

Inspection report for West South Lakeland Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	404435
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Reporting inspector	Susan Walsh

Centre leader	Mary Salter
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Joey's Nursery at Milnthorpe Family Centre EY341364
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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, outreach workers, health and education professionals, representatives of the local authority and Barnardos. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation and spoke with users of the centre.

Information about the centre

West South Lakeland Children's Centre is situated within the grounds of Milnthorpe Primary School. A nursery also operates from this site. The primary school is inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 and the nursery is inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The children's centre is made up of two previously separate children's centres. These were formerly known as Milnthorpe Children's Centre, a phase one children's centre which was designated in 2006, and the Cartmel Children's Centre which was a phase three centre designated in 2009. Both sites have been retained. The Milnthorpe site is based at Milnthorpe Primary School and the Cartmel Peninsula site is based at Flookburgh Primary School. Each site is served by a different team of midwives and health visitors and there are 16 primary schools in the two areas which operate as two distinct clusters of schools. Until August 2011 the Milnthorpe Children's Centre was run by Milnthorpe Family Centre, a local charitable organisation which was established by the headteacher at Milnthorpe Primary School. Since then the centres have amalgamated and now known as West South Lakeland Children's Centre which is managed by Barnardos on behalf of Cumbria County Council and governance is provided by an advisory board. When the centres amalgamated the hours worked by staff were almost halved because funding to the centre was reduced significantly. There are no full time members of staff at the centre.

The centre meets the core purpose and offers access to health services and family support plus links to other services, such as Jobcentre Plus. Families within the West South Lakeland Children’s Centre footprint also access services at other children’s centres, for example, in Kendal. Additionally the centre also takes activities out into a range of local villages.

The area served by West South Lakeland Children’s Centre is made up of wards and covers an extensive rural area within which there is a significant range in levels of affluence. The centre serves communities in the 70% most deprived wards in the country. Although most areas are relatively advantaged there are small localised pockets of high deprivation, where issues for families are increased by the rural nature of the area and a lack of affordable housing. The individual wards of Milnthorpe and Holker (the location of the Flookburgh site) manifest the highest levels of low income, unemployment and adults without qualifications. Across the area served by the children’s centre approximately 10.9% of children reside in workless households or in families that are dependent on workless benefits. There are low numbers of lone parents and very few families from minority ethnic backgrounds, the majority of which are to be found in the Milnthorpe and Holker wards. The lack of transport within the rural area is the main contributor to the barrier in accessing services directly at the centre.

Children in the footprint served by the children’s centre generally enter the early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are above those expected for their age. However, there are wide variations in attainment on entry to schools which serve different villages.

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

This is a good children’s centre. Partnerships with health professionals are a particular strength and are pivotal in ensuring that the centre’s resources are carefully targeted at those families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. The range of services that are offered are good considering the resources that are available to the centre and these result in good outcomes as families deepen their understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe. Staff take many activities out into local villages to

overcome the barrier of limited rural transport and there is a good balance between activities that are delivered at the Milnthorpe and Flookburgh centres.

Health outcomes, particularly those related to reduction in obesity rates, are good. However, the centre is aware that there is more to be done to make sure that they have accurate information about the proportion of mothers who sustain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. Additionally the amount of support for mothers who wish to continue to breastfeed has declined and there is a lack of peer supporters. The centre is effective in raising levels of attainment for young children, particularly in enhancing their social skills and improving their communication skills. Children greatly enjoy their time at the centre or at sessions in outlying villages. A good range of activities encourage the use of the outdoors both to promote health and children's enjoyment and achievement. The emotional health of children and their families is a fundamental part of the centre's work and good support is given to families in times of crisis. Services are carefully tailored to families' individual needs. For example, there is particularly good support for families who are facing issues with bereavement or domestic violence. Although the centre effectively promotes children's learning, resulting in good levels of development, not as much attention is given to developing the aspirations, skills and employability of adults.

