

Inspection report for Rossmere and St Teresa's Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Hartlepool
Inspection number	384141
Inspection dates	6-7 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Fred Brown

Centre leader	Mrs Gillian Slimings
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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Introduction

The inspection covers 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 one additional inspector and one Early Years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with managers, staff, volunteers, users and partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Rossmere and St Teresa's Sure Start Children's Centre is a Phase One centre and was first designated as delivering the full core offer of services in October 2004. It offers services in health, midwifery, speech and language therapy, family support, employment and benefit advice, childminder support, play opportunities, volunteering opportunities and a community cafe. The centre is located alongside Rossmere Primary School, St Teresa's Roman Catholic Primary School, and a youth centre, and acts as the hub for the south locality in Hartlepool. The centre targets families mainly from the Owton and Rossmere wards.

Most children enter Early Years education with a range of skills lower than expected for their age. Visitor numbers have increased from 852 in November 2009/10 to 956 in February 2012. Recent data show that, in February 2012, 816 of the 1045 children under five living in the reach area are registered with the centre. Around 550 of the children attending schools are entitled to free school meals, which is 30.2% of all children in the reach area. The proportion of children aged under five living in households where no-one is working, is 10.92%. About one third of families in the Owton ward receive income benefits. The vast majority of families is White British.

The advisory board is made up of representatives from the local community, partner professionals and parents. The Integration Support Manager manages the day-to-day running of the centre and its staff, under the direction of the local authority.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The centre is well-regarded in the local community and by partners and provides good services, resulting in good and improving outcomes for families in most areas. A typical comment was 'the centre has had a massive impact on my family life. You always feel welcome and I now find I'm much better at talking to other people and to my child.' Outcomes are good and year-on-year the gap between those who achieve well and others is narrowing. Effective measures are used to improve children's communication and language skills and their personal and emotional development. There is good early identification of children who need additional support. There are good initiatives to reduce child obesity rates, to improve breastfeeding rates and children's behaviour. The centre's workers focus their efforts and resources on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families.

The strong concentration on trying to engage the most deprived families, particularly in the Owton ward, has led to particularly good levels of participation by teenage parents and lone parents. The centre has successfully increased participation by isolated children and families through well-integrated and collaborative working with partners. Partnerships contribute well to improving outcomes and access to additional services for children and users. Parents are referred to and benefit from good opportunities for further training and advice on benefits and employment. Several have become active volunteers and some use this experience to find jobs. Close working relationships with childcare and Early Years education providers are improving children's learning and development. Learning activities are evaluated well with good feedback from users. The recording of children's progress in learning and play activities is not sufficiently thorough.

Services are delivered in an inclusive environment and there is good promotion of equality and diversity. A very high priority is given to creating a safe environment for children and users. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding and informed by excellent measures to ensure that all participants understand their responsibilities. Good strategic leadership and supportive management provide a clear steer for highly-motivated staff. The centre is managed particularly well and staff feel well-supported. The advisory board meets quarterly to review the self-evaluation, but attendance by parents is sporadic, they contribute little and they are not sufficiently involved in making decisions. Self-evaluation accurately

assesses the quality of provision and makes extensive use of good quality data. Data trends are quoted in detail, but there is insufficient summary analysis of the key messages that can be drawn from these data to support the grades awarded. There is good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance the effectiveness of self-evaluation through a fuller analysis of data trends, from this, identify summary judgements that will fully support the grades in the self-evaluation.
- Improve the recording of children's progress in learning and development activities to enhance further planning for their individual needs.
- Review the composition and operation of the advisory board to increase parents' involvement and influence in decision-making.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Centre workers work well with health visitors, midwives and speech and language therapists to offer a wide range of activities to promote healthy lifestyles and well-being for children and their parents. Families learn the importance of healthy eating and the dangers of childhood obesity through short, practical, motivational courses. An extensive programme for new mothers on the benefits of breastfeeding has led to a steady increase in the numbers starting, but figures for sustaining breastfeeding remain low. Increasing numbers attend ante-natal and baby clinics and feeding groups. Parents attending weaning clinics are much more aware of how to promote dental hygiene and avoid oversized portions. Teenage pregnancy rates in the area have fallen considerably. The use of incentives, including vouchers that can be exchanged for fruit and vegetables, helps reduce the numbers of parents who smoke during pregnancy.

