

North Eden Sure Start Children's Centre

The Regent, Old London Road, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 8ET

Inspection dates	11–12 June 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
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 numbers of families who are accessing the good quality services that are offered by the centre are not yet high enough; this diminishes the centre's impact on outcomes for families, including those in target groups.
- The centre does not receive sufficient information from key partners, and this makes it hard for the centre to identify families who are in the most need of support, to set robust targets and to measure the impact of its work. Information about families receiving support from social care is not routinely shared.
- The formal systems to refer children and families into the centre's services are not always sufficiently robust.
- The governance provided by the advisory board is not always providing rigorous challenge and this restricts the way it drives forward improvement. There is currently limited representation from parents on the board.

This centre has the following strengths

- The centre provides a warm and welcoming environment where families feel safe and secure.
- Staff, including the leaders and managers, are enthusiastic and committed. Together, they have improved access and the quality of services. Staff are continuously improving the quality of their work because of high quality performance management and professional supervision that is carefully linked to a wide variety of training.
- There have been improvements to the number of families who benefit from the centre's work because of the centre's strong commitment to taking services into rural areas.
- The activities provided for young children are well planned and focus very successfully on promoting the learning and development of those who attend.
- There is especially good support for parents of children with additional needs.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families, including those in target groups who are accessing the centre's services and therefore the impact of provision by:
 - making more direct contact with those families with children under five who are not taking advantage of the services offered by the centre, including those families who may reside in relatively advantaged areas
 - developing more coherent systems for working with partners to identify families in target groups and to refer children and families into the centre's services
 - making certain that the centre receives information about the children who are being supported by social services.
- Improve the impact of leadership, governance and management of the centre by:
 - accelerating improvements in data-sharing protocols so that important information including that related to health indicators, access to adult education, and detailed information about outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage can be shared
 - working with strategic partners to use these data to set robust targets, including for improvements to health indicators and the number of adults who are improving their achievement and to better measure the impact of the centre's work
 - equipping the advisory board with the skills needed to analyse data and thus helping members to challenge more effectively
 - enhancing parental involvement in shaping the strategic direction taken by the centre, including involving them more in the work of the advisory board.

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 three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the leader of the centre. They also spoke to other staff who work in the centre, and representatives from the local authority as well as the chair of the advisory board. Conversations took place with staff from partner agencies, including a range of health professionals, the child and family team and the adult education service. There were also discussions with parents at different times during the inspection.

The inspectors visited the Alston satellite site as well as venues in outlying villages.

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

Inspection team

Susan Walsh, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Nora Waugh	Additional inspector
Philip Ellwand	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

North Eden Children's Centre is a stand-alone centre with satellite provision at Alston. However, it shares many of its senior staff and services with South Eden and Carlisle Rural Children's Centres. The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery are the responsibility of Barnardos. The advisory board oversees the work of the North and South Eden Children's Centres.

There is one children's service manager who is responsible for all the linked children's centres. She became responsible for the centre in March 2013. The group offers early childhood services, including family support and health services, as well as aspects of adult education.

The area served by North Eden Children's Centre includes a very large rural area. Most families live in relatively advantaged circumstances. Of the families in the areas served by the centre, approximately 8.4% live in households where no one is working. Most families are of White British heritage.

Some children in the Penrith area enter early years provision with skills that are below those typical but, in other parts of the reach area, the majority of children's skills are similar to those typical for their age.

The centre has identified as particular target groups children with additional needs, children living in families that have low incomes, children living in families where there is domestic violence as well as children on a child protection plan, children in need and children who are looked after.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre is not reaching sufficient numbers of local families, including those that are expecting children. However, the number of families accessing services is increasing. This is because the centre is taking activities into outlying villages in order to ensure that services are more readily available to families living in more isolated rural locations.
- The centre uses social media well to advertise its services and as a means of communication. It has retrospective information about live births and uses this effectively to plan where services are delivered. However, it does not have precise information about where families are located and so cannot make a concerted effort to directly contact those families who are not registered or who are not accessing services.
- The centre reaches most families who live in the areas where there is the most economic disadvantage, but there are significant inconsistencies between the numbers of families in more advantaged areas served by the centre who are accessing services.
- Although the local authority is working to improve information-sharing protocols, there are still limitations to the sharing of information. This makes it hard for the centre to identify its target groups and to quickly focus its efforts on those who would benefit the most from children's centre services.
- Formal methods to match families to the services they need are complex. It is not always clear how families with low-level needs which are not being met by other agencies are referred to the children's centre and there is the potential for some families to miss out on the support they need.
- Nevertheless, good relationships and close working partnerships ensure that the centre is usually made aware of families that would gain from the support of the centre.

