

Inspection report for Calne Community Children's Centre

Local authority	Wiltshire
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the team leader, frontline staff, a range of partners, advisory board representatives, senior Barnardo's staff, local authority officers, childminders and parents. They also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the self-evaluation form, annual conversation report and service plan.

Information about the centre

The centre was designated as a phase two centre in 2007 and delivers a range of services that meet its core purpose. The centre serves the market town of Calne and surrounding villages in north Wiltshire. It shares a site with Priestly Primary School and Appletree Nursery, both of which are subject to separate inspections. The centre's immediate neighbourhood, Calne Abberd South, is ranked as the sixth most deprived area in Wiltshire.

There are 1,345 children under five years old living in the reach area. The vast majority of families are from White British backgrounds but some come from many different heritages including White European and Black African. The proportion of children living in workless homes is 18%, and 11% of families are in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision are typically below the level expected for their age.

The centre is managed by Barnardos on behalf of Wiltshire County Council. The day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the team leader, who was appointed in September 2012. Over the last 12 months, two frontline staff have left, and a key worker very recently returned to work following maternity leave.

Governance is provided by the advisory board, comprising partner agencies and parents. The centre was accredited with the 'Investors in Families' award in 2010.

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

The centre has come through a period of significant staff changes over the last 12 months and has sustained good quality services for local families. The new team leader has undertaken an accurate audit of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and is driving further improvement through the well-conceived service plan. The number of families engaging with the centre is increasing, following the centre's recent marketing drive. Families from different target groups who use the centre have high levels of satisfaction. The centre has established a positive track record, as reflected in the good outcomes which, together with good leadership and management, clearly demonstrates its good capacity to continue to build for further success.

Families are helped to be healthy through their participation in a range of activities. Breastfeeding rates are increasing, with good support for young mothers in particular. The centre plays a key role in promoting physical activities and a good diet; obesity levels in Reception-age children are lower than the national average. Parents told inspectors that they feel safe using the centre and very well supported in times of personal crisis. One parent's comment sums this up: 'It's such a homely centre, staff get to know you and find out whether you are having a good or bad day; they know everyone very well and give good support.'

Effective use is made of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) for different agencies to pool their resources to ensure needs are assessed early and a robust plan of support established. Close partnership working and well-integrated plans ensure that the most vulnerable families, including children subject to a child protection plan and looked after children, are effectively protected. Safeguarding is given high priority and good arrangements ensure that families are well looked after when they attend group sessions.

Satisfactory learning and development experiences result in children's and adults

sound educational achievement. Children show good behaviour and records show they make satisfactory progress from their starting points. However, the proportion who reach a good level of development is below the county and national averages and the gap between the lowest achieving 20 per cent of children and the rest widened significantly last year. The centre has well-focused plans to raise achievement, particularly for children at risk of falling behind, but they have yet to be implemented.

Adults make a good contribution to the life and development of the centre as volunteers or advisory board members, or through their written evaluations and 'post-it note' suggestions. Some adults improve their economic well-being because of the centre's well-targeted outreach work, and others benefit from family learning courses to which they are signposted, such as 'Messy Foody Fun'. However, the numbers, especially of workless adults, participating in courses are relatively low and the centre does not follow up closely enough on how well the adults they signpost to different services get on.

Governance is satisfactory and supervision arrangements are effective, as reflected in the good quality of outreach services and positive outcomes for families. Partnerships are good and the current satisfactory engagement of families is improving swiftly, due to the centre's effective strategies. The advisory board comprises parents who regularly attend the frequent meetings and a range of partners whose attendance is more ad hoc. The board is effective in helping to shape services but is not giving sufficient attention to checking the centre's progress towards meeting challenging targets.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the work with early education partners and the local authority to ensure that more children reach a good level of development and that the gap between the lowest achieving 20 per cent and the rest closes rapidly.
- With adult, family learning and employment skills providers, widen the opportunities for more adults, particularly those from workless homes, to increase their educational achievements and economic well-being, and establish a robust system to track their progress.
- Enhance the work of the advisory board by reviewing its role and remit and ensuring it looks critically at how well the centre is meeting its targets.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Antenatal clinics for teenage parents are held at the children's centre regularly, and this is having a good impact on improving the health outcomes for this target group. The centre promotes breastfeeding in many ways, including through specific groups such as 'Baby Buddies'. Currently, 47.2% of mothers sustain breastfeeding their babies beyond eight weeks, which is slightly lower than the Wiltshire average, but

this is increasing. Cooking classes are held regularly, and during 'Stay and Play' activities a healthy snack is provided and children and parents are encouraged to try new tastes and textures. The Dads' Group identifies that building dens keeps them and their children physically active, as do 'Welly Walks' and digging the centre garden. At 8.5%, the level of obesity in Reception-age children is below the national average of 10.2%.

