

Inspection report for Amble and Coquet Children's Centre

Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	366415
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Judith Elderfield

Centre governance	Action for Children and Northumberland County Council
Centre leader	Marjorie Charrada
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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 one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

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

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

Information about the centre

Northumberland County Council Children's Centres are clustered into five localities and Amble and Coquet Centre is one of three centres within the coastal area locality, governed by Action for Children on behalf of Northumberland County Council. In July 2009 the childcare and nursery education within the Coquet Children's Centre ceased. Northumberland County Council informed parents that it was not financially viable. In April 2010, Coquet Children's Centre and Amble Children's Centre amalgamated. Coquet had been a phase one children's centre, developed from an early excellence centre and under the governance of the local authority. Amble was a phase two children's centre, developed within Amble Links First School and governed by Action for Children. The Amble and Coquet Children's Centre is a phase two centre. The Amble and Coquet Children's Centre is located in North Northumberland, which is both rural and coastal. The area has a population of 13,563. The area is home to 648 children under five years of age, 29% of the children are in the bottom 10.84% in the country suffering from income deprivation. Children living in workless households are 20% in line with the Northumberland average. There is a high level of teenage pregnancy.

The centre is based on two different sites. Both sites are based in the centre of the community. Amble is the smaller of the two sites and attached to a school. The

headteacher of the school plays a very supportive role in allowing the centre to use some facilities when not in use by the school, for example, the hall and playing field.

Research shows that the obesity rates for Reception Year children have reduced and are in line with the national average. The number of mothers breastfeeding is slowly improving at 24%. However, it is well below the Northumberland 34.5% and national 50%, averages.

The local population is predominantly White British. However, there is a small minority-ethnic population of various origins. The centre is currently working with 100% of this population which has children aged under five years of age.

The area was once a large coal-mining and fishing community. Both industries are in decline and there is little alternative employment locally. The area suffers from poor transport links and local research shows 21.9% of people in Amble walk or cycle to work. Of people living in the Amble and Coquet area, 68.7% are employed within wholesale and retail, health and social care, manufacturing, public administration, defence or construction. High numbers of the population are without qualifications: in Amble 35% and in Coquet 41.7%.

Inspection judgements

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

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

Amble and Coquet Children's Centre provides a warm, welcoming and attractive environment for all its users; 'I feel very happy coming here.' said one parent, whose views are reflected by many other parents and carers. The centre is effective in providing good overall support to children and families. The leadership team is strong and works successfully overall to ensure that services are matched closely to the community's needs. However, more specific targeting is required to inform a few young parents of advice and guidance in career and training opportunities. Staff at the centre and those working in the locality know their community well and use local intelligence, input from parents and carers and effective partnerships, to provide good services that effectively meet the needs of the wider community and centre users.

There is access to a wealth of information available through the centre's comprehensive database. Combined with the support of the senior business support officer and the local authority, this greatly enhances the depth of the centre's self-analysis to improve services.

New and prospective mothers benefit from a full range of services which effectively promote their health and well-being. Parents and carers are developing a better understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy, by attending sessions such as, 'cook and eat' with toddlers, 'tasty treats', 'healthy lifestyle for families', and Zumba and Boxercise classes for young mums. All these sessions have been running throughout the year, have proved very popular and have had a positive impact on users' health

Breastfeeding and oral health care initiatives have been developed by the children's centre team. Breastfeeding support, in partnership with the health visiting team, has improved the breastfeeding rates and exceeded Northumberland County Council target figures. Free promotional items, such as breast pumps and free bras and fittings, have helped to encourage new mothers to engage. All the staff at the centre have training in breastfeeding management appropriate to their role. This provides a seamless service between the Northumberland Care Trust and the children's centre. The Northumberland Care Trust and the children's centre working in partnership, achieved a Stage 2 UNICEF Baby-Friendly accreditation and are due to be inspected for the final stage (Stage 3) in March 2011.

