

Inspection report for South Tyneside Early Excellence Centre

Local authority	South Tyneside
Inspection number	362572
Inspection dates	14-15 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Rajinder Harrison

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Sue Hedley
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	South Tyneside Early Excellence Centre Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	South Tyneside Early Excellence Centre Neighbourhood Nursery

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 two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, members of the advisory group, the Chair of the Governing Body and a range of providers, parents, carers and users. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at sessions in operation at the centre and other sites. They also looked at relevant documentation including the centre's operational plans, self-evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

South Tyneside Early Excellence Centre is a Phase 1 centre designated in 2004 and serving the Hebburn area of South Tyneside. It offers most of its services from the main site but some healthcare provision is located in the nearby health clinic. The area served by the centre is socially mixed and highly populated. A high number of properties are council owned. Much of the area served by the centre covers one of the 10% most deprived areas of the country. An above average proportion of families claim benefits as the incidence of worklessness, at around 30%, is higher than the national average. A high proportion of families are of White British heritage, but a small number represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A high proportion of children from the reach area enter early years provision with skills well below those expected for their age. Within the area the centre serves, there are significant issues surrounding extreme poverty, unemployment, poor health, alcohol and substance misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The local authority has commissioned the governing body of the linked nursery school on the site to provide governance of the centre on its behalf. These arrangements are supported by an advisory board, which includes representatives from a wide range of agencies in the local community. The centre manager is also the headteacher of the nursery school. The centre offers a range of health, social care, education and family support services. Childcare for children aged from birth to five years is provided through the centre by the neighbourhood nursery which was inspected in March 2007. The centre also provides regular crèche sessions.

Education for children aged between three and four years in the Early Years Foundation Stage is provided through the nursery school within the same premises. This provision was inspected in July 2008. Both reports can be found on the Ofsted website at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This is a highly effective children's centre, providing a very welcoming and safe environment for its users. Leadership and management are outstanding. All staff go the extra mile to help every child and adult achieve exceptionally well. Leaders listen carefully to users and adapt provision to meet their needs. Highly effective teamwork ensures the centre reaches ambitious targets which improve the health, safety and well-being of the community. Users are very appreciative of the centre's work and its positive impact on their lives. A typical view expressed by one user is, 'Staff treat you with respect – no one judges you or looks down on you for the way you are. I feel they care about me – it has changed my life forever'.

Leaders model outstanding practice and set high standards for others. Expectations of all staff and users are very high and a strong 'can do' culture inspires confidence. The centre is making an extremely positive difference to the lives of children and families, particularly those most disadvantaged by economic and social circumstance. Leaders are accurate in their self-evaluation. The centre has identified areas for improvement effectively and sets itself high standards for achievement. It is demonstrating an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

The outcomes for users are outstanding because provision is highly effective. Children and adults learn to lead healthy lifestyles through the excellent advice they receive, for example, on breast feeding and weaning, healthy eating and taking regular exercise. Attendance at ante- and post-natal clinics and education classes is high. The friendships forged through such regular contact encourage parents to support each other and become more independent and self-reliant. Parents participate eagerly in activities to strengthen emotional resilience and family well-being. Courses enhance their academic and vocational skills and they gain qualifications in basic literacy, mathematics, computing and childcare. This contributes very well to their future economic security. In the last year over thirty adults secured employment and moved closer to being wholly independent of benefits. The outcomes for children who attend the centre's day care are outstanding. They have excellent opportunities to learn and develop their confidence and independence. The gap between children from very poor backgrounds and the

rest is narrowing successfully. Award ceremonies, displays and newsletters in all the public areas celebrate users' achievements effectively, for example, in art. Users feel this gives them a strong sense of purpose.

As the centre's use increases, many sessions are oversubscribed and crèche places full. Wherever parents and carers request services, the centre strives to respond, for example with more parenting sessions. The centre's popularity is due to the staff's highly effective promotion of its services and benefits, particularly through home visits and referrals from partner providers. Assessments of individuals' needs are conducted very sensitively, ensuring parents and carers and children receive the right help promptly.

Equality of opportunity underpins the centre's work most effectively. Users know they will have the necessary help and guidance, irrespective of their background and ability. More confident users champion the centre's work well. They encourage newcomers to use the services to benefit themselves and their families. Users consider the centre a 'brilliant place to go for help and advice, to learn and to make friends'. The centre has met and exceeded a number of its targets this year, including helping parents and carers back into work.

Parents and carers say they feel exceptionally safe at the centre and say it is their 'first port of call' if they face difficulties. Safeguarding the users' health, safety and well-being is top priority. Procedures are robust and staff work hard to foster harmonious relations within the local community and among centre users. Highly skilled professionals identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at an early stage and intervene appropriately. The centre makes excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework to target resources effectively.

