

Inspection report for Dubmire and Monument Children's Centre

Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	362580
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Reporting inspector	David Scott

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Centre leader	Ania Caink
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Rainbow Rascals Childcare Footsteps Daycare

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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 one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, local authority officers, representatives from the advisory board, outreach workers, health professionals and front line staff. They met parents and carers, observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Dubmire and Monument Children's Centre is located in the Coalfield area of Sunderland. The catchment area includes five primary schools. It operates on two attractive purpose-built sites and a number of community venues so that there is ready access for targeted families and their children.

The locality in which the centre works serves an area with many social and economic challenges, and includes significant pockets of deprivation and disadvantage. Most families earn below average incomes and one in four children lives in workless households who claim out-of-work benefits. Qualification levels are very low. Attainment on entry of learners to the centre is below that expected for their age. The vast majority of families are of White British heritage.

The centre provides a range of services, such as education and play for children, adult learning, childcare, 'Stay and Play' programmes, child and family support, targeted services for lone and teenage parents, carer support and community-based health services. There are just over 1300 targeted children under five years of age within the catchment area. The centre also provides for children with physical disabilities, or for those whose parents have physical disabilities, but the need and take-up is small.

Dubmire and Monument Children's Centre is directly managed by the local authority. It was designated as a phase one children's centre in March 2006. The advisory

board consists of a wide range of representatives from the local community, including schools, service providers, parents and carers.

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

Dubmire and Monument Children’s Centre meets the needs of its community very well. Care, guidance and support are outstanding in this very welcoming centre, which has created a community approach to supporting every aspect of family well-being. This is because those in charge demonstrate a clear vision and have an accurate understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement. The centre has good capacity to improve further. There are exceptional relationships with key partners and, together, they are taking steps to improve already good outcomes for users and to reach more families. As one parent commented, ‘The support I received from the centre was brilliant – it turned my life around and has helped me to make new friends’. Similar views are held by many parents and carers.

Outcomes for users are good and improving. Exemplary procedures, protocols and learning programmes ensure high quality healthy outcomes for users. For example, many children, parent and carers, particularly dads, are responding very well to the ‘Let’s Cook Together’ project. They experience the process of cooking healthily on a budget. The centre regularly provides fresh fruit for snack times as a means of widening children’s dietary tastes and helping children to understand the importance of eating a balanced diet. Users and their children feel the centre provides a welcoming and extremely safe and secure family environment. Those using the centre thoroughly enjoy and are very appreciative of the varied range of services. They feel the centre is extremely responsive to their needs and cite many examples of how it has had a positive impact on their children’s and their own lives.

Children make good progress in their communication and language skills, as a result of the input from specialist workers during ‘Stay and Play’ and ‘Messy Play’ sessions and the ‘Time for Rhyme’ programme. As one parent reported, ‘It’s been great, it

gets me out and about and my child has gained in confidence from meeting new friends – and her speech and language have developed so quickly’. Users benefit from many other courses which build their confidence and self-esteem. For the majority of users, this has resulted in access to further training and gaining employment.

The centre collects a wide range of data. This relates to events, courses, and visitors to the centre, referrals from health and outreach workers, as well as from the local authority. Monitoring information is used regularly and analysed with increasing accuracy to identify what the centre does well and to plan for improvement. Nonetheless, the full impact of leadership at all levels on sustaining improvement has been restricted because criteria against which to judge the impact of any changes are not always measurable. As a result, not all potential users are reached. Some centre staff are new to their responsibilities. All staff are to undertake additional training to ensure they become more effective in improving the outcomes for users.

