

Inspection report for Greengate Children's Centre

Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	361071
Inspection dates	16-17 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Elaine Clinton HMI

Centre governance	Advisory Board
Centre leader	David Morrison
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Greengate Sure Start Children's Centre Greengate Street Barrow in Furness Cumbria LA14 1BG
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Linked school if applicable	NA
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Rainbows

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners; health, education and children's social care professionals.

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

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

Greengate Children's Centre opened in 2002 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. It is one of six designated, and two linked children's centres, in the Furness area, of which Greengate is the largest centre, serving the most deprived community. The centre serves an area in the coastal town of Barrow and includes two communities that are ranked within the top 10% of the most deprived areas in the country, and one area ranked the highest in the country. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage. Greengate is a Phase 1 children's centre providing the full core offer of services. It is a purpose-built centre and operates as a 'one-stop-shop' model. The centre also uses nearby Abbots Vale Community Centre to deliver some of its services. A multi-agency team which includes health visitors, midwives, speech and language therapists and mental health workers is co-located on the centre's site. The centre manager works across two children's centre within the central Barrow area. The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery at Greengate Sure Start Children's is the responsibility of Action for Children as part of a three year contract

awarded by Cumbria County Council in April 2008. Governance arrangements transferred to an advisory board in March 2010.

The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is significantly above the national average, as is the proportion of children under four years of age who are living in households where no one is working. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is above average.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

Greengate Children's Centre meets the needs of users exceptionally well and provides good support to children and families. It is particularly well led and managed and provides high quality activities for children and families. Outcomes for users are at least good, and sometimes outstanding. Multi-agency partnerships are strong and particularly responsive to meeting the needs of families. The centre provides an excellent range of services that are effectively raising the knowledge of parents and carers about healthy lifestyles and keeping their children safe.

Support for breast feeding mothers is excellent through the highly effective peer mentoring programme. As a result of this programme, and excellent support from health visitors and midwives, the centre has exceeded their locality target of supporting mothers to initiate and sustain breast feeding. Fathers are exceptionally well supported and motivated through a well established "Dad's Group". Increasing numbers of parents are encouraged to participate in adult learning through a range of courses offered by the centre and in the wider community, with many gaining qualifications that have enabled them to move into work. Support for teenage parents is excellent and delivered through a locally based, dedicated service that provides good early opportunities for teenage parents to engage in an excellent range of activities. The centre is aware that more needs to be done to reduce the incidence of obesity in young children. This is a key priority for Cumbria Children's Trust.

The centre is an inclusive setting and by providing for a wide range of users, promotes equality well. Particularly strong actions are taken to support vulnerable families and children and those who need support in times of acute need or crisis, through close

multi-agency working and the highly effective outreach support team. The way in which the centre assesses the individual needs of children and their parents is outstanding. This makes a significant contribution to ensuring outcomes for children and families are good. Parents and carers particularly value the wide range of provision that the centre offers and speak highly of the rapid response to requests for additional activities. Staff are particularly effective in listening to what parents and carers say, whether formally in the advisory group, through written feedback from participants, or informally. This information is used well to plan future activities. The positive action taken as a result of feedback has promoted trust with users of the services and with multi-agency partners. Collaboration with Jobcentre Plus is developing though currently parents have limited access to information about employment opportunities. Information on benefits and the impact of employment on benefits is also limited because of this developing collaboration. The centre has identified this as a key priority and has successfully liaised with the local citizen's advice bureau to re-establish fortnightly drop-in sessions.

Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures, are well trained and share their concerns well so that the safety of users is good. This strong multi-agency communication is effective in preventing family situations developing into crisis. Senior leaders and managers have mechanisms in place to verify effectiveness, efficiency and quality of recording concerns by completing random checks. However, the centre's implementation of its policy is only satisfactory overall because staff failed to recognise the potential risk posed by the fire exit opening onto the nursery playground; a risk that has now been rectified.

Since his appointment in April 2010, the children's centre manager, together with the nursery manager and teacher, has developed a clear and focused vision to make a real difference to this community, based on their needs and wants. He has successfully embraced the whole team, and partners on this journey to improvement. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is evidenced in very wide range of activities that families, particularly the most vulnerable, can access. Managers are aware that further actions are needed to ensure that all needs are met. For example, through having an excellent knowledge of the community, and having a good understanding of changes in funding and service provision, the centre manager is aware that support for those suffering from domestic violence needs to be developed. Consequently, he is consulting with parents, staff and partners to develop an action plan that provides a clear strategy for the future. The manager and his team are aware that the centre needs to develop a robust system to regularly collect and analyse evidence that will help evaluate the impact of the centre's work.

