

Sandy Lane Children's Centre

Sandy Lane, Orford, Warrington, WA2 9HY

Inspection date 26–27 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
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:

- Health inequalities for families in the area are not improving and in some cases have declined in recent years, the exception being breastfeeding. Breastfeeding has been the subject of a targeted project which has brought about improvement. However, when this project ended, funding to continue the intensive work was not been secured by the healthcare trust.
- Children do not make rapid enough progress from their starting points, which means that they enter school Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and abilities below those expected for their age. In addition, too few reach a good level of development at the end of Reception Year in school.
- Information available to the centre is not yet being used well enough to identify whether families are attending the groups and activities which will have the greatest benefit to their health, or help to get their children ready to start school.
- Targets set for and by the centre lack detail and measureable steps to help leaders and managers demonstrate the progress the centre is making and the impact services are having. Additionally, not all review meeting records include information about next steps for the centre.
- Not enough is being done to work with partners to encourage adults to start and successfully complete learning and development activities, including volunteering, and to improve their job prospects.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Activities and groups for children and adults are of good quality and are beneficial to the development of those who take part in them.
- The centre has a committed and well-informed advisory board that operates within clear governance and leadership structures. Information given to the advisory board is used to challenge leaders but this is not effective enough to drive improvement for all families in the area.
- Most families in the area who have a young child are registered with the centre and the large majority of them, including families who may be reluctant or whose circumstances may have made them vulnerable, engage with at least one service offered by the centre and its partners.
- Relationships with partners are very positive and information-sharing procedures are strong.
- Families who are most in need of help to make improvements to their lives receive good support from a team of well-qualified and experienced family and children's centre support workers.

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, parents, staff and representatives from the local authority, the advisory board and partner organisations.

The inspectors visited activities and groups for children and adults in the centre and Sandy Lane Nursery School.

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

Inspection team

Joanne Smith, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kathryn Gethin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jacki Hughes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Sandy Lane Children's Centre is located on a campus site with Sandy Lane Nursery School and The Lakes Centre Nursery. The nursery school and the childcare are subject to separate inspections and their reports can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre opened in 2007 as a sure start local programme. The centre delivers the government's full core purpose for children's centres. Throughout 2013 the local authority has been restructuring children's and young people's services. This resulted in changes to line management and staff. The centre is now part of a birth to 19 years multi-agency local authority team.

Sandy Lane is one of two centres, which form the Warrington Central cluster. The other centre, Sunshine Children's Centre, is subject to a separate inspection and its report can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk. The Warrington Central cluster was formed in 2013 and shares a family support worker team. The centre works with health and adult learning partners to deliver services to families in the central Warrington area. The centre is managed by the local authority and has its own advisory board and parents' forum.

The centre serves an area that is in one of the most deprived areas in the country. Worklessness in the area is higher than the average for the Warrington area in general. Many families are dependent on workless benefits.

There are 975 children aged under five years living in the Sandy Lane area. The large majority of families with young children in the area served by the centre are White British. Children enter Early Years provision with skills and knowledge well below those expected for their age.

