

Inspection report for Newcastle East and Fossway Children's Centre

Local authority	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Inspection number	362532
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

Centre governance	Barnardo's
Centre leader	Alison Priestley
Date of previous inspection	NA
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Linked school if applicable	NA
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY330512 Barnardo's Nursery at St Martin's

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre and the local authority, front-line professionals, parents, volunteers, members of the partnership board and a number of partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Newcastle East and Fossway Children's Centre provides a range of services from several locations across the Byker and Walker areas within the city of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It serves communities that are amongst the most disadvantaged in the country. The majority of local families are of White British heritage, although an increasing proportion, around 15%, is from minority-ethnic communities. Many of these families are refugees or are seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. The number of children aged under four who are living in households where no one is working is well above the national average, as is the proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and abilities that are generally well below that found nationally. The centre was originally two Sure Start local programmes, later combined into one. It provides the full range of services for children's centres, known as the 'core offer', and is run on behalf of the local authority by Barnardo's, a voluntary sector organisation. The main site is Cragside House but this is primarily an administrative base. Linked sites include Byker Sands Family Centre, also operated by Barnardo's, and St Martin's Centre, a partnership with a local Church. This centre hosts full day-care and Early Years Foundation Stage provision and both these sites have a range of rooms for family group work and play sessions. Other linked sites include Dunstanburgh Road Community Nursery, Monkchester Nursery School and Family Centre, and West Walker Family Centre.

Barnardo's Nursery at St Martin's is subject to its own inspection. The inspection report can be found at 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Newcastle East and Fossway Children's Centre provides good support to children and families. Outcomes for them are at least satisfactory, often good, and improving. Some aspects of the centre's work are outstanding such as the care, guidance and support provided to all who use the diverse and interesting range of activities and services across the area. Partnership working is outstanding and is helping to ensure responsive, sensitive and seamless support to children and families, particularly for those most in need. The partnership between St Martin's church and the centre is particularly strong and both add significant value to each other's work.

Centre leaders have a good understanding of the needs of the local community through local intelligence, analysis of data and outreach work. They constantly seek out ways to listen to, and respond to, the views of families. Activities are well attended and valued by those who use them. One parent summed up the views of many when she said, 'I just do not know what I would have done without the fantastic support of the centre.' Leaders are increasingly successful in meeting the needs of some groups who do not always know about activities that children's centres can provide. Following consultations in the wider community, activities are provided to successfully support parents, carers and children who have been subject to domestic violence, fathers, teenage mothers and refugee and asylum seeking families and their children. Parents speak with conviction about the different opportunities such as the Freedom Programme, Men Behaving Dadly, Teen Mums group and Time to Talk and the difference they have made to their own and their children's development and well-being.

The local authority is successfully implementing the recommendations following its review of children's centres across the city in 2008. This is reflected in the coherent, integrated provision, consistent strategies, policies and practice across the centre's work, whether provided by local authority, partners, Barnardo's staff or St Martin's. Strategic priorities between the local authority and the centre are coherent. Good, energising leadership and strong teamwork ensures a focus on continuing improvement and good quality provision. Morale is high and staff speak of an increasingly strong culture of performance improvement. Staff supervision is robust and staff are held to account effectively for their part in achieving the centre's

priorities. Partners who work for the centre are also held to account through regular, rigorous review of their projects. However, accountability against measurable targets is less strong because the centre's plans and project-appraisal forms do not always have specific targets for improvement. Nevertheless, regular supervision includes evaluation against national performance indicators for children's centres.

The safeguarding of all who access the centre is paramount and robust procedures secure users safety well. Staff across all buildings provide a welcoming, safe, warm and caring environment. They are highly ambitious for their user families and have built up a strong sense of trust amongst them. Some parents and carers make the centre their first point of call in times of most need. Inclusion and equality of opportunity for all children and families are at the heart of the centre's work. Leaders work tenaciously to remove any potential barriers. For example, by varying the times and venues of courses, providing crèche facilities for parents and carers who need access to important training opportunities, and conducting one-to-one support work in families homes when needed.

Governance arrangements are good with clear lines of accountability between the centre manager, Barnardo's and the local authority. A well-informed partnership board includes parents and a wide range of partners. The board meets regularly and supports and challenges leaders in equal balance. Together with staff, they are involved in the centre's self-evaluation and consequently have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas that need improving. For example, they are aware that the mix of databases the centre uses to gather information about their work is not helpful in drawing together information to always set challenging targets for improvement. To tackle this they are developing a system to bring all the data into one place. Given the improving outcomes for children and their families, the centre's determined leadership, management and governance, value for money and the centre's capacity for future improvement are also good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure staff and partners are fully held to account for their work within the centre's plans and projects by:
 - including key, measurable targets for improvement more overtly in plans and project appraisal forms and using this information during the regular supervision and review of projects.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Parents speak positively about the support and training to eat healthily and exercise well. Children, including those in the Nursery relish eating healthy snacks and fresh fruit because all the centre's activities promote this aspect of learning well. There is good attendance at Aqua-natal, Gym, Swim and Trim and Star Fish, water confidence sessions for young children. Passes provided to families for free swimming sessions are well used. Baby Massage, weaning courses and opportunities for families to learn about healthy foods together through sessions like Family Foods are well attended.