The quality of practice and services**Requires improvement**

- Not enough families benefit from the valuable support and guidance provided by the centre. The increase in the number of universal services available, such as the 'Time to Play' sessions that run alongside the child health clinic, are helping to improve the number of families who are involved in the centre's activities.
- Many parents describe significant help at times of crisis. One parent described how the centre was a safe haven at times of family tension and still remains a 'home from home'. Case files and records are maintained well.
- The centre has provided good support for those who have suffered from domestic violence. Those who attend the 'Domestic Violence Recovery Toolkit' course describe it as providing good pointers to avoiding poor quality relationships. It enables them to break patterns of behaviour so that these are not passed on to children.
- Families value the high quality support for children with additional needs. Activities and groups are important in providing parents with mutual support. The short breaks provided often benefit the whole family.
- The centre has not been set specific health targets and this, combined with limitations in health data, restricts the centre's impact on health matters. Nevertheless, centre staff actively encourage healthy lifestyles through a range of activities including 'Let's get Cooking' and weaning events.
- The activities that are provided for young children are of good quality. Children's progress is carefully assessed and the next steps in learning are planned to meet children's needs. The centre is aware that some children in the locality are behind in their language development when they start school. Staff have been trained to deliver a programme that helps to develop children's communication skills in order to address this issue. The children's centre is not fully aware of the Early Years Foundation Stage data for different schools and this limits the way it can target its efforts.
- The centre encourages centre users to attend courses and to develop their skills and those that do improve their financial outlook. Although there is a limited range of courses available, learners describe valuable gains in self-esteem and confidence. Centre staff and partners are developing new systems to track learners' progression but are not yet able to demonstrate the impact of changes in take-up over time, especially for those from target groups.

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

- The arrival of the current service manager and the reorganisation of the way services are delivered have led to an improvement in both the quality of services and the number of families that access services, as well as the way resources are used. The environment within the centre has improved so it has become far more child friendly.
- Thorough induction procedures mean that new staff quickly gain an understanding of how policies and procedures are applied and of their role within the centre. Performance management is linked well to training and is valued by staff as the means by which they can continuously improve their practice. Likewise, staff praise their professional supervision, with one member of staff saying it's 'the most supported' she has ever felt.
- The local authority continues to improve the way it monitors the performance of the centre and sets targets for improvement. However, there are still areas of the centre's work where more challenge is required, for example, providing targets for adults accessing education.
- There is insufficient up-to-date information about health outcomes that relate precisely to the reach area and about some potentially vulnerable groups of users. This makes it difficult for the centre to plan services or to measure the impact of its work; however, leaders do their best with what is available. Although information-sharing protocols are being developed, they are not fully in place and this hampers the centre's efforts to reduce inequalities.
- The advisory board acts as a forum where professionals work together to improve their services

but it is not providing the children's centre with enough challenge. The members of the board have not been trained to carry out their role. They understand about performance management and staff supervision, but their understanding of data and the comparative performance of the centre is not as well developed. Although members of the advisory board are keen to address inequalities, they are not clear about how effective the centre is in closing the gap. Currently, parents are not well represented on the board, restricting their contribution to shaping the strategic development of services.

- There is no doubt that the centre does respond very positively to parents' views and the voice of the child. There are several striking examples of services being developed in response to parents' requests.
- Policies, practices and procedures regarding safeguarding ensure that families are safe and secure when they attend activities. The common assessment framework (CAF) is used appropriately to promote joint working with partners. However, the centre is not routinely informed about which families have children that are on child protection plans, or are classified as children in need or about looked-after children. This lack is reflected in the centre having relatively low rates of engagement with children in this target group, many of whom are potentially vulnerable.

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	22360
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	442847
Managed by	Barnardos on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1502
Centre leader	Julie Fletcher
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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