The work of the centre is carefully monitored by managers and the local authority. As a result of good leadership and management, safeguarding and welfare requirements are met and the centre promotes equality and diversity well. Barnardos provides high quality training, especially in relation to safeguarding, and the sharing of staff expertise across the local cluster has strengthened the quality of support that can be given to local families. Self-evaluation is generally accurate with managers having a clear view of the centres strengths and weaknesses. However, within the centre, data are not always gathered together and used effectively to plan the delivery of services and to measure the impact of the centre's work. In recent years there has been a substantial reduction in funding and the hours provided by staff have halved. Throughout this difficult period staff have remained professional and committed. The good improvements that have been secured in relation to the quality of provision, while the financial input has fallen, demonstrate the centre's good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that more mothers sustain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks by developing more timely support and effective interventions.
- Develop more effective support to enable adults to improve their aspirations, qualifications and ultimately their employment prospects.
- Use recent and accurate data, including that relating to key performance indicators, such as breastfeeding rates, to robustly inform the planning and delivery of services and to carefully measure the impact of the centre's work.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Good partnerships with health professionals mean that parents of young children and babies are offered a good level of support. Attendance at the popular 'Baby Club' has made parents more alert to the pitfalls of early weaning and has also helped new mothers to be more aware of how to keep their babies safe. 'Baby Club' has also been particularly effective at supporting the emotional well-being of new mothers and at helping to prevent postnatal depression. Parents are especially appreciative of the information about resuscitation and choking hazards. Although one local hospital is particularly successful at encouraging the initiation of breastfeeding, the rates of initiating breastfeeding across the areas served by the centre are below the national average at 64%. The centre lacks accurate and complete data about the proportion of mothers who continue to breastfeed their babies at six to eight weeks. Although midwives and health visitors actively encourage breastfeeding, centre workers are not trained in breastfeeding techniques and the centre no longer has peer supporters. This results in parents not always receiving timely support. A strong commitment to improving the health of families who live in the reach area has resulted in obesity rates of Reception aged children falling to 8%, which is below the national average. Activities such as 'Let's Get Cooking' have increased parents' abilities to supply their families with healthy meals while keeping the costs down.

Robust policies and rigorous procedures ensure that children are kept safe. Parents describe the first aid course as 'fantastic' and say they have 'increased confidence' when dealing with a crisis. There is a good relationship with children's services which ensures effective and regular communication and contributes well to keeping children safe. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is applied when necessary to ensure that those families with circumstances that make them vulnerable receive timely and effective support. The impact of the centre's work can be seen in the reduction of the number of families with children who are subject to a child protection plan or whose children are identified as being in need.

The proportion of children achieving at age-related levels of development is above both local and national levels. The percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early

Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest has reduced significantly and is much lower than that seen nationally. Activities such as Book Start, plus a strong focus on helping parents to understand how their children learn through play, has contributed to a significant improvement in children's skills over the last year. The emphasis on boys' learning has been successful, resulting in them making especially good gains in their emotional development and in their language and communication skills. Parents describe how activities have helped their children to improve their social skills, coordination and confidence. There is a good range of family orientated activities over the school holidays. These activities successfully promote healthy lifestyles but also encourage parents to support their children's learning while having lots of fun.

Relationships within the centre are good and there is a warm and friendly rapport between staff, users and the local community. Particularly good use is made of local community features and the work of the centre is highly visible in the neighbourhood. Parents have been helped to improve their economic circumstances, for example, guidance on how to access the 'winter warmth fund'. Information about local jobs is available to users and appointments can be made when necessary with the representative of Jobcentre Plus. . The centre is keen to extend links with adult education but these links are at an early stage of development. Currently, the centre lacks clear pathways for adults to follow in order to raise their aspirations and to improve their employability skills.

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	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?

2

The reach covers a wide geographical and rural area. . The centre has risen to the challenge this presents and delivers a good range of services and activities in the centres and local villages. These activities are matched well to local needs. For example, important sessions such as 'Baby Club' and activities that promote learning for toddlers are delivered at both the Milnthorpe and Flookburgh sites. Parents say that 'we like the fact that musical activities

are run in Milnthorpe because we do not have to travel to Kendal'. The centre is particularly effective in ensuring that services are targeted at the families in the most need of support. Outreach is good and where necessary services are taken into families' homes. These home visits have led to the successful engagement of families in target groups and enabled them to access services and engage in activities that they would have otherwise missed.

Provision to help children learn and develop is good and staff regularly model the good use of language and high quality interactions with children. They carefully check children's development and plans for further activities are based on what children are interested in and what they need to learn next. Systems to train volunteers are very thorough and help adults to develop their skills. Productive partnerships with Childminders, through childminder support groups, help them to develop their expertise and to make good use of local community resources. However, overall there is a relatively narrow range of opportunities for adults to improve their academic skills or personal development and to progress to further learning or employment.

Potentially vulnerable families are quickly identified and receive good quality individual support which sometimes involves using workers from other centres who have very specific areas of expertise. Additionally, parents are offered good quality support in times of crisis described by parents as 'fantastic.' The centre ensures that good quality information about many aspects of parenting, including advice about how to keep children healthy and safe, is available to parents who visit the centres. Portable displays are taken into other villages so that more parents can access useful advice relating to health, safety and many aspects of child development.