Evaluations show how positively they are received. They also support the reduction in obesity rates of young children. Health visitors, the community midwife, outreach and family support workers provide timely support to new parents, making contact with them within 48 hours of leaving hospital. They are adept at advising mothers about the services available within the centre. Parents say they appreciate the breast-feeding peer-supporters who are helping an increasing number of them to sustain breast feeding beyond six weeks. One teenage mother spoke eloquently about the good support provided by the centre through courses like the 'speak-easy' programme that provides advice and guidance on sexual health and relationships. Several parents spoke with conviction about how their and their children's emotional health and self-confidence have been developed through parenting and other courses like the Incredible Years.

Parents and carers say how safe they and their children are in all activities across the area and, because of the good relationships developed with staff, say they would have no problem speaking out if anything should concern them. Good and timely support to the most vulnerable children and families is making a positive difference to their safety and care, particularly those referred to the centre who are at risk of entering the care system or subject to child-protection plans. This targeted support is helping to reduce the number of children placed on the child-protection register and ensuring vulnerable families use multi-agency support, often through a Common Assessment Framework, for as long as they need it. Sessions such as Time to Talk for refugees and asylum seeking families are very well attended and highly valued. One parent spoke of how much her English has improved, how well supported she feels, and the good friendships she has made. Importantly, she knows that because key workers or police attend, issues of concern will be tackled quickly.

Children make good progress and achieve well when taking into account their often lower than average starting points. Improving boys' achievements and children's communication and language acquisition skills are key priorities for the centre. Well-targeted strategies such as those used by the speech and language worker, the 'Every Child a Talker' programmes and activities to stimulate the interest of boys are reaping their rewards. The number of children in the area attaining expected levels in their early learning goals is increasing well and the gap between their achievements and those of children across the city as a whole is narrowing effectively. Good challenge and support to early-years' settings from the Sure Start teacher and support to childminders are also helping to raise expectations and children's achievements. Parents and carers comments reflect these findings.

Children and their families are successfully encouraged to make a positive contribution to the centre's activities and the wider community. For example, in Follow My Lead sessions, children's actions are monitored closely so that things they enjoy doing inform the next session's activities. In one session observed, children enjoyed playing imaginatively in a large range of cardboard boxes because staff had seen them wanting to play with boxes in the previous session. Staff have successfully encouraged many parents and carers to become volunteers, either in sessions across the area, or training them to support others such as breast-feeding peer-supporters. A good proportion of parents and carers are representatives on the partnership

board. In addition, a well-established parent forum is routinely consulted and successfully offers ideas and suggestions on behalf of their communities. Parent and carer representatives of both the board and the forum speak passionately about how included they feel and how valued their views are.

Children in the Nursery have good opportunities to develop skills for the future. For example, they are developing qualities such as taking turns and using real money when they go into their shop. Recent partnership working with the Citizens Advice Bureau is successfully supporting parents and carers with housing, benefits and financial advice through regular drop-ins. Partnerships with Newcastle Futures, part-funded by Jobcentre Plus, Building Futures East and adult learning opportunities are increasingly helping parents and carers into education, training, employment or volunteering. Recently they have collectively supported well over 30 people into such opportunities.

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	2
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

The centre meets the core offer well in the varying venues across the area. Assessment of individual need and tracking of progress are good and regular evaluations show high satisfaction rates. Participation rates are also good because the centre's leaders and staff make sure that activities are responsive to the needs and interests of the wider community. The views of users of the services are regularly canvassed and taken into account fully when planning and determining future provision. For example, the centre supports children who have additional needs through initiatives such as early entry into the Nursery from the age of two, and activities like Sing and Sign and Starting Points. However, parents and carers wanted somewhere where their children could learn and play together, where they could have time to talk as parents and gain advice when needed. As a result a new session specifically to meet those needs has been developed for the new year Partners work well together to make sure the needs of the most vulnerable children and their parents are assessed quickly so that interventions and support can be

