

Inspection report for Clayton le Moors and Altham Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents and other centre users, representatives of the local authority and advisory board, centre staff and partner agencies.

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

Information about the centre

Clayton le Moors and Altham Children's Centre was designated a phase two centre in September 2007. It serves a small town situated within the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The single-site centre delivers the full core purpose of services to a predominantly White British community from a small building in the centre of town. The largest minority group in the area are Traveller families. Many of the activities are delivered from outreach venues across the community, including all of the primary schools in the reach area. Services are delivered through a range of partners including health, education and adult learning.

In 2012, the centre relocated from its previous site within Mount Pleasant Primary School, less than a mile away. Prior to the move, governance was provided through the school governing body; since September 2012, governance transferred to Lancashire County Council, and there is an advisory board in place.

The most recent data state that 570 children aged from birth to five years live in the reach area, with 200 of these children living in the most deprived areas. The centre has registered 69% of all children under five, including 94% of children living in the most disadvantaged areas. Data indicate that the centre serves a population of approximately 8979 people living

in the Clayton le Moors and Altham wards. These include five lower super output areas, including one in the top 10–20% band of deprivation and one in the 20–30% band. In 2011, 150 people in the reach area claimed out-of-work benefits, and the 2010 data describe 100 families with children from birth to five living in workless households. Across the reach area, most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills below those typically seen at 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

This children's centre offers effective support to families and young children. Leaders know the profile of residents in its reach area well, and make good use of various assessment methods to ensure that services and resources are focused where they are needed most, and will do most good. This promotes equality of access and opportunity well.

The centre leader has organised a good range of provision which is improving the life chances of children and families by promoting all outcomes well. Provision is flexibly adapted in response to assessment, evaluation, feedback from users and partners and improvement priorities. The centre provides outstanding care, guidance and support, based on mutually respectful relationships and high aspirations for service users. Staff give highly effective, ongoing, personalised support for welfare and educational needs, and also practical and emotional help for families in times of crisis.

Outreach is used very effectively to deliver services across the community, and compensates greatly for the limited space in the centre. 'Staff are very open, they reach out for you', and, 'They just didn't let me go', are typical of comments made by service users, who also feel that the new venue places the centre in a much more accessible location to serve the community.

Despite a very problematic move during the summer of 2012, in which service delivery was significantly hampered by building problems and lack of landlines, engagement levels have increased, particularly of families in the most disadvantaged areas. However, leaders and the local authority have rightly identified that more needs to be done to ensure that the centre reaches the vulnerable families who have not yet engaged with centre services. The capacity to improve the centre's overall effectiveness is good.

The manager has forged strong relationships with key strategic partners such as health, social care and education, which translate into productive partnerships with local colleagues such as health visitors who stated: 'As front line staff we would find it much more challenging to do our job without the centre, because it knows its community.' However, at strategic level, the health service does not give the centre information about live births quickly enough to enable centre staff to offer timely breastfeeding and post-natal support. This is an improvement priority for the centre.

Governance is good, with informed support and guidance from the local authority. However, the centre does not receive detailed budgetary information in a sufficiently timely fashion to enable it to forward plan effectively. Effective line management and professional supervision hold leaders and staff to account well for their contribution to the way the centre promotes positive outcomes for families.

Parents and other centre users are influential in decision making and governance, with high levels of representation on the advisory board. Feedback from regular consultations and through the parents' forum is sought, valued and acted on to reshape services to ensure that they continue to meet local need.

Although the centre has evidence that children who have accessed their services outperform their peers, as measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores, the achievement gap widened in the reach area in 2012. Analysis indicates that this may be cohort-specific for this year, but the centre acknowledges that more could be done to ensure that early years practitioners receive the specialist support they need to ensure that all children make the progress to which they are entitled.

Safeguarding is a key priority for the centre, with all staff trained to support their roles and responsibilities. Centre staff are seen as models of good practice for their use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes, demonstrating this to staff in a local school. Individual children subject to a child protection plan are supported well.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Narrow the achievement gap across the reach area by:

- providing high-quality early years specialist support to improve adult interaction and its impact on children's learning and development.
- Continue to increase the active engagement of families and children from the groups in the community who are most at risk of discrimination or falling behind.
- Health partners to improve the timely sharing of information about live births to enable the centre staff to swiftly offer breastfeeding and other post-natal support.
- The local authority to improve the timeliness of the provision of budget information to enable the centre leadership to forward plan effectively.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

'I find that working with the children's centre really improves outcomes for families', declared two health professionals. Successful partnership working, together with good use of outreach work in homes and community venues, is the key to the centre's effectiveness. The antenatal clinics held in the centre are very successfully increasing health outcomes and parents who attend these clinics often go on to access other services.