The highly effective care, guidance and support is reflected in one user’s comment, ‘I don’t know what I would be doing if these activities were stopped – they’ve helped my granddaughter’s development so much’. The centre has a good understanding of each user’s needs, and takes every opportunity to promote and support their interests. Vulnerable children and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported through effective inclusive practice. The centre has established very strong links with other professionals, such as health visitors and community nursery nurses to target specific support to those users who need it the most. Staff strive to eradicate any differences between groups within the community by ensuring each user is valued. The centre has good procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet all government guidelines and include high quality checks on adults and a carefully planned approach to managing the safety of children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Sharpen the impact of leaders and managers at all levels on sustaining improvement by:
 - ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is analysed robustly by setting quantifiable measures against which to evaluate success
 - increasing participation rates among target populations
 - distributing the leadership of the centre more widely by extending the capacity of leaders at all levels to manage their areas of responsibility even more effectively.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for the children and families who use the centre are good. For example, parents and carers are very enthusiastic about the healthy cooking courses that

encourage them to provide healthy meals for their families. Analysis of data indicates that the numbers of children under five who are obese are falling, and the centre is starting to have an impact on smoking cessation. Parenting courses have brought improved outcomes for children as they have become better behaved, and stress levels have been reduced for parents and carers, especially mothers. 'Baby Massage', 'Baby Days', 'Bosom Buddies', immunisation programmes and weaning advice sessions are well attended and provide excellent guidance and support for parents and carers. Children and families feel safe when accessing services at the centre. Parents confidently discuss and share their issues, as they feel secure in groups such as 'Play and Family Learning'. The 'Dad and Kids' group has successfully cultivated an 'outdoor oasis' where they have grown their own tomatoes and cabbages. The garden is even complete with bird feeders and scarecrows to protect the produce.

Ensuring the emotional well-being of users is a high priority for the centre, particularly those with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are subject to child protection plans. Strong inter-agency working and dedicated centre staff ensure that children supported by the Common Assessment Framework are well cared for. Outreach workers are key when working with such families. They help families to build trusting relationships so they feel able to engage with other professionals to access the required help. This is highly valued by users, for example, in the words of one parent, 'The personal support offered to me at a time of emotional crisis was excellent'.

Regular home visits ensure that users and their children are fully aware of how to stay safe in the home and community. For example, targeted users are given enhanced safety packs, distributed through the toy libraries, in order to provide a safe environment for their families. Courses available are highly valued by parents and carers. They enable them to gain confidence with their parenting skills, in order to support their children's learning and prepare them for the world of work by gaining recognised qualifications in childcare, cooking and numeracy.

'Stay and Play' sessions are popular and well attended. A focus on language and communication has seen positive benefits in improving children's speech and by increasing parents' understanding of how they can encourage their children's language development. Initiatives such as 'Messy Play' have worked well by encouraging parents and carers to take an active role in their child's learning and development. There is growing evidence that, where children and families have benefited from contact with the centre, they have made a better start to school life.

Children's behaviour is good in the children's centre. They have positive relationships with adults and develop confidence to separate from their parents and carers as a result. Users' views are taken into account regularly through the 'Have Your Say' boxes located in the entrance at each centre, and have an influence on provision. For example, following consultation, the timing and location of sessions have been adjusted in order to fit in with users' work and care patterns.

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, and 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 and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is effective at assessing the needs of the children and families who use its services. Assessments cover the whole range of needs, including those who are most vulnerable. Excellent relationships are in place with a range of key partners including social care, health and other Early Years Foundation Stage providers and the safeguarding team. The centre follows clear processes to involve these partnerships in targeting services for individual children and families. The crèche staff and outreach workers use their knowledge and influence to help families engage with other professionals and so ensure the well-being of children and their parents.

The children's centre is increasingly effective in engaging some harder-to-reach families and works very well with partners to gain the information they need to help these families. For example, those who are subject to domestic violence are referred speedily to therapeutic services. The crèche and 'Stay and Play' facilities ensure equality of access to all users and particularly those from more vulnerable groups. Trips to local places of interest provide specifically tailored support for those who need it most. These provide a fantastic opportunity for families to have fun and engage in outdoor pursuits, while building confidence, relationships and parenting skills. There are highly effective transition arrangements as children progress into school.