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	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

The leadership at all levels is focused clearly on providing a good range of services that are matched well to the particular needs of the families in the area. High expectations and enthusiasm for the task in hand are shared by staff and have been sustained during a period of change. Staff are also reflective and determined to improve their practice further. Teamwork amongst staff is good and contributes well to the positive ethos and welcoming environment in the centre. Professional management systems are used effectively to monitor the work of the centre and there are very clear lines of accountability. Contractual arrangements are particularly clear and there is a strong and successful focus on meeting the needs of the identified priority groups. The centre's work is well supervised by Barnardos and the local authority is rigorous in the way it monitors and challenges the centre. The advisory board represents a good range of professional viewpoints and a good number of parents regularly attend meetings. The centre is very good at making sure that the quality of activities are carefully monitored and that parents' views on the quality and impact of services are noted and acted upon. The centre is less effective at gathering and analysing data and using information to measure the impact of services and inform future planning of services.

Safeguarding is given a high priority and robust vetting and recruitment procedures are followed for all staff. Staff training is extremely thorough. For example, the annual safeguarding days ensure that staff are highly aware of safeguarding issues and current practice. There is a particularly good focus on making sure that staff understand the impact of emotional abuse and domestic violence on young children. The centre promotes equality, tackles discrimination and celebrates diversity well. It is especially good at making sure disabled children and those with special educational needs and their families are included in all its activities. Parents are actively encouraged to bring their children along to sessions such as 'Jump Start' where they can learn from other children with a very wide range of abilities. They are also helped to access specific support groups at other local children's centres. Outreach work ensures that key services are taken to families where particular requirements are identified and that activities are taken into the areas where they are most needed. This ensures that good outcomes are secured even though resources are limited, and that the centre provides good value for money.

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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures 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	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

Joey's Nursery at Milnthorpe Family Centre was inspected at a similar time to the children's centre and provision was judged to be good. The findings have contributed to the centre report and findings.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the West South Lakeland Sure Start Children's Centre on 5–6 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all the people who spoke to us when we visited the centre and told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very helpful.

The children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping families in Milnthorpe, Flookburgh and the surrounding villages to improve their health and keep their children safe. The centre has undergone many changes recently and now operates with a much reduced staff and budget. For that reason it has had to target its activities very carefully in order to reach those families in the most need of support. It works well with partner agencies, particularly health visitors, midwives and local schools to identify families that may benefit the most from its services. It is particularly good at helping families in times of crisis. Its association with Barnardos means that it can access workers who have particularly well developed expertise, such as assisting families to overcome domestic violence or families who are coping with bereavement.

The centre is good at helping new mothers to develop their parenting skills. The 'Baby Club' is very popular and you told us that you really appreciate the help and advice you receive. Those of you who attended first-aid courses were also full of praise for how this has helped you to be more confident when dealing with emergencies. The centre has had a good impact on health outcomes for local families, for example, obesity rates at the end of the Reception Year are reducing and are now below the national average. This is because the centre has put on activities, such as 'Let's Get Cooking', where parents can learn how to cook nutritious food at an affordable price. However, the centre has not had as much impact on improving breastfeeding rates in the area. It is unsure how many and for how long, mothers sustain breastfeeding after birth. Centre staff have not been trained in supporting breastfeeding mothers and there are no longer any peer supporters. Therefore, we have asked the centre staff to improve this aspect of their work.

The centre is good at helping your children to enjoy learning and to achieve well. Activities help them gain confidence, learn how to make new friends and develop their speaking and listening skills. The centre helps you to understand how young children learn through play. Staff carefully check children's learning and plan new activities based on their interests and needs. The centre is particularly good at organising imaginative use of local facilities. Activities such as a walk in the wood or a pram push and toddle along a local promenade encourage families to keep fit and healthy, encourage an appreciation of the outdoors and help families to understand how natural resources can support their children's learning with the minimum of expense. There are fewer opportunities for adults to improve their qualifications and employability skills and the centre has recently started to work in partnership with adult education. We have asked the centre to develop these opportunities.

The centre is well managed by an experienced leader who is supported by cheerful and enthusiastic staff. Together they work well as a team to make sure that activities are of good quality and effectively improve outcomes for children and their families. They, together with managers from Barnardos and the local authority keep a careful check on the quality of the work that they undertake. We have asked the centre to make better use of data because it does not always make the very best use of this information to plan services and evaluate the impact of their work. Staff listen carefully to the feedback given by those who attend activities and use that information to improve the quality of provision when required. Leaders do their very best with the funds that they have available by taking services and activities out to local villages and offering individual support in the home for families. Consequently, they spend the funds they have to best effect and provide good value for money.

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