

Darwen Children's Centre

Lord Street, Darwen, Lancashire, BB3 0HD

Inspection dates	14–15 July 2015
Previous inspection date	17–18 November 2010

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Good	2
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- Strong partnerships with health and other agencies mean that a large majority of those identified as being in need of services are registered and regularly access the activities and services provided by the centre.
- Excellent working arrangements with social care mean that the most vulnerable children in the area are quickly identified and supported.
- A well established and effective allocation panel identifies the most appropriate services for each family so parents and children are able to access high-quality services swiftly. This means the families' needs can be met as soon as possible.
- Activities designed to help children to be ready for school are having a positive impact. More children in the area are reaching a good level of development when they are five and gaps in achievement between disadvantaged children and others are closing rapidly.
- Parents value the high-quality support they receive, and the positive changes this support has brought about for them and their children are significant.
- The centre's leaders and managers have an excellent understanding of how to deliver high-quality services. As a result they have further developed and extended good-quality practice and services across the centre. Staff feel highly valued because their appraisal, supervision and access to training have enabled them to develop them both professionally and personally.
- The local authority and the advisory board effectively support and challenge the centre and so good overall effectiveness has been sustained since the previous inspection.

It is not outstanding because:

- The tracking of the achievements of children and their parents is not always in place across all services the centre delivers.
- The available data is not always used effectively to demonstrate the overall impact of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership, governance and management by making even better use of the available data to inform the centre's evaluation of its effectiveness.
- Extend the existing good practice of tracking and monitoring individual children's progress in the more-targeted activities to all the centre activities for both children and their parents.

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 managers, staff, representatives of the advisory board, representatives of the local authority, parents and other professionals.

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

Inspection team

Geoffrey Dorrity, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Parm Sansoyer	Additional Inspector
Philip David Ellwand	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Darwen Children's Centre provides a range of services, including activities to support children's and adults' learning and families' health. It delivers some activities at community venues across the area.

The centre has an operational manager who oversees the day-to-day management of the centre, and a geographical manager who oversees wider partnerships and developments. The centre shares a family support team and geographical outreach team with other centres in Blackburn with Darwen. Governance is provided by the local authority and an advisory board, which comprises a range of professionals, staff and parents.

Since the last inspection, a remodelling of Children's Centres in Blackburn with Darwen has been undertaken. The centre now delivers the 2-, 3- and 4-year-old free early education offer from the main site only. This did not form part of this inspection, but a report of its quality can be found on the website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

There are approximately 2,043 children aged under-five living locally. Around 25% of these live in poverty, rising to 50% in the most disadvantaged areas. Most families are White British, with a small but growing population from a range of minority ethnic heritages. Children's skills on entry to early education are generally below those that are typical for their age.

The centre has identified those families and children most in need of its support as: the most vulnerable children (that is those with a child protection plan, children in need and children with special educational needs and disabilities); children from minority ethnic groups; pregnant teenagers and teenage parents; and two-year-old children who are eligible for the free entitlement to early education.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- Effective referral procedures from health visitors and information about live births and those expecting children, from midwives, means that all children in the area are known to the centre. Consequently, the large majority of all children aged under-five are registered.
- The large majority of those most in need of services regularly attend children centre activities designed for them. A large majority of those living in the areas of highest deprivation are also engaged with the centre's services.
- The majority of those attending sessions run by the centre are from groups with the highest level of needs. This is monitored by the centre to ensure that any barriers are reduced and that hard-to-reach families remain engaged with the centre's services. Indeed health visitors and social workers state how often parents prefer to meet in the centre as they see it as a place where they feel comfortable both with the environment and the staff.
- The well-established 'service allocation' panel includes managers and leaders of services. It is used well to review all requests and new registration forms in order to decide on the most appropriate way to address needs. This ensures that those families most in need of services, including teenage parents and children from minority ethnic heritages, are swiftly identified and their needs are met in a timely fashion.
- Effective partnership work with social care means the centre is highly aware of the most vulnerable children in the area including those classified as in need or with child-protection plans because they always attend review meetings. The Early Support Forum is used effectively to make certain that children with special educational needs and disabilities receive the most appropriate service. A good range of partners, including health professionals, educational psychologist, paediatricians and children's centre staff, come together regularly to discuss these children who are attending the

centre.