Adult users are active in the leadership and management of the centre. They lead many self-help groups and have representation on the governing body. The multi-agency advisory group and governors lend their expertise and support and continually challenge the centre to secure better outcomes for users. While partnerships with most services are of high quality, the centre does not always receive the data it needs from the health authority to enable it to reduce health inequalities, for example, in relation to smoking, obesity and teenage pregnancies.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the partnership with the health authority so that centre staff have access to the data they need to help them do all that they can to reduce smoking, obesity, teenage pregnancies and other health inequalities.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The centre addresses users' feelings of isolation and low self-esteem very effectively. The parents' forum members are clear as to how the centre has enabled them to take control of their lives and as a result, many feel they can tackle problems more

easily. Typical comments are, 'I couldn't have managed without help from the centre staff when I suffered from depression. I can discuss problems without fear - they saved my life', and, 'it's helped me relate better to my children - they are going to have a better life than me'. The place buzzes with excitement and anticipation as adults and children learn to play together and have fun creating high quality works of art displayed on corridors and in rooms. Many users organise events such as the highly professional pantomime. The centre belongs to the community and this engenders pride, confidence and ambition.

Very good educational courses have helped an increasing number of adults move successfully into employment, college or university, including childcare, school support staff and foundation degree courses. Those new to learning English make rapid gains and progress to other classes. As a result, many users develop relevant skills and qualifications, which equip them for work and a better life.

Users report that staff help them with, for example, advice on health or managing money. Parents say they have a better understanding of parenting skills and early years' education through the many family learning activities, such as the 'Stay and Play' and 'Cosy Time'.

High attendance at activities indicates their popularity and usefulness. Education regarding healthy eating has proved very effective, for example, the centre provides fruit for all users and children cultivate the allotment and cook its fresh produce. 'Tasty Treats' encourages families to try new things and learn about healthy diets. Users say they would like to learn more about cooking healthy low-budget meals. Outdoor pursuits and fitness are promoted well. Health workers are successful in raising awareness of the dangers of smoking. As a consequence, in over three hundred pregnancies last year, only about thirty mums continued to smoke.

Children are very well prepared for school through high quality learning experiences and extensive interactions with staff. These contribute very positively to children's learning and development. Children have fun socialising with others and play and explore independently inside and outdoors. They make very good progress in their personal development, interacting well with others and learning good hygiene and eating habits. Children's speaking and listening skills are improving rapidly because parents are shown how to talk and share books with them. Children who need extra support in this area benefit from early identification from the speech and language therapist. Children who use the centre settle into school more quickly than others and make faster progress.

Users trust the centre staff and staff identify quickly and sensitively any safety concerns and intervene appropriately before a crisis occurs. Services offered in the centre ensure users are safe and resources, such as free home safety packs, aid safety at home. Good- quality parenting courses help parents secure better relationships, behaviour and home safety for their children and help some users manage their stress and distress and thus ease flashpoints if problems arise. Regular sessions on home and road safety remind parents of everyday hazards and consequently, the centre sees fewer children needing emergency aid.

Behaviour is very good. Mutual respect between staff and users ensures open, honest relationships. Children are at the heart of all that the centre does. Parents are encouraged to suggest ideas for future activities and promote the centre's work in the community. Key users, including some dads have successfully organised a number of activities and trips to support the community. Parents represent users' views to the advisory group and governing body effectively.

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	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

Sessions and courses provide high quality purposeful learning. For example, 'Family Art', parenting groups and the crèche facilities provide excellent opportunities for parents and their children to enjoy quality time together. Children play and explore in a safe, nurturing environment; parents receive helpful advice and support from many professionals and have valuable time to share experiences with each other and make friends. High numbers regularly attend the many childcare and parenting courses and engage in activities that help them support their children's learning and development. For example, weaning sessions offer important guidance on how best to introduce babies to healthy food. Many adults start in sessions that they feel are non-threatening, for example, excellent art activities. Once confident they progress to more demanding academic courses that equip them for work as well as help them to support their children's learning.

Outreach services meet the diverse needs of families very effectively. From referrals through various service providers or self-referrals, home visits provide excellent support, particularly for vulnerable families facing urgent crisis. Children with disabilities are supported well and specialist staff work with family workers to ensure positive outcomes for parents and the children. For example, respite support is available to allow parents time for themselves. Additional support from providers, such as the portage service and childcare ensures that individual needs are identified early and met well. Outcomes following all home visits are monitored closely. Support for the few families of minority ethnic origin takes account of any language

needs and staff signpost services, for example, welfare benefits and courses in English as an additional language.

Strong partnerships with other providers ensure support is prompt and effective in safeguarding children and their families, particularly the most vulnerable. Extensive work with housing associations keeps children safe, warm and well looked after, particularly where families face considerable financial hardship. Partnerships with social care are very good and family workers coordinate well with care workers to support families in crisis. When emergencies arise centre staff respond quickly and tailor support to meet individual needs. This personalised support is a strength that users value. While partnership working has many strengths, the centre's links with the local health authority are not as robust.