Obesity on entry to Reception classes across the area is falling, partly attributed to the centre's persistent focus on improving physical health in the area, for example, in well-publicised projects such as 'Healthy heroes'. This is further developed in the centre-run 'Bhealthy4life' sessions delivered in local primary schools. Adult mental and emotional health in the reach area is improved through programmes which support those experiencing domestic abuse or violence, or who need to have their confidence rebuilt after time out from the workplace.

Consultation indicates adults feel that accessing centre services has significantly increased their understanding of how to keep their families safe and healthy. This is also underpinned by the outstanding advice, guidance and support available.

Early identification through good use of the Common Assessment Framework processes, together with good partnership working using systems including 'Team around the child' procedures and joint visits, ensures rapid intervention and help for those most in need. The centre offers comprehensive support for children leaving child protection plans, and no children in the area have become subject to a second plan.

Although the achievement gap widened for the first time in 2012, the centre's tracking for that period indicates that children supported by the centre outperformed their peers who did not use centre services. Centre analysis suggests that the widening gap for 2012 may be cohort-specific. The local early years settings which were previously linked to the centre

when it was situated in a school either became outstanding or improved from satisfactory to good. The centre and local authority have already identified a need to further improve attainment of those at risk of poor outcomes. The centre has a persistent focus on engaging with the most vulnerable families. However, in recent months the centre has not been able to ensure continuous, specialist early years support across the reach area in order to specifically improve the quality of early years teaching and adult interaction with children.

Adult learning and development benefits from the centre's good links with training providers and the effective tracking of the progress centre users make, together with strong support and encouragement for users to constantly increase their skills and qualifications. In total, 12 adults were supported into paid full or part-time employment last year.

The centre provides many courses to help adults manage their children's behaviour and support their learning and development. Half of the advisory board are centre users who can cite many examples of their input being used to reshape services.

Volunteers report: 'This place has turned my life around really, I am working, my child is at the crèche and I am going to meetings with headteachers – unbelievable!' and, 'I believe that if I didn't do the volunteering course here, I wouldn't have the job I have now'. High proportions of adults volunteer, and are well-trained for their roles. Destination tracking indicates that for a significant number, volunteering is a successful route to paid employment and further education and training, including at graduate level. Volunteers credit the centre with increasing their confidence and self-esteem, encouraging them to attend courses which enhance their contribution to the community and ultimately leads to improved economic prospects.

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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The quality of provision is good, based on a thorough analysis of the needs of groups and individuals, particularly those from target groups. Staff use processes including the Common Assessment Framework skilfully to identify specific needs early, and to quickly galvanise partnership support through strategies such as 'Team around the child'. Services are well matched to need, and as a result, participation and attendance rates are increasing. As one parent said: 'If they were not good, we simply wouldn't come, simple!'

The centre supports the learning and development of adults and children well, with progress and achievement carefully monitored and celebrated. A large majority of adults access courses to promote their personal, practical and educational development, with activities provided across the reach area to maximise attendance.

Outstanding quality of care, guidance and support is increasingly focused upon those most in need of centre services to equalise their life chances. The centre carefully monitors provision and outcomes to ensure parity of access and achievement for those whose families are disadvantaged by circumstances or facing particular challenges which make them vulnerable to falling behind. Good quality displays provide an outstanding source of information, advice and guidance, but users unanimously credit their successes to the strength of relationship fostered by caring staff who consistently welcome and support centre users, and who are '....excellent at putting you at ease.' 'It's my life really, I am here nearly every day, I don't know what I would do without them, I have four children under seven years.'

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.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leader has built a motivated staff team with a 'no excuses' culture of high expectations for the children and families in their area. He has a reputation among his professional colleagues for innovative ideas and an enthusiasm to forge the strong professional relationships needed to make integrated working a reality.

The local authority has only provided governance since the move to the new premises, but in that short time has provided good quality support and challenge, and holds the centre to account well for its work. The authority provides good quality information about the groups in the reach area. It expects, and receives, measurable evidence of the impact of the centre's work. Performance management and supervision are robust and are improving the quality of provision, which is well matched to need.