Parents are united in their views that the good care, guidance and support they receive help them keep safe. 'I feel able to open up to staff as they don't judge you, just do their best to help you get over a hump' is a typical comment. Timely support helps families improve their parenting skills through participation in courses such as 'Toddler Tantrums and Beyond', as do the very positive role models provided by staff. Highly effective use is made of CAF processes to keep safe those at most risk. The centre has worked very well to help some parents to cope with mental health issues and others to manage potentially abusive relationships with confidence.

Children and parents enjoy centre activities, as reflected in their positive feedback. Inspectors at an outreach 'Stay and Play' observed parents who were at first a little hesitant about how to promote good quality play but were building confidence during the session and getting stuck into 'making marks' in play dough and shaving foam. Children show good behaviour and records show they make satisfactory progress from their starting points. However, at 53%, the proportion of Reception-age children living in the centre's area who reach a good level of development is below the county and national average of 64%. The trend showed a spike last year but has been typically at the 2012 level since 2009. Last year, the gap between the lowest achieving 20 per cent of children and the rest widened to 31%.

Meetings have taken place between early years settings, the centre and schools to explore the improvements required and the way forward. This group has yet to meet in 2013. The centre has devised a comprehensive plan which includes focusing 'Stay and Play' activities more precisely on helping young learners to develop their personal skills alongside communication and language development, and sharpening assessment practice.

Volunteering has been a strong feature for some years and the programme of training helps parents enhance their workplace skills. Current volunteers support play sessions, help parents complete CVs and job applications and serve on the advisory board. The parents' forum is currently going through a phase of development led by a volunteer. Parents told inspectors that the centre has a good 'listening ear' and seeks their views, for example about programme changes, as a matter of routine.

Case studies show families improving their financial stability, for example through the centre's good partnership with Green Square and the grants secured that improve housing and living conditions. One family's comments reflect the impact of centre support: 'We had debts coming out of our ears and were at risk of losing our home; today thanks to the centre's help, the family is much more stable and happy.' Others are signposted to a range of services to assist with debt management, seeking

affordable credit and managing family budgets, but the centre does not check closely enough what impact these services have.

The centre's work with young parents, especially teenage mothers living in nearby supported social housing, is a strength and has resulted in some resuming their studies and improving their educational achievement. Some families benefit from courses such as 'Messy Foody Fun' and 'Toddler Talk', which are targeted specifically at parents with qualifications below level 2 in English and mathematics. However, the number sustaining participation in courses is low. Additionally, not enough families from workless homes are accessing services to enhance their employability.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	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	3

How good is the provision?

2

Centre services are well located in various accessible venues across the area, which means that families from different target groups have better access to what is on offer. At 72%, the large majority of families, including those from the most disadvantaged community, are registered with the centre. This includes just under half of five-year-olds living in the reach area. The proportion of families in regular contact with services is increasing as a result of the effective marketing drive which included chasing up 'inactive' families. Good attention is paid to meeting local needs, with changes to the programme ensuring a balanced mix of bespoke and universal services. Responses to users' suggestions have included increasing the number of activities provided for parents and new babies. The centre recognises that still more work remains to ensure that services fully meet the needs and to increase the engagement of families from workless homes.

'Stay and Play' sessions provide a range of appropriate learning and development opportunities for children and parents. Planning includes clear objectives and usefully draws on the revised Early Years Foundation Stage guidance. Resources are well chosen and enhance the chosen themes such as 'Mark Making'. The centre has plans

in hand to sharpen the focus of activities and to more accurately assess the progress of targeted children. The centre is currently without an allocated early years advisory teacher but specialist support from the local authority has been earmarked to help implement the centre's raising achievement plan. The centre's links with childminders are strengthening and now involve monthly 'learning surgeries'.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good and ensures that families, some of whom are particularly vulnerable, lead healthier and safer lives. Good partnerships with health and social care result in integrated packages of support, for example for the high number of families involved in CAF processes. Outreach interventions are well targeted and involve home visits by centre staff for one-to-one support of families, including several who are experiencing mental health difficulties. Parents are usefully assisted to access workshops provided by the psychology service that help them manage stress, depression and anxiety. The centre's close links with Springboard opportunities centre for children with special educational needs or disabilities ensures that families in touch with both receive 'joined up' provision in order to meet all of their needs.

