

# South Eden Sure Start Children's Centre

Appleby Primary School, Station Road, Appleby-in-Westmorland, Cumbria, CA16 6TX

<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 July 2014
<b>Previous inspection date</b>	Not previously inspected

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The quality of practice and services		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a good centre.

- A large majority of families with young children living in the rural area served by the centre are registered and engaged in the activities that it provides. This includes those who are traditionally harder to reach. This is because staff use a good variety of different methods to bring the centre's services to families' attention and then make them feel welcome once there.
- Centre staff take parents' views into account when planning activities, which ensures both that families want to attend and that most do so on a regular basis. Good partnerships with other agencies, together with good use of community buildings across the area, help to reduce barriers to families accessing and engaging in activities.
- Users and professionals are equally positive about the impact of the centre's work on improving families' well-being. A particular strength is the increasing self-confidence demonstrated by children and adults who attend the centre's activities.
- The effectiveness of the centre has improved over the past fifteen months due to the clear focus and persistent actions of its leader and management team. They use well their good knowledge of the area's changing needs to target their work. Policies, procedures and expectations are clear. Staff are well trained and all place a high priority on safeguarding children from harm.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The data provided to the centre leadership and governance by the local authority, health, as well as child and adult education partner professionals are not as useful as they could be in helping leaders to plan and evaluate the centre's activities with precision.
- The advisory board includes too few parents and is still developing its role. This means that it does not play a strong enough part in holding the centre to account and helping to develop services.
- Despite the generally positive outcomes for users, levels of obesity in children of Reception age are too high; the gap between most children's achievement at the end of Reception and the achievement of those entitled to free school meals is too wide; and opportunities are missed to enhance families' economic well-being through access to volunteering.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the leadership's and advisory board's ability to plan the centre's development and evaluate its effectiveness with precision by:
  - improving the accuracy, timeliness and usefulness of data provided to the centre by the local authority, health and education partner professionals
  - increasing the rigour with which the advisory board holds the centre to account and ensuring that parents regularly contribute to the board.
- Improve the quality and impact of services by:
  - together with health partners, working more effectively to reduce levels of obesity in Reception-age children
  - working closely with schools in order to reduce the achievement gap between most children and those known to be eligible for free school meals
  - increasing opportunities for adults to engage in volunteering and, through this, to enhance their ability to improve their families' economic well-being.

## 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 or conducted telephone conversations with the children's centre leader and other staff; a range of representatives from the local authority, health, education and adult learning; the assistant director of Children's Services for Barnardo's and individual parents. They also spoke informally with centre users attending activities.

The inspectors visited and observed activities at the centre hub in Appleby. The lead inspector conducted a joint observation of a 'Let's Get Creative' session with the centre's play, learning and childcare coordinator. No activities organised by the centre were taking place in community buildings during the inspection. The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including data and other evidence demonstrating the impact of the centre's work, development planning, and policies and procedures relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Sarah Drake, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Heather Hartmann	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

South Eden Sure Start Children's Centre is a single centre which is managed by Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority. In March 2013, the management of children's centres in the area was reorganised. One centre leader now oversees three different centres, supported by a management team of four, all of whom work across the different centres. The services are coordinated from Penrith.

There are approximately 605 children aged under five years living in the reach area. The area has a widespread population. There are low levels of families identified as workless, headed by lone parents, or belonging to minority ethnic groups. Most children's skills on entry to early years provision are broadly typical for their age. The centre identifies those most in need of its services as families living in rural isolation. Others that the centre identifies as in most need of its services include those living with domestic violence; disabled children; children in need; two-year-olds eligible for free early education; Black and minority ethnic families.

The centre provides services at the hub in Appleby and at a range of community buildings, mainly in Kirkby Thore, Kirkby Stephen and Tebay. Services include: health care; sessions to help parents support their children's learning and development; adult learning; individual advice and guidance. The centre is held to account by the local authority and an advisory board.

The centre is located on the site of Appleby Primary School. The school did not form part of this inspection. A report of its quality can be found on the Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- At over 70% overall and including most of the centre's identified vulnerable groups, a large proportion of local families and young children participate in the centre's activities. No routine antenatal care takes place within the centre although staff do provide support, when necessary, to those expecting babies.
- Close working with health visitors, and the relatively recent transfer of child health clinics from doctors' surgeries to centres in Appleby and Kirkby Stephen, have improved families' access to both health care and other services. Centre staff provide good-quality play sessions alongside the clinics, which creates a relaxed atmosphere and opportunities for parents to discuss any concerns or needs.
- Staff use social media to good effect, alerting families to available services across the wide geographical patch. Consequently, many of those spoken with said that this was how they first came to use the centre. Staff maintain contact with those who stop attending, alerting them to other services from which they may benefit. They discreetly accompany those who are less confident when first attending activities or who need targeted support to help with their parenting skills. Such good practice supports these families in improving their life chances.
- Working closely with partners, centre leaders seek out and use well any local information about those most likely to need support, and staff work effectively to engage them. As a result, the proportion of fathers engaging with the centre increased by 35% between 2012 and 2013. Most disabled children benefit from centre services because there is a wide variety of targeted activities to choose from, and they are fully included in activities, which are open to all. All local families belonging to minority ethnic groups have engaged with the centre.
- Centre staff and partners work successfully together to raise families' awareness of the availability of free early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children. This means that most two-year-olds who are entitled take up places at settings known to be of good or outstanding quality. Almost all three- and four-year-olds attend schools or private childcare settings.