The centre provides a good programme of dental health care funded by the children's centre and called the 'Childsmiles' programme. Winning Northumberland Best Practice awards. A survey in 2006 found that 62% of children in this area under five years of age had tooth decay. Education to achieve a change in behaviour has been successful and the outcomes are regular dentist appointments, use of fluoride toothpaste and an awareness that the frequency of sugar intake impacts of dental health.

There is a good parents' forum, re-formed in September 2010, which is very proactive and enterprising in the running of the centre, and effectively contributes to the ongoing developments of the centre it represents. This forum raises money for events and activities, which are very popular, such as educational visits and visits to the theatre. Two parents are active members of the coastal advisory board and are very vocal about what they would like to see in their centres. The parents' forum is also very confident that their opinions and ideas will make an effective contribution to the ongoing developments of the centre.

Children and users say they feel safe in the centre. This reflects the high priority given to the promotion of the safety and welfare, and good safeguarding arrangements. All staff are subject to appropriate checks and are confident in their understanding of child protection policies and procedures. Equality is promoted sensitively, with robust systems in place to identify and tackle any forms of

discrimination. The sites are safe and secure with good-quality risk assessment in place.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Highlight services for advice and guidance and training opportunities specifically targeting young parents.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Described by one parent as, 'the second home for myself and my child' the centre is well known and well regarded across the local area. Staff work successfully to remove barriers to enable families to access the activities and services on offer. One parent said about the centre, 'It is a life line, I am a single parent and had post-natal depression... I was really down but they came to visit me and brought me to the centre and I come every week now.' Parents interviewed said that since their child had started at the centre, their behaviour had improved but also their confidence, independence and language skills. Parents also attest to the positive impact of the stay and play sessions on their own learning and enjoyment. Their close, affirming relationships with their babies and children are obvious for all to see. Children, parents and carers enjoy the Butterflies playgroup and activities such as 'messy play'. Parents emphasize the reasons for choosing the Butterflies playgroup, which they say helps the child to socialise and the parents to adjust to their child growing up. Attendance is good at 55.7% this is high for Northumberland which is 34.4%.

Family support workers are actively involved in multi-agency work to protect children who are deemed to be vulnerable.. They signpost families to appropriate agencies or to the centre for targeted parenting support or to sessions that will help them improve their parenting skills. Parents say 'The staff always go the extra mile.' As a result children who attend the centre are kept safe in their homes due to parents' and carers' increased understanding of how to reduce risk. Parents report they have made other positive changes in their homes, including the adoption of more healthy lifestyles as a result of their learning. For example, one parent reported that she had learnt how to make baby food as a result of her participation on the tasty treats course.

The centre has been successful in targeting and supporting dads. A dads' group has been set up in three of the coastal cluster children's centres and the groups put on activities in the area on a Saturday morning. Several dads or carers were seen in the baby massage class which has proved very popular with all parents.

There is evidence which shows that many parents and carers move on into further education and employment or volunteer. Some parents access the information and communication technology suite to develop new skills. Others become volunteers in the centre and many of those move on to paid employment. A few of the young parents interviewed did not know of the advice and guidance on careers and training

that is on offer in the centres

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
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

All centre staff, partners and the local authority share good understanding of the issues and challenges facing the community. A continued focus on the promotion of issues around child safety, combined with good partnerships, ensures a better support framework for families. Parents and carers feel they have a voice within the centre through the parents' forum and that services provided meet their specific needs.

Assessment of the needs of children and their families is systematic and effective. Services and activities are well signposted. Case studies demonstrate the progress children make with their behaviour and their personal, social and emotional development.

The centre is very proactive in taking services out to groups who are hard to reach and who are known to be vulnerable. These services are supported by good partnership working and the centre's persistence in establishing links with hard-to-reach groups, through schools and other settings. Telephone calls are used to inform families of activities taking place in the centres. The good quality of the outreach work quickly identifies and supports individual family needs before it reaches crisis level. Staff have also been involved in research to make centres more user friendly for dads. The centre works closely with the Northumberland Employability and Work Service which provides advice and guidance on behalf of Jobcentre Plus in outreach areas.

