

Kendal West Sure Start Children's Centre

Kendal Green, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 5PP

Inspection date 19–20 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The number of families overall who are registered with the centre and who access the centre's services is not high enough; this reduces the centre's impact on outcomes for families.
- The centre does not receive sufficient information from key partners, including live-birth data, and this makes it hard for the centre to identify families who are most in need of support.
- The centre lacks robust systems for registering families and making certain that they access services.
- The targets set for the centre are not precise enough and this makes it difficult for leaders, managers and governors to focus their efforts on specific areas for improvement and to measure the impact of their work. The advisory board is not fully involved in planning for improvement.
- Parents are not sufficiently involved in developing the centre; they are under-represented on the advisory board and the activity of the parents' forum has waned.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Staff, including the leaders and managers, are dedicated and hard working. They are highly skilled because they have access to a wide variety of training.
- There have been improvements in the number of target families who benefit from the centre's work. For example, the focus on helping teenage parents has been very successful.
- The good support provided for families who find themselves in challenging circumstances helps them to improve the quality of their lives.
- There is outstanding support for parents of disabled children and those with special educational needs, for parents recovering from domestic violence and for children who have been bereaved.
- The centre's work to promote tolerance, and the celebration of diversity, is exceptional.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children’s centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the cluster leader and the manager of the centre. They also spoke to other staff who work in the centre, to representatives from Barnardo’s and the local authority as well as members of the advisory board. Conversations were held with staff from partner agencies, including a range of health professionals and staff from the adult and family learning services. Inspectors also spoke with staff from Jobcentre plus, headteachers and other educational professionals and staff from Inspira. Discussions with parents took place at different times during the inspection.

Inspectors observed the centre’s work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Susan Walsh, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Qaisra Shahraz Ahmed

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Kendal West Sure Start Children's Centre is one of four centres in the South Lakeland cluster. The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery are the responsibility of Barnardo's, as part of a three-year contract awarded by Cumbria County Council in August 2011. This centre is guided in the provision of services by the requirements of Cumbria County Council's core purpose and its service delivery plan. The advisory board oversees the work of the East South Lakeland and Kendal West centres.

There is one children's service manager who is responsible for all four children's centres in the cluster. Many services across East South Lakeland and Kendal West have been merged.

The area served by Kendal West includes urban areas of Kendal where there are pockets of deprivation as well as a large rural area within which there is a significant range of levels of affluence. Most families are of White British heritage but there is an increasing number of families of East European heritage.

Of the families in the area served by the centre, approximately 13.3% of children live in households where no one is working.

Most children in the Kendal West area enter early years provision with skills that are similar to those expected for their age.

The centre has identified as particular target groups:

- disabled children, children with additional needs and children of disabled parents
- bereaved children and families
- children who have experienced domestic abuse
- expectant teenage parents, teenage parents and young parents under 25 years
- lone parents
- children living in workless households and families that have low incomes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families from the reach area that benefit from the centre's services by:
 - working at a strategic level with key partners to secure data-sharing protocols so that important data, including those relating to live births, expectant mothers and a range of health indicators, can be shared in a timely manner
 - developing a well designed system for registering all local families and identifying their specific needs
 - making certain that there are clear signposts to direct families to the centre
 - exploring innovative ways to reach more families, particularly those living in rural areas.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management, and the governance of the centre by:
 - working with strategic partners to set precise and measurable targets that will assist the centre to improve its overall effectiveness and to measure the impact of its work, and incorporate these into development planning at a local and strategic level
 - involving the advisory board more in development planning and equipping its members to challenge the centre's performance more effectively
 - enhancing parental involvement in shaping the strategic direction taken by the centre, including involving parents more in the work of the advisory board and re-invigorating the parents' forum.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- A lack of vital information from key partners, combined with an unstructured approach to registering and engaging families, has resulted in only a minority of local families accessing the support that is available at the centre. Nevertheless, effective partnership working at a local level has been used to identify families in target groups, many of whom use the services of the centre.
- The centre does not routinely receive information from key partners about those mothers who are expecting children, babies who have been born or the specific nature of families' needs. Additionally, the centre does not have robust procedures for making sure families with new babies and young children are registered and then become involved in the centre's activities. Consequently, only a minority of families benefit from the centre's work.
- The centre knows how many families from target groups attend the centre but a lack of important information from key partners makes it difficult for the centre to know how many families from target groups live in the area and are not accessing the centre's services.
- Good relationships between local health workers and other professionals who work with families and children facilitate the exchange of information, and help the centre to identify local families who would benefit most from additional help and support. The centre has worked hard to identify the needs of families who live in urban areas where there are pockets of deprivation. It has not yet fully considered how it might overcome the challenges of serving a large rural area.
- The centre has managed to steadily increase registration and engagement rates, particularly with the key target groups. It has been especially successful at reaching out to teenage parents, to families with disabled children and to those with special educational needs. The use of modern technology to publicise services is helping to raise the profile of the centre, but the centre is hidden away and there are no signs to help families locate the building.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre targets its services mainly at families with very specific needs and so, overall, only a minority of families in the area benefit from this valuable support and guidance. There is a good range of targeted services but very few regular activities are open to all.
- Where individual support is provided for families, it is of a high standard, improving life chances and reducing inequalities. Case files and records are maintained well; children's and parents' voices play a central role in planning the type of support given to a family. This means that, when specific help is given by the centre, it has the maximum impact on the well-being of young children. For example, very effective support is provided for children who have suffered a bereavement.
- The centre is particularly good at providing support for those who have suffered from, or witnessed, domestic violence. Those that attend the domestic violence 'Recovery Toolkit' course describe it as 'amazing' and say that they have been given back their 'zest for life'.
- An increasing number of families are taking advantage of the high-quality support for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Activities such as 'Sparkles' and 'Play and Chat' involve a wide range of professionals and have a successful focus on developing children's communication and social skills.
- Parents report that they find courses such as those relating to parenting and first aid very valuable, and that these have a direct impact on the quality of their families' lives. Unemployed adults have good access to advice, guidance, education, training and volunteering opportunities to help them get back to work.
- The centre has not been set specific health targets. Centre managers recognise that obesity rates for children in Reception classes are too high and that rates for sustaining breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks are below average. The centre is diligent in promoting a healthy lifestyle to the families that attend the centre. Activities such as 'Baby Group' provide much valuable advice but are focused on first-time mothers and those expectant parents that health visitors assess as needing extra