**The quality of practice and services****Good**

- The centre offers a good range of services that are either targeted at those with specific needs or that are open to all. As much as possible, staff adapt the venue, timing and content of activities according to parents' suggestions to ensure equality for those living across the rural area.
- One activity often leads to another. Attendance at a popular 'Baby Social' has led to new families registering with the library, some engaging in 'Art and Craft' sessions and two users progressing to a functional English course. Those who initially bring their children for play sessions such as 'Let's Get Creative' then participate in first-aid or 'Let's Cook' courses, effectively improving their families' safety and health. Tracking data show that the numbers attending accredited adult courses have more than doubled over the past fifteen months, leading to increased opportunities to secure families' economic well-being.
- Together with other agencies, the centre works hard to improve families' health and well-being. As well as reducing colic, 'Baby Massage' sessions help parents to bond with their babies. Those who have experienced the 'Domestic Violence Recovery Toolkit' are positive about the difference that it has made to their self-esteem and ability to cope. The proportion of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks increased well in 2013. However, the proportion of obese children of Reception age also rose, to 10.8% overall and 12% in some parts of the reach, well above the national average of 9.8%.
- Staff provide a variety of good-quality sessions which one mother praised, because 'They provide dedicated play time where I do not get distracted.' The progress of children attending crèche sessions while parents participate in adult learning and parenting courses is carefully recorded. This shows children's increasing self-confidence and, for example, one child learning to put on her shoes correctly. At the sessions observed, children played well together and delighted in experimenting with new resources, including climbing into and exploring a tray of jelly!
- Early Years Foundation Stage profile figures for the area are above the national average. However, there is a wide gap between the achievement of most children and that of those known to be entitled to free school meals. It is only in the last two weeks that centre staff have gained access to information about individual schools' profiles; up until now, they have had no detail about those with the weaker results and needing most support for young children preparing to go to school.
- The centre has a comprehensive system for training volunteers and, as a result, some have successfully progressed into paid employment. However, currently, there are none attached to the centre and no staff member with responsibility for developing this area. This means that opportunities are lost to help adults improve their employability and their families' economic well-being.
- Staff are good listeners and are alert to potential risks for children. Case files confirm that they liaise well with other professionals to provide families with the right support at the right time, thereby reducing inequalities. Parents typically comment that engagement with the centre leads to 'happier me, happier child'.

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

- One professional described the centre leaders as 'astute, looking beyond the data to identify need'. This is accurate, as exemplified by leaders' recent work which highlighted the number of children eligible for, but not receiving, Portage. It is also key to the centre's success because the data provided by the local authority, health, as well as child and adult education partner professionals do not furnish leaders with sufficient, timely information which is specific to the centre's reach. This inhibits leaders' ability to plan and evaluate with precision the centre's work.
- The local authority and Barnardo's regularly monitor the centre's effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This has led to, for example, the halving of costs per beneficiary over the past year. However, the advisory board acts more as an information-sharing committee than one which provides challenge and support for the centre. In addition, few parents attend regularly and their input to the centre's strategic development is not strong enough to ensure that their voices help to shape services.

- Performance management, supervision and training for staff are well embedded. The centre leader keeps those in governance suitably informed about these and about what is being done to drive improvement and reduce inequalities, with reference to those data that are available.
- Clearly written policies and procedures guide all the centre's practice, including that relating to safeguarding. Staff are making increasingly good use of early assessment of individuals' needs through the Common Assessment Framework process, particularly to support those identified as no longer needing a child protection plan or as children in need.
- The centre provides a warm, welcoming, well-resourced venue for families and children to meet, play, learn, share concerns and receive support. Staff work successfully as a well-knit team to help families overcome the potential problems of rural isolation and to improve their overall well-being.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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 well-being 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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	20100
<b>Local authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	442848
<b>Managed by</b>	Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	605
<b>Centre leader</b>	Julie Fletcher
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01768 899022
<b>Email address</b>	Julie.fletcher@barnados.org.uk

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