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	2
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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are good. The new team leader has an accurate view of the centre's effectiveness and has set out a clear plan for improvement that includes the right priorities and realistic but challenging targets. Staff are committed to taking the centre forward, and feel well led and valued in their roles. Strong partnerships with other agencies working in the reach area add value to the quality of support for local families who are engaging in increasing numbers due to the centre's effective marketing. The centre runs well on a daily basis, supervision arrangements are effective, and the sensible allocation and use of resources result in good value for money.

Governance is satisfactory and the centre's performance is monitored closely by senior staff from Barnardos and the local authority. The advisory board comprises parents who attend well and a range of partners whose attendance is sporadic. This means that valuable meeting time is spent on catching up on previous meetings rather than reviewing how well the centre is meeting its targets. Not all members have seen the terms of reference and some new joiners have had limited induction. The views of parents are not a routine feature of agenda items. Additionally, not

everyone is given advance notice of the dates and times of meetings. Members are up for the challenge of reviewing the advisory board's role, as reflected in the comment of a newly elected representative: 'I am keen to share my expertise and want to be able to provide challenge in our decision-making.'

Good attention is paid to inclusion, and parents from different social and cultural backgrounds value the friendly non-judgemental welcome they receive. Volunteers from minority ethnic backgrounds told inspectors that relationships are racially harmonious as families are accepted for who they are and not where they come from. The centre has a clear commitment to promoting equalities, but recognises that its work is currently satisfactory rather than good, as reflected in the widening achievement gap.

Good arrangements for safeguarding include well-trained staff, robust policies, well-executed risk assessments and consistently applied health and safety practices. Families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are well protected by the effective communication between different agencies and closely integrated support. Numerous case files demonstrate that the centre's work with parents who lack behaviour management skills leads to positive outcomes, as does its work with victims of domestic abuse.

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 secure improvement in outcomes	2
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	3
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	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 Calne Community Children's Centre on 27 and 28 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

We chatted to some of you, your children, staff, childminders and a wide range of partners, the advisory board, Barnardos and local authority representatives linked to the centre. We looked at case studies, evaluations of the centre's work and a range of documents, including safeguarding policies and procedures. We very much enjoyed sharing in some of your activities.

The last 12 months have been quite a challenge, as some staff left, others returned from maternity and a new team leader took up post in September. It is heartening to learn that good quality services have been sustained despite the changes and that you enjoy these services very much. It is good to see that more families are visiting the centre and attending outreach activities at different venues in your community, but fewer from workless homes do so currently and so we have asked the centre to look at this.

You and your children are helped to be healthy through your participation in a range of activities. Breastfeeding rates are increasing, and inspectors enjoyed dropping into the 'Baby Buddies' group to chat to some of you about how much benefit you gain from having a close network of support. The centre offers lots of ways to help you keep fit and know what comprises a nutritious diet. It is pleasing to note that obesity levels in Reception-age children are lower than the national average.

You told us that you feel safe using the centre and very well supported in times of personal crisis. One parent's comment sums this up: 'It's such a homely centre, staff get to know you and find out whether you are having a good or bad day, they know everyone very well and give good support.' Close partnership working and well-integrated plans ensure that some families, including those with children subject to a child protection plan and looked after children, are effectively protected.

Safeguarding is given high priority and good arrangements ensure that you and your children are well looked after when you attend group sessions.

'Stay and Play' sessions provide a range of appropriate learning and development opportunities for you and your children. Inspectors saw parents and children

enjoying making marks with play dough and in shaving foam together during their visit to Coleman's Farm Community Centre. Data for the area show that just over half of Reception-age children achieve a good level of development and education professionals working in the reach area have already begun to explore ways to improve the outcomes for children. The centre has plans to focus more on children's progress during activities, particularly for children at risk of falling behind, but these have yet to be implemented and so we have recommended they press on with this.

Many of you make a good contribution to the life and development of the centre as volunteers, advisory board members or through your written evaluations and 'post-it note' suggestions. Some of you improve your financial health because of the centre's well-targeted outreach work, and others benefit from family learning courses such as 'Messy Foody Fun' to which they are signposted. However, the numbers of adults, especially workless adults, participating in courses are relatively low, and the centre does not follow up closely enough how well the adults they signpost to different services get on, and we have asked them to improve this.

Governance is satisfactory and supervision arrangements are effective, as reflected in the good quality of outreach services and positive outcomes for you and your families. The advisory board comprises parents who attend the frequent meetings and a range of partners whose attendance is not as regular. The board is effective in helping shape services but is not giving sufficient attention to checking the centre's progress towards meeting challenging targets, and so we have recommended this as an area for improvement. You told us that the staff are always willing to listen to your ideas and that through the parents' forum you have your say in running the centre. Please continue with this great work.

Once again, thank you for your welcome; we thoroughly enjoyed our time at the centre and wish you the very best for the future.

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