The centre assesses and reviews users' needs very effectively and signposting to courses is swift and effective. Users frequently request, for example, more support with parenting or vocational courses. This is readily organised and may include attending other centres in the area. Some groups become self-managing, using the centre as a safe base to work from. During play, assessments focus effectively on children's needs and ensure activities are interesting and relevant to their lives. For example, children make fruit salads and pizzas and enjoy being 'mini-chefs'. Parents are shown how they can record their child's success through notes and photographs in children's 'learning journeys'.

The centre takes excellent care of users and their children. Support for users' well-being is high priority and everything possible is done to safeguard their interests. Families report that their lives are better for having had the help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives. While overall care arrangements for children aged birth to two years are very good, no provision is made for the removal of outdoor shoes to safeguard floor areas where babies play.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
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?

1

The centre leader is highly skilled and experienced. She leads a team of exceptionally well-motivated professionals who work together effectively to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of children and adults in the local community. Leaders are fully focussed on raising aspirations and improving users' lives. Leaders have an accurate

view of where improvements need to be made. Staff are extremely positive about the centre's work and morale is high. Staff are supervised well and supported effectively to improve their practice through robust performance management procedures and high quality professional development. Many regularly train other professionals. Users who attend activities are encouraged to express their views regarding provision and this influences changes.

The centre sets itself high targets to reach those who are 'hardest to reach' and the most potentially vulnerable families. Clear policies support the centre's work in safeguarding and protecting children. Governors ensure that all staff implement stringent checks to secure the safety of children and their families and that every precaution is taken where there are concerns, particularly regarding child protection. Development planning is aligned clearly to local and national priorities for children and their families. Information from most providers is readily forthcoming because partnership working is well embedded and centre staff analyse the information they gather effectively to identify development priorities. The very careful assessments regarding the progress of young children as they move through the Early Years Foundation Stage shows that children using the centre benefit immensely in their personal and academic development. Data confirm that more adults are securing gainful employment. Plans accurately reflect the changing profile as the number of users increases, but with limited data from the health authority, the centre does not always know if it is doing enough to reduce health inequalities in the local area.

Equality and diversity are promoted exceptionally well. The centre makes an excellent contribution to promoting community cohesion and tackling unlawful discrimination. Everyone who attends is integrated well. Any family experiencing exceptional hardship, for example, with respect to debt, receives support to cope with legal issues and to budget more effectively. New migrants are welcomed into the area and immediate needs identified quickly to help families settle and register with service providers. Leaders ensure users and community groups make maximum use of the facilities.

Governance is outstanding as the advisory group and the governing body have a very clear understanding of the issues facing the local community and hold centre staff accountable for delivering the services children and their families need. Leaders review the centre's progress regularly with the local authority and set further targets. Leaders continually look for new ways to reach into the local community and include all groups of users effectively. For example, lone parents are effectively encouraged to attend the centre to improve their relationships with their children and families. The centre offers outstanding value for money.

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	1

integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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 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	1

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 South Tyneside Early Excellence Centre on 13-14 December 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall because it provides excellent support to you and your families. Thank you to everyone who took the time to speak with us. We are very grateful to you.

The centre provides an excellent range of services that are helping you to improve your lives. You appreciate the high quality support from all staff and were eager to explain how well the centre has transformed the lives of some families. We were very impressed with how some of you lead activities in the community. Your pantomime certainly reflected very many hidden talents. It was particularly good to

hear that you regard the centre as a safe and welcoming place, and that you make good friends there. It is not surprising that every day more families are using the centre.

The centre works well with a range of partners such as social care, early years education, and various health providers. It provides excellent support for your children, so that they have a very good start in life. 'Stay and Play', 'Cosy Time' Story' and the breast feeding groups are popular and provide excellent opportunities for parents and carers and children to play and learn together. As a result, your families have enjoyed improved relationships and a better understanding of how to stay safe, fit and healthy. You have a very good understanding of how to ensure your children are healthy. Many of you benefit from various parenting sessions and numerous high quality education and training courses to increase your employment prospects. A high number of you have secured jobs this year. Providers work very closely with the centre to offer the best service possible.

The centre manager and all staff work very closely with other service providers to support you. The governing body and the advisory board maintain an excellent overview of the centre's work. The staff are supported extremely well by leaders to ensure the best outcomes for you all. Staff involve you fully in evaluating the activities you attend and this is changing future developments.

We have asked the centre to do one thing to help improve it for you:

- Ensure that staff have the information they need from the health authority to tackle issues such as smoking, obesity and teenage pregnancies even more effectively in the local community.

We wish you every success for the future.

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