Despite the centre's website being at an early stage of development, its services are increasingly well advertised in the local community through 'word of mouth', and are tailored to meet the needs of its users. There is high quality advice and guidance for users accessing benefits and those seeking to gain employment. For example, the centre provides a daily update of available jobs in the local area, and staff are always available to download application forms and offer support in completing them. The use of volunteers within the centre is a strong example of the commitment to

developing users' self-confidence and to support them to move into further training, education or employment.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leader's commitment and determination to improve the children's centre are impressive. As one parent commented, echoing the views of many, 'The centre leader is always approachable and accessible'. There is a clear vision for the children's centre, and a strong commitment to serving the local community and improving the life chances of all children. These intentions have been shared effectively with all staff who embrace and deliver them wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, leadership responsibilities at all levels have not been fully distributed. This constrains how well the centre is increasing the participation rates and improving the outcomes of target groups.

Self-evaluation is honest and accurate. The advisory board is fully supportive of the centre's aims and fulfils all its statutory duties well. The board has an intuitive understanding of the needs of the community and ways in which these can be met. Staff and volunteers undertake relevant training to enable them to support families effectively and keep them safe. All policies and procedures are clear and meet requirements. The centre has good procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet all government guidelines and include high quality checks on adults and a carefully planned approach to managing the safety of children. Child protection procedures are thorough and responsibilities are clear. Staff attend regular training on safeguarding.

Staff know the community well and have developed excellent relationships with partners and professionals in social care, health and education. The centre has excellent links with the local community, particularly with its partner primary schools, a special school, health care students from local universities and the multi-agency team at Jobcentre Plus. The centre leader has cultivated a highly positive relationship with the headteachers of the two partner primary schools who have been instrumental in championing the cause of Dubmire and Monument Children's Centre. The centre offers good value for money.

The centre has a strong commitment to inclusion and is successful at removing barriers to ensure that every child has an equal chance to learn. It works very effectively to eradicate any differences between groups within the community so that they are positively recognised and supported in the centre. They know their families well and quickly identify where additional support is needed. Staff are knowledgeable about the centre’s vulnerable groups and take proactive steps to engage them in the centre’s work, for example using volunteers as role models for others. They have well established links with the police to quickly reach families subject to domestic violence. They work effectively to ensure the consistency of health referrals across the catchment area.

The centre deploys a number of ways to evaluate its services, ranging from questionnaires to one-to-one interviews with users and providers. As a result, the centre collects much useful data both from its own sources and the local authority. While the data supplied by local authority is helpful, it does not always indicate the specific performance of the centre in relation to the national picture. There is evidence to show the good impact of the centre’s work on outcomes, but the effective work it does is not always accurately analysed.

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
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	1
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Dubmire and Monument Children's Centre on 14 and 15 December 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

Under the good guidance of the centre leader, staff work very well as a team to provide outstanding care, guidance and support for all its users. Staff are committed and keen to support both children's development and to develop adults' skills and levels of confidence. They have established some excellent partnerships with other professionals and organisations to ensure users have access to a full range of support and guidance. They are providing excellent guidance to parents on how to keep their families healthy and have placed efforts on increasing children's speech development through the 'Stay and Play' sessions and the 'Time for Rhyme' groups. Some parents told us that they found the support of the centre 'a lifeline' in times of crisis.

Dubmire and Monument Children's Centre is a safe place for parents and carers to bring their children. The rooms are welcoming and allow children to play happily while they learn inside or outdoors when attending the crèche. Parents said their children were happy in the crèche while they attended a variety of helpful courses, such as 'Play and Family Learning'.

The centre is a good place for users to meet other parents and people who can help them and their families. The centre regularly seeks the views of users on the quality of its activities and courses through the 'Have Your Say' boxes located in the entrance of each centre. As a result of listening to users' views, the timing and location of activities was adjusted to fit in with users' work and care patterns.

The advisory board meets regularly to ensure that the services the centre is providing meet the needs of users. They provide an effective link between users of the centre and senior leaders, who listen to and take account of their views. Staff look at ways of providing interesting activities and courses that will be of most benefit to users. They receive a lot of information from users and many others about how well they are doing, as well as information about other families in the local community who may benefit from the services at the centre. We have asked leaders at all levels to use this information more precisely by extending their responsibilities to ensure they reach more families and increase participation in activities at the centre in order to improve outcomes still further.

We thoroughly enjoyed the time we spent at your centre. Thank you to everyone who took time out from busy schedules to speak with us. We would like to wish you every success for the future.

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