An advisory board, which covers four children's centres and two linked children's centres in the Furness area, was established in March 2010. Members of the board are fully supportive of the work of the centre and meet regularly to monitor what the centre is providing. However, their ability to fully evaluate the impact of the centre's work is limited. This is because the centre does not yet have systematic and accurate management information that records the full impact of its work, or enables them to set consistently challenging targets for improvement. Actions are in place to remedy

this. However, the centre evaluates the impact of each activity and individual service provided. This information, combined with a range of evaluations from parents affords the board an effective understanding of the progress the centre is making towards achieving their priorities. The extent of the area that the board covers also limits the extent to which parents can effectively contribute to the ongoing developments of the centre they represent.

The centre has successfully raised outcomes for users since opening, has strong and dynamic leadership and an active advisory group. The local authority is increasingly providing a robust quality assurance role. This provides the centre with good capacity to build on these successes in the future and further improve outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the advisory board's ability to evaluate the impact of the centre's multi-agency work by
 - implementing the new management information system to ensure that the full impact of the work is recorded
 - use the outcomes from this evaluation to set consistently challenging targets for improvement
- Review the structure and size of the advisory group to ensure that it involves more parents and continues to be responsive to local needs.
- Ensure that recent actions to secure the outside play area are consistently applied and reinforced

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Evidence through case studies and discussions with partners and parents, all reflect the very positive impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and physical health across the Greengate footprint. Strong partnerships with child and family health services are ensuring that the majority of local families are benefiting from the wide range of activities offered. This includes breastfeeding peer support, baby massage, parent craft, Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS), well-baby clinics and weaning advice. The work undertaken in relation to the promotion of breastfeeding has been particularly innovative, successfully changing local attitudes. As a result, local breastfeeding initiation rates have doubled since 2000, with a further six percent increase seen in the past 12 months. Support and advice offered to teenage parents through the 'Young Parents to Be' group is excellent. Two of the young mothers involved in this group were part of the local "Be a Star" campaign to promote breastfeeding to the younger mother. The majority of young parents who participate in this course go on to join the 'Parents with

Prospects' group and many go on to college or further vocational training.

The promotion of healthy lifestyles is very well supported through initiatives such as Cooking 4life, Walk 4life and the North West initiative HENRY (Health, Education and Nutrition in the Really Young). This combined with well attended activities such as breakfast clubs, Jumping Jacks, aqua-natal and regular smoking cessation groups ensures that families are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. These activities are helping the centre work towards reducing the number of children under the age of five who are obese. However, it is recognised that there is more to do and centre staff are currently working with the local primary school to support a walking bus and to encourage parents to use their car less. The importance of the role of fathers is extremely well promoted, the local "Dad's Group" recently winning the Queen's Award for their work. Fathers are supported to be actively involved in delivering services to support families, with two male workers trained in breastfeeding peer support and baby massage. The very positive impact of this work is reflected in the number of fathers who attend a variety of activities, many of whom commented on how included they now feel and how much more confidence they have in their very important role as a father. One father commented that he "really enjoyed playing with his child now" and "was no longer frightened of what to do when he was on his own with his child"...

Good procedures ensure that children are well safeguarded. Parents say that they feel safe in the centre and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Partnership working with health visitors, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), and the local fire service is helping to successfully raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. Family support workers undertake safety visits to homes and operate a low cost safety equipment purchase scheme. The uptake of this service is high and has contributed to a 13% reduction in the number of accidents in the home over the past 12 months. Research undertaken to identify the most common causes of unintentional accidents locally has also informed the development of a safety awareness pack, which parents receive as part of this home visit. Excellent multi-agency support for families referred to the centre in times of acute crisis is helping to reduce the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan; this figure reducing by just under 50% in the past three years.

The extent to which children and young people enjoy and achieve is good. The recent appointment of a qualified teacher to support the development of early years work and the centre's involvement in the "Narrowing the Gap" project has had a significant impact on the achievement of children particularly in relation to their personal, social and emotional development as well as communication, language and literacy. Professionals spoken to during the inspection spoke of the positive impact close working with the centre has had in breaking down barriers, raising aspirations, and improving outcomes for young children.

