

Dalton SureStart Children's Centre

Dalton Clinic, Dowdales School, Nelson Street, Dalton-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA15 8AH

Inspection date 2–3 April 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	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.

- A large majority of families that live in the area, including those from target groups, are registered and accessing services at the centre. However, staff and leaders have yet to effectively track the progress that these families are making to improve their outcomes.
- The centre has yet to put robust systems in place to track the attendance and progress of the two-year-old children that are eligible to access nursery education funding.
- Adults have very few opportunities to attend accredited training courses and take up volunteer roles.
- Evaluation of services and activities are inconsistent. Not all evaluations capture the impact of services to demonstrate how families' lives are improving.
- Leaders, including governance, have not put in place clear, precise targets aimed to bring about improved outcomes for families.
- Centre leaders do not astutely analyse and use the data provided to them by the local authority to identify trends and steer the direction of the centre's work effectively.

The children's centre has the following strengths:

- Safeguarding families, particularly those in crisis, benefit from well co-ordinated support from the centre staff. Case studies clearly demonstrate that this is helping to reduce the risk of harm to children.
- The centre, along with its key partners in early years, is helping the parents of children that access services to understand how their children learn and develop. They also provide these parents with a good range of information on how to extend play in the home.
- Young parents benefit from an informal but supportive atmosphere in which they learn good parenting skills and develop confidence. Regular visits to this group from local midwives ensure that communication and health monitoring is effective through pregnancy to birth.

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 a member 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

Jackie Hughes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Dalton SureStart Children's Centre is a stand-alone phase two centre based in the Barrow and South Lakes district of Cumbria. It became operational in 2009. The centre is situated in Dowdales Secondary School grounds and within a health centre building known as Dalton Clinic. The centre shares the site with health professionals delivering a range of services which include a dentist, speech therapists, health visitors, midwives and district nurses.

The centre is managed by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. The centre works closely with Ulverston Children's Centre and staff work across both settings. The centre has its own advisory board comprising of key partners and parents.

The centre does not have any linked childcare provision, but works closely with Jack and Jill Pre-School Playgroup. This provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The report for this setting is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk. A majority of children living in the area currently enter early years provision with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age.

There are approximately 524 children under five years of age living in the area. The centre serves a generally affluent area with small pockets of deprivation. The main social issues affecting these areas are: families living on workless benefits, young parents and families living with mental health problems, including post-natal depression. The centre has identified these families as their key target groups. The majority of families living in the area are of White British heritage.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve access to services by:
 - tracking more closely the attendance and progress of the target families accessing services at the centre
 - tracking the take-up and progress of the two-year-old children that are eligible to access nursery education funding.

- Improve the quality of practice and services by:
 - providing further opportunities for accredited learning and promoting volunteering roles to enable adults to develop the skills they need to aid employment
 - further developing evaluation systems so that they consistently capture the impact of the centre's work to improve outcomes, particularly for target families.

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that targets in the centre's action plan are specific, measurable and focused on improving outcomes
 - centre leaders examining data so that it is used more effectively to analyse local needs, shape provision and identify any emerging trends.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- A large majority of families in the area are registered and accessing services at the centre. However, centre leaders and staff do not routinely track what services their identified target families are attending. As a consequence, the centre is not in a secure position to show how well their support is helping to improve the lives of these families.
- Health partners are based in the centre. As a result, health services are visible and accessible. Antenatal and post-natal sessions are popular and busy. Centre staff and health partners can demonstrate that they are slowly starting to break down some long-held cultural attitudes towards bottle feeding babies and eating unhealthy food.
- Home visits form part of the effective outreach support that assists families who are most in need and find accessing the centre difficult. The outreach team know the community well. They target support and advice appropriately, particularly for those families in crisis, and ensure that parents are involved in the assessment of their own needs.
- Most three- and four-year-olds access funded places. However, not enough two-year olds are taking up their entitlement to free early education. The centre is just starting to identify the children that have yet to take up a place. In addition, the centre is just in the early stages of putting tracking systems in place to monitor the progress of the two-year-old children that are accessing places.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre is a safe environment and there is good attention to keeping users safe through regular advice and signposting to other agencies. However, the extent to which the activities and opportunities parents are signposted to meet their needs is not always sufficiently tracked or evaluated. As a result, the centre is not yet in a secure position to demonstrate how it is improving life chances and reducing inequalities.
- The centre works closely with the local childcare provider and the early years team from the local authority. Together they make sure that the children they know, including those from target families, are making at least good progress. Data held at the centre strongly suggest that, from some low starting points, children are becoming well prepared for school and the gap in all children's achievements is closing more rapidly than seen nationally.
- The centre generally provides a good balance of universal and targeted services. Health outcomes are improving year-on-year. For example, due to support from the centre staff who provide breastfeeding support, more mothers are choosing to breastfeed their children. In addition, the promotion of healthy activities, such as 'Aqua-Natal' and healthy eating sessions, are helping to reduce the numbers of children starting school obese.
- Young parents receive good support through pregnancy and after their child has been born. Popular groups, such as 'Young Parents to Be' and 'Parents with Prospects', are well attended. Evaluations from these sessions are captured well to show improved life chances. 'I feel like a different person as I now have ambition in my life', show how much these users benefit from services. However, the centre does not routinely capture impact evaluation statements in all of its services.
- The 'Connecting Mums' sessions help mothers suffering from anxiety or post-natal depression to stay mentally healthy throughout the challenges of pregnancy and early motherhood. By attending, women are increasing their social support, improving their confidence and self-esteem and developing a range of coping skills.
- A rolling programme of parenting courses is delivered across several centres in the area. However, there is insufficient tracking of those accessing this service and the impact these courses are having.
- Adults have very few opportunities to develop the basic skills and qualifications that they need to enter the workforce. As a consequence, some children in the area continue to live in disadvantaged households. The centre supports a volunteer programme at the centre but the numbers of adults taking up these opportunities are low.

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

- The local authority and Action for Children is supportive of the centre staff and leaders and have recently introduced a new system for self-evaluating practice of service. However, they are not yet setting the centre clear challenges or priorities to improve practice. As a result, they have yet to ensure that all of the centre's resources are being used effectively to meet the needs of targeted families living in the area and to reduce inequalities.
- The advisory board has been dormant for several months, but is now back in full operation. The board has good representation from professional partners and parents. The board is committed to providing challenge and driving improvement. However, as the board has not operated for a period of time, it has lost some understanding on current issues and priorities.
- Leaders are motivated and work with children's and families' best interests at heart. However, they do not use data or the information that they receive from the local authority well enough to show the full effect that services have on improving the lives of families, or to drive forward continuous improvement.
- Safeguarding children is well managed. Information sharing and referral processes between partners and the centre ensure that the right support is provided swiftly to families. Those whose problems have been assessed using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process, or who are subject to a child protection plan, are well supported. Outreach staff keep detailed records of the support they offer and the meetings that take place with other partners.
- Centre leaders follow local authority procedures for staff recruitment, vetting and safeguarding, and staff attend a good range of training to build on existing skills and develop new skills. All staff are well qualified and have regular supervision meetings, and aspects of their work that may require improvement is addressed.
- Parents demonstrate good levels of satisfaction with the centre, especially the welcoming, helpful staff. Parents are confident to make their views known. For example, they have raised issues, such as closure of sessions at short notice, with the centre manager and at advisory board meetings.

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	20911
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	430188
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	524
Centre leader	Neil Gillson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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