As a partner in the Warrington central cluster the centre offers services designed to help new mothers, growing children and adults. These include health appointments, adult and family learning opportunities and family support work. The centre seeks to focus its activities on four groups of families who need support. These groups are teenage and young parents, families from minority ethnic groups, families of vulnerable two-year-olds and families living in the most deprived areas of the centre's reach area.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - adopting a more systematic approach to the analysis of non-user data to find out why some families are not attending groups
 - setting more precise targets with measureable stepping stones to aid monitoring and measuring the impact of the centre's work towards long-term targets set to improve health and school-readiness inequalities
 - accurately recording all reviews of the centre's work so that it is clear what has worked well and what the centre's next steps are.
- Improve the promotion of adult learning in conjunction with partners so that:
 - more parents are involved in learning activities that enhance their employability
 - volunteering opportunities are maximised by taking advantage of parents' existing skills and knowledge.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The very large majority of families with young children who live in the area are registered with the centre as a result of a concerted effort by centre leaders and staff working closely with partners to share information about new births and new families moving into the area. Midwives and health visitors are the centre's main partners in registering families with the children's centre. Registration forms have been specifically devised for the different information packs carried by them.
- The centre is used effectively as a venue for delivery of midwifery and child health clinic services to the local community. Antenatal and postnatal appointments and classes encourage most local parents to engage with the centre and centre activities, including those families identified by the centre as being in most need of support.
- Most families with young children who are eligible to receive funded nursery education take up the opportunity for their children. As a result, the very large majority of children who are most in need of support to help them to be ready for starting school access high quality child care and nursery provision.
- Families who are in most in need of support have their requirements assessed very well. Common Assessment Framework (CAF) completion takes careful account of families' views. Staff are committed to making sure families fully understand their assessment and the support programme they are being offered before they are asked to agree to it.
- Most families in the area are well-informed about the range of activities and services offered by the centre. This is because the centre has established good relationships with local partners, such as the library service, the housing support team and schools. Staff also actively visit local shopping areas and have information points at school events to promote services and re-engage families who have stopped attending the centre.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Childhood obesity levels, young children's attendance at hospital emergency departments and the number of women smoking at the time they give birth are stubbornly high in the area and have been for a number of years. In addition, the number of young children reaching a good level of development in their early years at school remains well below national and local rates.
- Positive impact has recently been made on the number of women who continue to breastfeed six to eight weeks after they have given birth and the communication and language skills of some children through the provision of intensive and specifically targeted programmes with health partners. Funding, however, is not secure to fund the breastfeeding project for an extended period.
- Through an effective partnership with the 'Brighter Futures Team', the small number of parents in the volunteer programme have a good induction and are well-trained. The skills and interests of volunteers are matched well to the needs of the centre and one parent who worked in the centre as an administrative volunteer has now found paid employment elsewhere. However, the centre does not do enough to encourage individuals who have much to offer, for example, speakers of community languages to take up volunteering opportunities.
- Some parents access good quality training such as English, mathematics, family learning and English for speakers of other languages. However, the centre does not work well enough with its partners to offer a broad range of training, including more accredited courses, to improve opportunities for employability. The centre has good partnerships with local authority information services and local further education providers to signpost and support learners into education. However, the system to track adults' progress and measure the centre's effectiveness in this area is underdeveloped.
- A wide range of information is readily available to parents. Specialist help, such as that provided by the Citizens' Advice Bureau, is offered on site and supports a good number of parents. Case studies also demonstrate that those experiencing severe difficulties, such as domestic abuse and postnatal

depression are supported well and show a positive impact on families' lives.

- Children who attend Sandy Lane Nursery School are well-prepared for their start there. They go to 'Ready, Steady, Nursery' sessions which are run by the nursery school teacher and a children's centre support worker. Children who go into other school Early Years Foundation Stage provision are just beginning to have support through the 'Foundation Fun' sessions which are directed at children who have been identified as in need of extra help.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The centre has made very good progress in recent years in relation to its target to register the overwhelming majority of families living in the area and to increase the number of families who access services offered at the centre. The activity programme and resources have also been carefully shaped to begin to address the main issues affecting the outcomes for families in the area.
- Attendance information is held but it is not yet used well enough to make sure that the right families are accessing the activities they need, nor are systems secure enough to make sure that delivery of activities is right for the community. Therefore, activities are having too little impact on reducing health and school readiness inequalities for families.
- A new data system gives the centre manager access to a wealth of highly relevant information. This is the case because the local authority involved the most appropriate managers in the authority in the design of the program. The centre manager has started to use the data system to analyse the participation of some of the target groups, but this work is in its early stages and has yet to have any influence on the families' use of relevant activities and in turn on the outcomes for families.
- The centre is supported by established governance structures that include regular reviews of the centre's and staff work. Annual reviews by the local authority and outcomes of quarterly monitoring visits, however, are not always recorded accurately which, alongside the sometimes unclear targets, give managers little information on which to focus their work.
- Target setting for the centre's improvement is based securely on the priorities for families in the area and on the local authority's agenda for improvement. However, in too many cases targets are unclear and do not provide leaders with the stepping stones by which they can measure their progress towards some highly aspirational targets.
- The centre is supported by a passionate advisory board which understands the priorities for the centre. The board asks probing questions about whether the centre's activities are working and offers solutions. A small number of parents are involved in the parents' forum, but not enough families from the wider area are involved in shaping the service delivery.
- Some good relationships have been established with partners which are mutually beneficial to all parties. Information is shared well and activities are supported across organisations to meet the needs of the wider community. This is particularly strong in relation to working with families who have children subject to child protection and child in need plans and where families have agreed to a CAF review and plan.

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 details

Unique reference number	22631
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	427584
Managed by	The Warrington Borough Council

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	975
Centre leader	Suzie Humphreys
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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