

Distington SureStart Children's Centre

Derwent Vale School, William Street, Great Clifton, Workington, Cumbria, CA14 1WA

Inspection date 7–8 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
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 centre does not always effectively track and check the difference it is making in the short and long term for those adults and children who access groups, activities, education and training opportunities.
- Leadership, management and governance are not robust as the centre's action plan does not contain precise and challenging outcome and performance measures. As a result, the centre's success measures are not detailed enough to show the full impact of the quality and practice of its work, particularly for its target groups.
- The information provided by the local authority and key partners is not always helpful in enabling the centre to monitor its performance easily and fully reflect the impact of all aspects of its work with families.
- There is an inconsistent approach to capturing the attendance and participation of those accessing services at the centre. As a result, only a majority rather than a large majority of users is being supported to improve their outcomes.
- The content of the centre's activity programme is not based fully on users' needs. For example, it does not routinely provide information and advice on how children may be affected who are living in domestic violence and substance misuse households.
- Not all schools work in partnership with the centre to look at effective ways in which they can help all children enter school ready to learn.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Reducing the risk of harm to children is deeply embedded in the centre's work and procedures are rigorously applied and understood by all who work with children and families.
- Despite the centre undergoing a turbulent time with regard to premises and leadership arrangements, staff have remained motivated, enthusiastic and committed to improving the life chances and reducing inequalities of families in the local area.

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 senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with members of the governing body, representatives from the local authority and parents. The inspectors visited activities that took place at the centre and at a venue in the area.

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

Inspection team

Janet Stacey, Lead Inspector

Additional inspector

Maureen Deary

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Distington Children's Centre is a stand-alone centre situated near to Workington in Cumbria. It was established in 2010 under phase 3 of the children centre development programme. Since its designation the centre has been required to move premises and has lost a key strategic member of staff. It is presently based at Derwent Vale Primary School; the centre also uses various sites throughout the area to offer family support, adult learning and health services. The local authority has delegated responsibility for governance of the centre to Action For Children. Most of the families in the area are White British; there is a small but growing community of Eastern European immigrants.

Linked childcare provision is provided by private and voluntary early years organisations in the local area. These provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements and are available on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. Data show that a majority of children in the reach area enters early years provision with a range of experiences and skills below those expected for their age.

There are approximately 692 children under five years of age living in the reach area. The centre serves a generally affluent area with pockets of high deprivation, with two particular areas, Distington and Clifton, being within the 30% most deprived communities in the country. The centre's key target groups are children living in low-income households, those receiving workless benefits, lone parents, children living with domestic abuse and substance misuse, disabled children and those with special educational needs.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve the governance and accountability of the centre by:
 - setting smarter targets so that the impact of all the centre's services is easier for board members and senior leaders to evaluate and challenge the centre's performance
 - further developing the centre's evaluation and tracking systems to capture consistently the impact of the centre's work to improve outcomes, particularly for the target families
 - the local authority and partners improving the data that the centre receives so leaders can build a more accurate picture of the needs of families living in the area.
- Improve access to services so that it is at least good by ensuring that:
 - consistent procedures are in place to monitor the attendance and participation of users, particularly target families accessing services.
- Improve the quality and impact of services by:
 - developing transition into school arrangements and transfer of information between all schools in the area to secure continuity in children's learning and support school-readiness
 - incorporating into the centre's activity programme creative ways of informing users how domestic violence and drug and alcohol misuse affect children.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires Improvement

- The numbers of families registered with the centre are steadily increasing, including those expecting children, but it is not yet the large majority of those most in need who participate. The centre lost its base at a prominent site in the area and its current site is also uncertain. Despite this, however, staff have worked hard to increase and sustain the engagement of families accessing its services, including those hardest to reach, and are constantly developing new access points across the area.
- While the centre knows its target groups, centre staff do not systematically monitor their attendance at activities or track the impact of these services. As a result, the centre is not in as strong a position as it could be to demonstrate that these services are helping to improve the lives and well-being of its target groups.
- Most eligible families with two-year-old children take up their free entitlement to early education. Assessment at age two years is carried out in early years settings or by health visitors. It identifies which of these children are most in need of early intervention. The centre is working well with families and other agencies to enable most of the children identified through this process to access the help they need.
- Overall, the centre has generally good partnerships with health teams in the area. The imminent sharing of live birth data will enable centre staff to have a better awareness of those not yet accessing services.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The rate of children's progress is improving year on year and the gap in attainment between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest continues to narrow. As a result, the centre is contributing well to improving children's life chances and reducing inequalities. However, while this is very promising for those already in education, the centre and schools have yet to look at ways in which they can work together to ensure that children are well-prepared to benefit from all the learning experiences they encounter when they first start school.
- Health outcomes are steadily improving. For example, due to effective partnership work with the National Childbirth Trust and volunteers, the proportion of mothers who breastfeed at six-to-eight weeks after birth has increased over a three-year period from 11% to 39%. Obesity and overweight rates of children in their Reception Year are variable year on year but overall are generally low. The number of women smoking during pregnancy is in line with national averages at 12%. However, the centre does not routinely receive the localised data it needs to ensure that these figures are as good for its target groups.
- The centre has promoted volunteering very effectively. Volunteers are viewed as critical partners in the centre and support is in place to ensure that all volunteers gain something valuable from their experience. Volunteers, as well as being part of a community, are also members of the advisory board and, as parents, make a good contribution to decision-making.
- Through good partnerships with the Workers' Education Association and Lakes College, some parents have gained useful, transferable skills which have improved their life choices and in some cases have led to paid work. However, longer-term progress of adults who do attend education and training courses is not monitored well enough.
- The centre offers a generally good balance of universal and targeted services. Information is displayed and specialist services to support families living with domestic and substance abuse are in place. However, activities to inform adults of the harm this can do to children living in these households is not routinely in the centre's activity programme. As a result, this weakens the centre's drive to tackle these issues.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Requires improvement**

- The effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement because the centre is not yet having a good impact on outcomes for enough local families. Priorities identified in the centre's improvement plan are general and tend to focus on what the centre offers. As a result, the centre is not being provided with accurate information and targets that are ambitious or challenging. This in turn weakens the ability of the advisory board to offer an effective challenge regarding the centre's on-going performance, particularly the take-up of services by local families, including target groups.
- The available information provided to the centre from the local authority and partners is not always timely or accurate. This restricts the centre's ability both to evidence and monitor its performance accurately and means that information is not currently being used as effectively as possible to inform on-going planning.
- Work with those families most in need is seen as a priority and duties relating to safeguarding are taken very seriously. This was evidenced by a parent who stated that 'without the support of this centre my family would not still be together'. The centre works in effective partnership with social care to meet the needs of children subject to child protection plans and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is used appropriately to reduce levels of risk.
- Case recording is generally completed to a good standard and reflects the views and opinions of families as well as the involvement of other professionals. Staff receive regular supervision and are offered an extensive range of training opportunities to enhance and develop their skills.
- The systems to evaluate practice are variable and do not always capture the impact of what each session or activity has to offer. As a result, the centre is not yet in a secure position to show that all of its resources are being used effectively to improve outcomes for all the families that live in the area.
- Parents demonstrate good levels of satisfaction with the centre, especially the supportive and helpful staff. They make their views known through the 'Parents' Carers' Network' where most key groups are represented. They feel listened to and have a role in shaping services.

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	20963A
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	430189
Managed by	Action For Children

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	692
Centre leader	Stephanie Crosthwaite
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01900 325251
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