The centre is a very safe place and users consider security arrangements to be excellent. Children consistently behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others and learn how to recognise dangers and manage risks safely through play. Parents develop the confidence and skills through successful parenting programmes to manage their children's behaviour and to keep them very safe. Children are extremely well-protected by the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and intervention takes place before situations become threatening. Increased numbers of children are subject to child protection plans and there is sustained evidence that their outcomes are good. Families learn how to reduce risks to children in their homes and develop an excellent understanding of safety in the home through training and home safety checks. Large numbers of families attending the centre have the confidence to share any concerns with staff. The number of incidents of domestic violence affecting children referred to panels has declined from 15 in 2009 to three by April 2011.

Outcomes for children and parents involved in learning, play and recreational activities are good and they make good progress. They have lots of fun and bond well together and parents discover how children learn through play. In play workshops children become more confident, learn new skills and explore new materials creatively. Children are well-prepared for nursery school. They make good progress and improve their personal, social and emotional skills with the Rossmere area showing the highest level of improvement in the local authority area. Programmes, including home visits, supported by the speech therapist, to help reduce delays in children's development of speech and communication skills have reduced numbers by over 10% between 2010 and 2011. The gap between the lowest 20% and the average in the Early Years Foundation Stage has reduced from 35% in 2009 to 27% in 2011, although girls still perform much better than boys.

Parents and users feel well-supported by the centre's strong culture of mutual respect. Children learn to take their turn and show respect for others. Parents are regularly encouraged to suggest improvements to services, to evaluate learning and development activities and are consulted on new developments. A steering group of local users helped decide what provision was needed at the new Golden Flatts Bungalow centre. Actions from recommendations are reported back to users. Increasing numbers of users become volunteers as a result of their positive engagement in centre activities and some run activities which are no longer funded, such as the 'Little 'Uns' group, as a way of sustaining them.

The centre supports multi-agency approaches to engaging parents and users to take up further training or to seek financial or benefits advice. Many initiatives through partners are targeted at harder-to-reach users who do not yet have the skills needed to seek work. Good advice is available to parents on debt management and to check whether they are receiving their full entitlement to benefits and tax credits. Advice and referrals take place either in the centre or through home visits. The excellent volunteer training programme has enabled more than 50 parents from the local area to become confident enough to progress to further training or employment. Over 10 work as volunteers in the centre each week. About six have moved on to paid jobs at the centre. The centre does not yet keep records of the progression of users when they leave the centre and is unable to assess the benefits of further training to the families.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target 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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre meets the needs of targeted groups well. Along with its partners it is very effective at assessing the individual needs of the children and families who use its services and providing well-coordinated support. Partners share their local knowledge to identify the needs, particularly of the more vulnerable groups, accurately. Parenting needs are assessed thoroughly. The centre has significantly increased its registration of families and over 80% of the 462 attending in February 2012 are from its most deprived areas. It has been particularly successful in engaging teenage parents and lone parents.

The centre is good at promoting learning and encouraging children to progress. Parents are given good opportunities to further develop their parenting skills. 'I really enjoy the group and am a load more confident to have a go at home', is a typical comment from a parent. Sessions are targeted at children or mothers at particular stages of their development. There is a strong focus on the development of children's speech, communication, play and social and behavioural skills. The quality of sessions is generally good. However, the tracking of children's progress in learning and the keeping of detailed case records to personalise support is underdeveloped.

The quality of care and support for all centre users is good. Children and families receive good guidance on choices to be made. Families in crisis are strongly supported by multi-agency teams who identify needs early before identifying an appropriate key worker to develop personalised support plans. Families are supported in attending appointments for help with health, medical or benefits advice. Portage arrangements are offered to all families in need who feel unable to attend the centre. Children who are looked after by others are well-supported so that they can continue to be involved in activities. Disabled children and those with special educational needs receive well-coordinated individual support. Families are signposted well to other services and there is a range of good quality information.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Strong strategic leadership provides a clear steer for highly-motivated staff in the centre. The centre's manager is highly supportive and inspires staff to produce good-quality services for all users. Very close collaborative working between the children's centre, health services, social care, local schools and the voluntary sector supports co-ordinated approaches to tackling issues. The centre prioritises the need to engage families living in the most deprived areas. There is stringent monitoring of progress towards targets using accurate data. These data provide valuable information on trends but the provider does not always identify what the key messages are.