Behaviour across the centre is good. Children in Little Rainbows are well-behaved and relate well to one another. A number of parents spoken to during the inspection,

including fathers and young mothers, commented on how their confidence as parents had improved as a result of their participation in a number of activities offered by the centre. A visit to a messy play session provided compelling evidence of young children and their parents bonding well and children developing their play, exploration and communication skills as they created pictures with paint and glitter using their feet and hands, chatting about what they were doing. Groups of mothers shared stories and tips about dealing with increasingly mobile babies and several parents reported that they feel better on days when they have an activity to participate in. Parents all feel that they have a voice within the centre and that services offered meet their specific needs. For example the centre has recently started a twins group and a support group for parents and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as a result of parental requests.

Observation of the early years provision showed that children successfully developing skills for the future. There is some good evidence of how the centre has helped parents into learning, training and employment, and several parents spoken to felt that their economic stability and independence had improved as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided. The Citizens Advice Bureau has recently begun a fortnightly session at the children's centre, offering advice on how to access benefits and tax credits. However, this is not well enough established to assess its impact. Whilst the centre has established a number of links with local training providers, the development of a closer working partnership with adult education has been identified as an area for improvement by the centre.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre meets its core offer well. Centre staff and their partners have a very good understanding of individual needs. Outstanding multi-agency partnerships across providers are increasingly making sure that the individual needs of children and their parents who are referred to the centre are being assessed quickly so that interventions and support can be targeted appropriately. Assessment of individual cases is robust

and the common assessment framework is successfully ensuring teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need. Parents report that the timeliness and quality of individual support is good, often exceptional, and available for as long as needed. Careful strategies are in place to ensure parents can build their confidence, parenting skills, and be supported to independence, at a pace that is appropriate to them.

Learning, development and enjoyment are promoted well. Good partnership working with childcare providers is ensuring that aspirations are raised. All centre staff are being supported by the early years teacher to integrate the Early Years Foundation Stage into all aspects of their work to ensure that children are well prepared when they start school. Parents, including young parents, speak highly of the impact that the opportunities provided by the centre have had on them and their child, and detailed evaluations from parents about the individual interventions demonstrate the difference their experiences have made to their own and their children's development and well-being. The centre has identified that on a few occasions sessions are too busy and activities for children lack focus and purpose. Action is being taken to resolve this through identifying additional times and locations for sessions and through additional staff training.

The range of provision available through the centre is outstanding. Participation rates in activities provided are high because the centre is making sure that activities meet the range of needs and interests of the community. The shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly flexible. These include home visits and targeted support through the very responsive outreach team, portage, and access to CAMHS at the centre. Attendance for CAMHS appointments is exceptionally high at 98% compared to 63% within Barrow. Recent healthy eating and cooking sessions have enabled fathers to reduce the amount they spend weekly on food by two thirds. As an outcome of this course, they have developed a cookery book that is currently being published. Young parents are able to take elements of level 1 programmes at the centre, gradually building up to a full qualification. Many parents have progressed from entry level courses offered at the centre, to a range of courses at local colleges and work based learning providers. Increasing numbers of parents are progressing to higher education and into careers within health and social care. One parent reported that "they couldn't have imagined two years ago that they would be employed and buying their own house".

Care, guidance and support are good. Sensitive individualised and tailored support is provided to all families and children who access the centre. There is evidence of much good multi-agency working which ensures that families can access the right kind of support; be it from the child and adolescent mental health workers, speech and language therapists, or support and advice on breast feeding.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance and accountability arrangements are good. Lines of accountability are understood, reporting arrangements are beginning to be embedded, and the chair and local authority are providing robust challenges to the manager and his team through quarterly performance audits and the newly introduced “annual conversations”. Arrangements between Action for Children and the local authority to manage significant concerns about staff performance are strong.

Performance management of staff is robust and arrangements for appraisal and supervision are thorough; outcomes are used to plan training and support staff development. The centre and Action for Children place a strong focus on developing the skills of all staff, through high quality training, to deliver inclusive provision and to be sensitive to the needs and views of users. Equality impact assessments are always used when developing new provision and a flexible approach to service delivery means that workers can be sensitive to individual needs. For example the provision of one-to-one support in families’ homes, when requested.