Initiatives which provide parents with low cost safety equipment, such as fireguards, safety gates and a safety pack, which contains socket covers and cupboard locks, are in place. Parents attend first aid courses, 'Whoops' safety course and parentcraft sessions in order to further their knowledge.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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	2
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

Leadership and management are consistently good at all levels. The centre manager and senior leadership team provide excellent leadership, with high expectations for the community firmly at the heart of the centre's work. The advisory board and staff share their aspirations and are motivated and proactive in taking services out to hard-to-reach and vulnerable families.

Regular meetings take place to discuss, share resources, develop group practice, mentoring and effectively monitor and track the centre users. The team look at ways to overcome the more complex challenges faced by the group. Self-assessment is good and improving. Senior managers are very reflective about what is provided and keen to improve further. The cycle of evaluation and improvement planning is well established and rigorous. Performance data is used well to inform planning. The process is well managed and results clearly indicate improved outcomes.

The recently restructured parents' forum and a good representation from partner agencies, are effectively involved in decision making and setting challenging targets. Parent and carer consultation is ongoing and the parents' voice is highly valued. Parents and carers feel their opinions are respected and that they can make a difference to the way the centre operates. The parents' forum participates in the key decision making about the governance of the centre. They have a good understanding of the centres strengths and weaknesses and of ways in which they might extend their role. Together with the centre manager, they set ambitious targets based on good self-evaluation and comprehensive data.

Good safeguarding arrangements are supported by clear lines of communication and collaboration between agencies to ensure children are protected. All checks, vetting and recruitment processes, meet current guidelines and staff have up-to-date training in safeguarding, child protection and first aid.

The centre provides a rich and inviting setting, with parents' and carers' artwork well displayed together with galleries of photographic evidence of sessions and outings organised by the centre and the parents' forum. The centre itself is a highly-cohesive

community where positive relationships flourish. The centre is highly inclusive and promotes equality and the celebration of diversity to a good standard. Staff are sensitive to the needs of those who use its services and work successfully to break down barriers to access and to the sustained use of its services. The key target groups receive good support which is tailored to their needs and delivered through strong partnership working. Resources are well utilised in both locations. Staff are well deployed and utilised ensuring good value for money, the centre manager remains acutely aware of the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the centre.

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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The 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	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
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	2

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Amble and Coquet Children's Centre on 20-21 January. We judged the centre as good overall. We met a number of you during our visit. We talked with staff from the centre and from other organisations who work with your centre to provide services and activities. During our visit we were able to observe some sessions and activities.

Those of you we spoke to told us that you enjoy coming to the centre and that you feel happy and safe there. You also told us that your children enjoyed coming too and particularly enjoy activities, such as messy play, crèche sessions, stay and play and Butterflies playgroup, and that you like being able to meet up with other parents and carers and share ideas. The children's centre provides good support and is very much at the heart of your community.

The parents' forums play a very proactive role in the ongoing development of the centre and also are active members of the advisory board. The centre staff are continuously reviewing how to manage the demand for popular activities. From our observations, discussions and case studies, we were able to see how much impact the centre is having on your lives. For example, some of you told us that you were able to improve your own health and that of your children after attending particular sessions at the centre, or by receiving guidance and support from some of the well trained and qualified staff.

Your centre offers a good and varied range of activities, training sessions and craft sessions, such as art and craft sessions and information and communication technology sessions. You can also get good-quality guidance and support to deal with health problems, parenting and safety in your home. However, we feel that the centre can do better by targeting advice and guidance for career pathways to young parents. Some of you also told us that you have received help to make your homes safer for your children by having safety equipment installed. The staff at the centre offer you home visits if required and give you personal and individual attention to help you become more confident parents and carers and to help your children succeed in life.

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us during the visit. We very much enjoyed talking with you and we appreciated your willingness to talk with us about some of your personal experiences. We wish you all the best for the future.

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