successful engagement with families and their willingness to praise and support the work and performance of the centre. Parents confidently and willingly share their views and confirm that these are well received and responded to.

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 | 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 | 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. | 2 |

How good is the provision?

2

Data are being increasingly well used to identify particular local trends and improve life chances. As a result, provision is well targeted in tackling mental health and low mood, poor health and raising parental aspirations and social independence. The centre has secured a consistently improving trend across the engagement of all target groups including the Black minority ethnic groups of whom 72% are now engaging in services. Teen parents are well supported through extended partnerships and the Families First Intervention Team, and disabled children and adults access centre activities alongside specialist provision. Fathers attend more informally and some are volunteers and engage with the parents forum, although plans are in place to further develop service provision for this group.

Although the 'Single Point of Referral' pathway into centre services is relatively new, it enables needs to be assessed swiftly and steers the delivery of multi-agency services. This collaboration between partners ensures a two-way flow of information and effectively monitors impact, enabling the centre to adapt and increase support without delay. Parents consistently report how children's centre workers are sensitive, non-judgmental and perceptive to their needs. Effective family support ensures families at risk of disengaging because of barriers to access sustain their participation with services. For example, careful weekly planning and allocated transport ensure sustained access to parenting courses and

childcare for two-year-olds. Comments such as 'This place is brilliant, it's made a huge difference to our lives' and 'It's a life-saver' confirm the good care, guidance and support received by families.

The provision to help children learn, develop and gain skills for the future is developing well and consistently improving. Guidance and training for staff ensure play and learning activities across services are of good quality, including those delivered to children within the home environment. A good range of early years provision is available which successfully builds on each developmental stage as children become older. In addition, groups such as 'Terrific 2's' have been developed to meet increasing demand for targeted services for two-year-old children, ensuring more children benefit.

The learning journey for some parents, including those from target groups, has been particularly life changing. From very low starting points parents' confidence and willingness to improve their life chances and learning opportunities are embraced by many. Volunteering has played a significant part in this process; for example, one father has completed 200 volunteer hours in four months and has become a valued member of the centre team. He is undertaking vocational training and aspires to own his own business. Holistic therapies have provided increased personal confidence and a tentative road back into further education. Maths, English and employability skills programmes have raised aspirations, encouraging parents to set and achieve their goals and get back into the workplace.

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 good, with secure day-to-day leadership, a well-established advisory board and a firm strategic steer from the local authority. Representation on the advisory board has consistently included parents, although the current representatives are new to the role. Parents play an active role in decision making and shaping services, empowering them to be part of their future community development. Consultation takes place across outreach services, ensuring families attending services at Bewsey and Whitecross feel valued and have an equal say. The renaming of the centre is pending in order to promote cohesion and a sense of belonging to families across the reach area.

The advisory group are well-informed in relation to the performance of the centre, which ensures they are able to offer challenge as well as support. Development plans are well-informed from the previous planning cycle and align to priorities set in the Children and Young People Plan. Strategies to manage performance are well embedded and help to drive improvement, particularly where plans include challenging targets such as those set for engagement and the registration of families directly from live birth data. However, target setting is not evident within all health plans.

The priority given to developing integrated provision alongside partner agencies enables the centre to improve its services rapidly, sustain more effective contact with families and reach those families who previously have been harder to reach. Good partnership within local schools has enabled the sharing of local intelligence and expertise and has led to groups such as 'Toddler Time' and 'Foundation Fun' being rolled out to children who require some additional support in their learning. Links with Home Start, local neighbourhood boards, Brighter Futures, children's social care and, particularly, health all enhance provision for families and improve the parenting and safety of children.

The centre provides good value for money. Resources are deployed effectively into the community, improving outcomes for more families. The centre continually strives to provide an inclusive centre with evidence of success. Through perseverance and well-placed outreach provision the centre has successfully broadened its reach into the Bewsey, Burtonwood and Whitecross communities, engaging the large majority of their minority ethnic population as well as families living on the outskirts of the five-mile reach area. Provision is consistently focused on closing the gap between one group and another and reducing inequalities. As a result, parents of all ages and backgrounds are accessing services, training and volunteering opportunities. Provision is extended and adapted to support disabled parents and those with special educational needs so they engage at a level to suit their personal needs. This is particularly evident within the 'Tiny Stars' group where parents can move on or return as their needs require.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective in keeping children and families safe. Recruitment, vetting and induction of staff are rigorous and all staff understand their safeguarding roles and responsibility. Family support workers are well supported through robust clinical supervision, case file management and opportunities to discuss and reflect on outcomes and provision for families with complex needs. Close links with the 'Independent Domestic Abuse Service' alongside the centre's routine presence at MARAC meetings ensure appropriate resources are swiftly put in place for families experiencing, or at risk of, domestic violence.

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 | 2 |

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| 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

The inspection reports for Dallam Community Primary School and Little Treasures Neighbourhood Nursery were considered as part of this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Dallam Children's Centre on 20 and 21 February 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.

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. Services are run from other sites across the community, making sure that families in Bewsey and Whitecross can also engage with the centre's work. This has ensured families from different ethnic groups and backgrounds also use the services and it has helped those who live on the very outskirts of the area to have their own groups too. The centre knows it is important to seek your views and ideas and they do this very well. They encourage you to share these in the parents forum and with the advisory board, and more recently a good number of children and parents have been involved in choosing a new name for the centre.

We found that the centre provides a safe and welcoming place for you; 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 sensitive and non-judgmental approach which has encouraged them to seek help and improve their lives and futures. Comments such as 'This centre is a life-saver' and 'I'm a better parent now' confirm this. The centre offers good levels of care, guidance and support, providing new mothers with breastfeeding advice that helps them to feed their babies longer. Equally, parents are now more aware of the necessity to lead healthy lifestyles and some show an improved awareness of the dangers of smoking in the home because they have stopped smoking altogether. However, there are some significant health concerns such as high levels of teenage pregnancies and poor dental health which the centre still needs to improve. So, we have asked them to work more closely with their particular health professionals to address these problems.

Parents consistently told us that the 'All Kinds of Play' sessions, 'Tiny Stars' and 'Explore and Discover' all help to support their children's development and early learning and we agree with this. We found that the centre carefully plans activities which help children's educational progress. Groups such as 'Songs and Signs' and 'Chatterbox' make a positive difference to children's communication and language. However, the centre is only just beginning to put in place systems to record and track the progress individual children make and they do not always use development information well enough to show the difference their activities consistently make. So we have asked them to improve these systems.

We found that parents have good opportunities to improve their skills and qualifications through volunteering and a good range of training, encouraging more parents to go on to further education or find work. Some parents have been particularly successful and this has inspired them to find work and consider setting up their own business. For some, such opportunities have been life changing. 'I've got a better curriculum vitae because of training and volunteering, I've got work and money to plan a family holiday for the first time', states one proud parent.

We found the leadership and management of the centre to be good. 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 advisory board and 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. The centre works particularly well with its partner agencies, which helps to expand the range of services available to you and which increases opportunities for you to get what you need and move forward in your lives.

Thank you to everybody who took time to speak 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.