The improvement plans indicate a relentless focus on ensuring that the centre meets the needs of the target groups, and prioritise the areas for improvement well. There is not a direct read-across to the centre's self-evaluation, which is mainly used to describe successes. Improvement priorities are manageable, and based on high expectations for what families in the area can achieve, and arise from close monitoring of the quality of provision and its impact on outcomes.

Value for money is good because good management of resources is resulting in good outcomes for local families, despite receiving late notification of the budget from the local authority. Volunteers are used effectively to extend the range and quality of services offered, for example, in the small crèche, children can receive one-to-one support if necessary. Outreach work deploys staff to their strengths and during the centre's difficult move to the new building, services were provided mainly through outreach work, which demonstrates good sustainability.

Improvement planning and service provision is firmly focused upon narrowing the achievement gap for children and adults, supported well by early identification of need and swift intervention. Engagement of families from target groups is good, with 81% of families in the top 30% areas of deprivation now accessing services at the centre, including all of the families with young children in the local Traveller community. The work of the centre is enhanced by volunteers from across most of the target groups. The take-up of services by all groups, including parents and children with disabilities, is carefully monitored to check if activities continue to meet the full range of needs in the area.

The relaxed and welcoming atmosphere in the centre belies a strong commitment to safeguarding. Recruitment checks are thorough and staff are well trained to support their specific child protection roles and responsibilities. There is safeguarding information

displayed in every area of the centre, advising users how to refer a child protection concern, but some users revealed a slight lack of clarity about the onward referral of safeguarding concerns and about whistleblowing procedures. However, this is not impacting upon how well children and families are safeguarded.

Professional partners express high levels of confidence in the centre leader's good local knowledge of the needs of the area, which results in delivery of services where they are most needed. Integrated partnership working is conspicuously improving outcomes, and all partners are focused upon meeting the needs of those who need most support. Partners participate in the centre's self-evaluation through the advisory board and this also supports a strong capacity to continue to improve.

The centre provides a variety of routes for local families who use the centre to contribute to governance and decision making. Parents on the advisory board who have a specific interest or skill are given responsibility for particular improvement priorities, which has engendered enthusiastic commitment to the centre's work in general, and strengthened the determination to deliver improvement in these areas. Consultation methods ensure that the views of adults with literacy challenges are also canvassed regularly and used to gauge whether services continue to meet local needs.

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.

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Clayton le Moors and Altham Children's Centre on 13–14 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

We enjoyed meeting so many of you, and are grateful that you gave up your time to speak to us about the difference the centre is making to your lives. This really helped the inspection team to reach their judgements.

There are many strengths. The staff provide outstanding care, guidance and support, both for individuals in crisis and more generally. 'They just didn't let me go', one mum told us, describing how the staff encouraged her to attend a variety of courses which helped her to gain the confidence and skills to gain paid work. Parents experiencing domestic violence or abuse are very sensitively supported. The centre offers a wealth of advice and guidance and displays are used really well to inform parents of the help available.

The leaders know the needs of the area well, and focus the centre's resources where they are needed most. We have asked the leaders to continue to increase the active involvement in centre services of those families who are most at risk of discrimination or falling behind.

The centre has evidence that children who used centre services are better prepared for school than those who do not. However, across the reach area, the gap between the children achieving least well and the other children widened last year. We have asked the centre to do more to help to narrow this gap by providing high quality specialist early years support to improve the way adults work with children, in order to improve children's readiness for school.

Adults are well supported in their learning, and the centre has helped at least 12 adults in the area into paid work in the last year.

We think the centre is doing a good job of helping families develop healthy lifestyles, and the centre is contributing well to the increase in the numbers of children starting school at a healthy weight. We think that if the centre had information about the births in the area more quickly than they currently do, they could contact new parents early enough to offer breastfeeding and other support, which would greatly help to increase the numbers of parents who persevere with breastfeeding. We have asked the centres' health partners to improve how quickly they share this information.

The centre leaders receive good support and challenge from the local authority, but need to receive information from the local authority about their budget sooner than they currently do, in order to plan their services and manage their resources.

We were impressed to see how many parents are involved in decision making in the centre, through the advisory board. We consider that the way individual parents with particular interests and skills take responsibility for helping the centre meet specific improvement priorities makes very good use of your talents.

The centre leader is very proactive in forming good relationships with other professional colleagues, and can call on these colleagues to make sure families swiftly get the support they need. As a result of good partnership working, the centre is helping local families to stay safe and protected, live healthier lives, achieve well, make a positive contribution to the local community and gain greater economic independence.

Thank you again for contributing so enthusiastically to the inspection, we found it a privilege to hear of your experiences, 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