- Centre staff have ensured that most of those children who are eligible for a free two-year-old early education place are accessing their entitlement. Almost all three- and four-year-olds are accessing their early education entitlement. Children's early access to good-quality provision is having a positive impact on their readiness to learn.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The quality and range of courses and services that are open to all families and those targeted at specific groups are good. This is because of the skilled staff who have a strong focus on narrowing gaps, improving well-being and improving the lives of families. For example, 'Chatter Chums' gives parents ideas and strategies to improve their interaction with their children and narrow any gaps in learning.
- The centre is widely recognised as a real hub of the community that improves children's well-being and families' quality of life. As one parent stated, 'The staff don't realise how good they are – I think each day about how far I've come.'
- Most health targets for the area are being met. Work around supporting breastfeeding is a strength. This has led to a rapidly increased initiation rate in the past year, from significantly below the national average to above. Figures indicate that the number of new mothers who continue to breastfeed at six-to-eight weeks is also at the national average rate.
- High-quality case files indicate that families most in need are identified and their needs are met in a timely fashion. Families' stories exemplify the appropriateness of the services offered and the impact they have had. As one parent reflected, 'My life changed completely – my family was kept together by the support from the centre.'
- The centre responds rapidly to support families in need. The effective input of the family support team in early intervention and prevention has led to a decrease in initial referrals to social care and a decrease in the number of re-referrals.
- The majority of early years' settings in the area are good or better and there are clear action plans to improve those that are not. Information from the local authority shows that children who have attended activities at the centre are more ready to start school than their peers. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in the reach area overall, is now in line with national figures. The proportion of disadvantaged children from areas of highest deprivation achieving a good level of development is slightly above national.
- There is good practice in tracking and monitoring individual children's progress in the more-targeted activities but progress is not consistently checked in activities open to all children and adults.
- Centre staff and partner organisations work hard with users to develop their emotional and social well-being, and boost their skills and confidence as parents. They offer an increasing number of evidence-based parenting programmes with good individual support and home visits.
- Centre staff encourage supported families to improve their skills and qualifications. They ensure many families access independent information, advice and guidance on routes to further learning and employment. Comments from parents show many successes, particularly in improving attainment in English and mathematics.
- Managers and staff support volunteers well, with good-quality training and mentoring. Volunteers are consequently well prepared for further employment. The centre also benefits from the enthusiasm and dedication of these volunteers, for example in promoting more involvement by fathers. Some staff have come through the volunteer route, having been recipients of services initially, and a small number have now been promoted into more senior roles. The breastfeeding peer support group is largely led by parents who have set up their own peer-to-peer support through the use of social media.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Good**

- The centre is led by a highly committed management team. They manage an energetic, well-trained, skilled staff that have high aspirations for the children and parents in their community. This means that impact of service delivery is good and there is a positive impact on the lives of children and their parents in the area.
- The advisory board, along with the local authority, effectively monitors the performance of the centre and provides support and challenge. Members of the advisory board visit the centre to know how well it is doing and use the performance management data to check that their view is accurate. They talk to parents in the centre and the wider community and challenge the centre to continue to improve.
- Areas for improvement identified by the centre are accurate and the detailed development plan sets challenging targets. However, the available data is not always analysed effectively to demonstrate the longer-term impact of the centre's work on the children and parents it works with.
- There are effective policies, procedures and practices in place, including those for staff recruitment and safeguarding. Staff know the procedures to follow should they be concerned about an issue of child protection. Risk assessments are carried out regularly for activities and lone working visits. This means children, parents and staff are all kept safe.
- The centre is aware of all those children who are subject to child protection plans as well as looked-after children and children in need. They work closely with other agencies to successfully meet the needs of all these children and ensure that early help is effective.
- The restructure has enabled the centre to manage its resources more effectively to strengthen its family support and outreach offer. The strength of the ever-evolving partnership working means that families in the area benefit from new resources and more joined-up delivery. For example, in the developing relationship with a local voluntary group, 'Reach Out', who are working in a small part of the reach area focussing on similar outcomes.
- Staff receive good quality support for their professional and personal development and feel highly valued. An increasing number of staff are drawn from the community served by the centre, and are particularly well-supported by both management and a very caring team. Staff report that children also benefit from the targeted training. For example, training to promote communication and language development in young children has resulted in better outcomes for children.
- Consultation through 'Parent Voices' is one means by which the centre ensures that service provision is meeting the needs of the community. A recent project in the centre used external funding to develop an outside play area designed jointly with children, parents and the wider community.

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	20919
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	465490
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,043
Centre leader	Carol Holding
Date of previous inspection	17 November 2010
Telephone number	01254 778900
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