As part of the planning cycle, the centre manager works with staff, partners and parents to identify future priorities. The views of parents and users are central to the development of the centre and are used continually to bring about change and improvement. Detailed evaluations of individual activities and interventions are collected through a range of methods, in order to check quality, usefulness and to support improvement. Evaluation of the impact of the work with individual families takes place within team and multi-agency meetings, case studies and through regular supervision of staff. However, this information is not yet collated into manageable data to measure impact at a more strategic level. Although the centre’s action plan links to the local authority strategic targets, it does not include precise centre targets which are developed from robust self-evaluation. It also lacks quantifiable measures against which the centre can evaluate the impact of its actions on the outcomes for users and improvement over time, including in relation to fully promoting equality of opportunity and celebrating diversity. Consequently this makes evaluation of the impact of the plan difficult. Despite this, the manager has an exceptional understanding of the priorities and needs of the centre and the community it serves, and a particularly good knowledge of the impact of services. Resources are used very effectively to provide a vibrant and welcoming environment. The community café is used particularly well by parents and the local community, providing good opportunities for children to interact with older people. Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate

level to ensure timely and effective packages of support to families. This ensures good value for money.

The safeguarding arrangements to share concerns and record information are well developed. These procedures are used by a range of professional agencies to monitor children's welfare and to provide appropriate support where necessary. All checks on the suitability of staff directly employed by the centre prior to their appointment are handled by Action for Children and are in place. The centre maintains a central register which records these checks including those of seconded staff. The centre has completed appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of children and their parents. However, these risk assessments failed to identify the potential risk posed by the fire door providing access to the nursery's play area that was identified during the inspection. The centre has taken immediate action to resolve this problem.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
3The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

There is one private sector childcare setting within the Greengate Children's Centre. This is Little Rainbows nursery, which was last inspected in 2005. This report has not been taken into account as part of the inspection. However, observations of the breakfast club and nursery provision were undertaken as part of the inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Greengate Children's Centre on 16 and 17 June 2010. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and professionals. Following this work we have judged that the centre provides good, and in some areas outstanding support to you and your families.

One of the things that the centre is doing really well is supporting mums to breastfeed their babies, with many of you successfully undertaking training to help other mums in your area to do the same. As a result there are now more than twice as many babies being breastfed than there was 10 years ago. Your children's centre is also brilliant at making sure dads are involved with their children and families, especially during pregnancy. It was great to see so many dads involved in the different activities that we saw during the inspection, and to hear lots of positive stories from them. Support for teenage parents is also a real strength of your centre, and it was reassuring to know about all the excellent support young people have received and to see the success of the "Be a Star" campaign.

Parents who spoke to us all said that your children's centre is a warm and welcoming place, full of staff who they feel they can trust to help and support them. Parents told us that staff listen to them and so make sure that they get the right advice. We found that the centre was excellent at helping people at times in their lives when they most need it; action was taken quickly and different people and organisations worked exceptionally well as a team to support both children and families. In particular, you said that you really appreciated the personal attention that you received from all staff who work from Greengate.

We found that services worked well together as a team to provide help and support to families where a child has special educational needs and/or disabilities. In particular activities around weaning, messy play, parent craft, baby massage and the baby clinics were really well attended. Parents we spoke to said they thoroughly enjoyed the activities that they attend and that they feel really happy on the days when they have an activity to go to. You also told us that the community café was a great place to meet up with friends and was very much at the heart of the community.

People in charge of running the centre are doing a really good job. The children's centre manager has worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. He makes sure that

everyone who works with Greengate children's centre share this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a real difference to your lives. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is seen in the exceptional variety of activities on offer as well as the number of you who attend them. Managers know there is still more to do if they are to fully meet the needs of your community. For example, the manager knows there is still more work to do to ensure you have lots of information and advice in relation to training, employment and benefits, as well as support for those in your community affected by domestic violence.

The centre has recently changed the way in which decisions are made about its future work and the different services it provides. However, the ability of this group to properly understand how well the centre is doing in improving the lives of you and your family could be improved. This is because the centre does not yet have systems in place to monitor the impact that all the activities it provides have on your lives. We have asked the centre to make sure actions are in place to improve this. The Advisory Board covers a large area so we have asked the Local Authority to look at this to ensure that you can continue to effectively contribute to decisions about developments specifically in your centre. We know the centre is good at asking you to tell them how you have found all the activities and services which you go to, through questionnaires, evaluations and the 'Every Parent Matters' group. We hope that this is something you will continue to play a part in, making sure the services offered meet your individual needs and requirements.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.