targeted well. Parents who have faced significant challenges in their lives speak about their appreciation for the timeliness and quality of support provided. They describe the positive difference support is making to their relationships with their children and their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The centre promotes good, purposeful learning and development opportunities for all who use the centre, including harder-to-reach groups such as dads, teenage mothers and refugee and asylum seeking families. Sessions for young children, including in the Nursery, are of high quality, well resourced, exciting and child-focused; adding value to children’s achievements as well as their enjoyment. A warm and nurturing welcome awaits all who enter provision across the area. All reception desk staff are well-trained and quickly put entrants at their ease and signpost them on to the right session or advice. Well-supervised sessions by trained workers and volunteers ensure children’s and parents’ needs are met. Highly sensitive and individualised care, guidance and support are provided to those who require it, in the community or at home when necessary.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leaders successfully galvanise staff and partners in their quest to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families in their area. For example, the gap between the early learning achievements of children in this area and those of the city as a whole are narrowing well. Centre staff meet regularly to plan how they can actively involve and encourage hard-to-reach families to attend group activities and remove barriers to access. They receive a good range of summative evaluations from activities and sessions. Information gleaned helps develop or change services and activities. For example, Follow my Lead sessions are very popular and very busy. Parents’ feedback helps leaders to separate the age groups and they have developed a Follow my Little Lead. There are now two different sessions with more age-appropriate targeted learning and play opportunities. Staff work successfully to gain the trust of families before encouraging them to participate in activities or appropriate services like the popular parent and toddler groups or baby massage.

Actions to safeguard children and their families are robust. All policies and procedures meet statutory requirements and procedures are updated regularly. Every activity and project is rigorously risk assessed and training on safeguarding children

and child protection is regularly undertaken. Vetting and recruitment procedures are thorough, including for volunteers. Procedures to share information are good.

Rigorous quarterly review meetings between the local authority’s senior Sure Start manager, the lead officer from Barnardo’s and the centre manager identify progress against priorities. Outcomes from reviews inform staff supervision, the development of the centre’s accurate self-evaluation and thorough planning process. Whilst local performance data are used during these reviews, and considered in the development of priorities, leaders are aware information is not always used well enough to set challenging targets for improvement due to compatibility issues between the two databases the centre currently uses. Nevertheless, planning links into resource information and resources are used well to provide a wide range of appropriate activities and rich and welcoming environments across the area and good value for money. Outreach work extends the reach and impact of work of the centre and many more parents come to use the centre as a result. For example, centre staff are tenacious in ensuring equality for all and are becoming increasingly successful in securing support for their identified hard to reach groups such as fathers, teenage or lone parents and refugee and asylum seekers.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
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

Any other information used to inform the 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 Newcastle East and Fossway Children's Centre on 8–9 December 2010. We judged the centre as good overall. Some aspects of the centre's work are outstanding including the care, guidance and support provided to you and your children. The way the centre works with partners such as St Martin's church, health professionals and the local authority is also outstanding and is helping to ensure responsive, sensitive and seamless support to families most in need.

Other things that the centre is doing well include the activities and actions taken to support you and your children's safety and well-being, supporting you both to be healthy through activities such as Gym, Swim and Trim, and Star Fish, and activities that support the learning and development of your children. Learning journals and memory books record children's achievements and their views. Some of you told us how much your children enjoy activities like Follow my Lead and Baby Massage. Some parents who are facing challenges in their lives, such as those subject to domestic violence, spoke with conviction about the good support provided through the Freedom programme which is helping to build their confidence and self-esteem.

Staff constantly seek ways to listen and respond to your views and they change activities and develop new ones as a result of feedback. For example, following suggestion from parents and carers of children with additional needs, a new session is being developed in the new year so their children can make friends and play together while parents and carers have time to talk to each other or to professionals who will be invited to attend. Centre staff welcome volunteers and spend a lot of time training and supporting them. A number have gained qualifications and some have moved onto full-time employment as a result. New mums are appreciative of the breast-feeding peer-supporters who, like them, have had their ups and downs in trying to feed their babies themselves. This sort of voluntary work is helping to increase the proportion of new mums sustaining breast-feeding beyond six weeks.

People in charge of the children's centre are doing a good job. They are working hard to make sure that everything the centre provides will make a difference to the area in which you live. Everyone who works with the centre shares this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a real difference to your lives. The whole family is at the heart of the centre's work and this is seen in the increasing range of activities on offer and the good number of you who attend them.

They are also working hard to develop services for families who would not always know about the good things children's centres can provide. Following consultation, the centre has developed activities for dads, such as Men Behaving Dadly, and activities for teen-mums and for refugee and asylum seeking families, and these have been very well received.

Parents are welcome to be involved in the centre's work. There is a well-established Parent Forum and some of you, who are members, spoke convincingly about how your views are valued and how involved you feel in the centre's developments. Some of you are also representatives on the Partnership Board, which meets regularly to review the work of the centre.

Leaders regularly monitor the centre's work and that of their partners. They also take account of the evaluations you write and the comments you make about sessions and activities you attend. This is to make sure that the right activities are in place and to ensure things can be changed if need be. They have developed detailed plans and projects from this review information and have a good idea about what is going well and what needs to improve. However, we have asked the centre manager to improve one area. That is to make sure all plans and projects include challenging targets. This is because, while managers track progress against national performance indicators for children's centres and track outcomes for families, this information is not yet used well enough to set consistently challenging targets for improvement.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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