support. The needs of teenage parents have been carefully considered. A specific 'Baby Group' has been set up and there has been a huge increase in the number of teenage parents accessing services. In addition, the 'Expect Respect Group' has helped teenage girls understand what is acceptable behaviour and what is not and a babysitting course provides young girls with valuable advice about how to keep themselves and the children in their care safe.

- The activities provided in groups such as 'Little Explorers' are closely matched to children's interests and promote a sense of enjoyment. Through activities such as this and 'Book Start', the centre has a positive impact on school readiness and is focusing its efforts on improving boys' early literacy skills, though there is more to do to reach a greater number of children.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Although leaders and managers in the centre work hard to provide services, the lack of protocols for sharing information makes it difficult for the centre to identify families with young children, including those in target groups. This lack of data also makes it hard for the centre to determine the impact of its work, and this is compounded because key partners do not set sufficiently precise and measurable targets against which the success of the centre can be judged.
- The centre uses its resources carefully and makes the best of what it has. It has sufficient resources to meet the needs of identified families but finds it more difficult to meet the needs of a wider range of families who live in the reach area, including those who live in more rural locations.
- The centre has a realistic view of the quality and impact of its work. Members of the advisory board know what is happening in the centre and are aware of the quality of practice and services. Both Barnardo's and the local authority make regular checks on the centre but key partners do not always set specific numerical targets. For example, there is an absence of health targets for reducing childhood obesity or increasing breastfeeding rates, and no precise targets for improving levels of engagement with families in the reach area.
- The lack of targets makes it difficult for governance to measure the centre's impact and to know how effective the centre is at reducing inequalities. Additionally, the advisory board is not actively involved in development planning or in the setting of targets and this reduces its ability to challenge the centre's leaders.
- The centre takes careful note of parents' evaluations of sessions and uses these to refine future activities. The advisory board contains a range of professional partners but parents tend not to attend regularly; additionally, the parents' forum has faded away. Therefore, parents have a limited influence in shaping long-term developments in the centre.
- Users of the centre describe the staff as 'wonderful people' and say staff 'go the extra mile' to help the families who have been identified as needing additional support. Day-to-day management is of high quality and ensures that the centre runs smoothly. There is a very strong commitment to celebrating diversity and tackling discrimination, as reflected in the wonderful displays around the centre, the choices of books and toys and the signs in English and Polish.
- Responsibilities relating to safeguarding are taken very seriously and staff are carefully vetted and well trained. Policies and procedures are thorough and the Common Assessment Framework process is used appropriately to identify which professional can best support a family. The centre is not always routinely informed about the children living in the area that are subject to a child protection plan or who are identified as being in need. Where the centre does provide support to these children, and those who are looked after, it has a significant impact on their well-being.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's Centre

Unique reference number	21646
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	427465
Managed by	Barnardo's, on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	939
Centre leader	Anne Armstrong
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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