The advisory board is partly successful in monitoring the work of the centre, but it has yet to find appropriate ways to engage parents. Parents are more successfully involved in the parents' forum and this gives them an opportunity to evaluate services with good support from a facilitator. The centre recognises the need to strengthen parents' influence on the development of its activities.

All staff and volunteers benefit from a range of high-quality training and support in their work. Self-evaluation is used mostly well to determine priorities for further development and progress towards tackling these is carefully monitored. Outcomes for almost all users of the centre are good and improving. The centre uses its resources well, fulfils all of its statutory duties and provides good value for money. The two centres are close to primary schools and are in the heart of their communities. They offer high-quality resources and facilities for parents and children.

Equality is promoted at all levels and this is supported by the inclusion of all children and their families. Cookery activities encourage very young children to discover different tastes and menus. The centre offers good support to disabled children and vulnerable two-year-olds. The gap between the lowest 20% of children's Early Years Foundation Stage scores and the Hartlepool average is successfully being narrowed.

Safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults is given the highest priority, procedures are particularly robust and practice is exemplary. Local authority policies on safe recruitment are followed stringently. Rigorous Criminal Records Bureau checks on staff and volunteers are reviewed every three years. The centre works very effectively with partner agencies to protect children, including disabled children, and vulnerable parents. The numbers of hospital admissions following accidental injuries to children have reduced in the last year. All staff, volunteers and partners receive regular training, have a thorough knowledge of safeguarding and child-protection procedures and are confident in using them. There are excellent protocols for referring and sharing information between relevant agencies and the family support worker plays a key role in assuring this. Very good advice and access to expert help and protection is given to those experiencing domestic violence. The centre promotes the safety and welfare of all centre users. Users understand their rights and responsibilities and appreciate the secure space that enables them to discuss any concerns.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.	2

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Rossmere and St Teresa's Sure Start Children's Centre on 6 March 2012. We judged that this is a good centre overall. A significant strength is the commitment from the centre and its arrangements to keep children and families safe. We judged this aspect as outstanding. The centre provides you with a very safe place where you can be sure to receive a warm, friendly welcome. As part of the inspection, we observed a number of activities, held meetings, looked at the centre's documents and talked with a number of children, parents, volunteers, staff, community representatives and partners.

We would like to thank all the people who spoke to us during our visit. Many of you told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very helpful. Everyone we spoke to was full of praise for the centre and its staff. These are some of the typical things that parents said. 'The centre has made me feel much less isolated. I now feel as though I have someone to talk to and people listen.' 'I became a volunteer after I had my child because I wanted to give something back.'

So that more families can benefit from the types of service you are receiving, we have asked the centre to make it easier for parents to influence decisions made about what the centre does and the activities it offers. Also they should keep better records of the progress your children make in activities. Managers collect excellent data on the work of the centre, but they could do more to clarify what these data are telling them about how well they are doing.

The centre has done a lot to help parents stop smoking, to help reduce child obesity and to help improve children's speech before they get to reception year. We hope this work will continue to be successful.

The manager knows your community very well and is very enthusiastic about helping you improve your lives. You told us that all staff and volunteers work hard to involve your children in enjoyable and stimulating activities. You particularly like the play sessions where you can join in. We know that the centre's work in helping you improve the safety of your children at home and in the community is outstanding. Because of their work with partners they have helped you improve your children's behaviour and their speech and language. Health workers, social care workers and voluntary organisations work closely with centre staff to provide good services to meet all of your family needs. The links with health professionals are good and are making it much easier for you to attend ante-natal sessions and baby clinics and to gain useful information about breastfeeding and how to keep your children healthy. You value the advice you get on how to deal with your child's behaviour.

Some of the work in the community is very successful in helping parents who find it difficult to come to the centre or who do not know who to ask for help. Some parents have enjoyed the chance to attend training to learn employability skills that might help them get jobs in the future when opportunities come up. They value the advice they get on benefits and on how to manage their money. Your children have good opportunities to learn and develop through the wide range of activities available. They become more confident and are getting ready for school. They make good progress in developing their skills for the future. The care, guidance and support offered by the centre are very good, especially for families who need extra help.

Thank you again for coming to talk to us. We enjoyed visiting your centre and wish you and your families our best wishes for the future.

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