

# Inspection report for Seaham Children's Centre

Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	362562
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority.
Centre leader	Susan Howe
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Seaham House North Terrace Seaham SR7 7EU
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY396805 Seaham House Day 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre and the local authority, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including health, education and partners from the voluntary sector. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The centre is situated in the town of Seaham on the east Durham coast. It serves a former coal mining community that has historically been one of the most deprived in the country. Recently there has been significant new housing and investment to improve the infrastructure of the town and increase opportunities for children, families and the local community through initiatives such as the Coalfields Regeneration Programme. This has changed the demographic make-up of the area but it still remains an area of high deprivation, and unemployment rates are above the national average. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is generally above the national average, as is the proportion of children aged under-four who are living in households where no-one is working. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the area with skills and abilities that are often lower than those found nationally.

The centre opened in 2005 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. It provides the full core offer of services and is part of a children's centre cluster within the Easington locality that includes 12 other children's centres. The centre manager is the cluster manager for seven of these. A multi-agency team which includes health visitors and midwives is co-located on site. Governance arrangements are currently transferring from a local management board to an advisory board. A privately owned company provides day care and Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children aged from birth to five years and is open for fifty-two weeks a year. This provision, Seaham House Day Nursery was subject to its own inspection in November 2009 and its report can be found at [www.Ofsted.gov.uk](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

3

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

### Main findings

Seaham Children's Centre provides a welcoming and caring environment for all who enter. Whilst its overall effectiveness is satisfactory, there are a number of strengths. These include the high quality care, guidance and support provided, the impact of actions to promote healthy lifestyles and enable children and their parents, carers and grandparents to enjoy and achieve, and the actions taken to safeguard them. Good partnership working with health services and private and voluntary sector providers enrich the range of activities and support offered. Partnership with Jobcentre Plus is less successful as they have recently withdrawn their presence from the centre. Nevertheless, the centre manager makes sure that up-to-date employment opportunities are posted in the foyer and staff have been trained to support families and direct them to the service. Friendly, approachable and well-trained staff have built up high levels of trust amongst parents, carers and grandparents who attend the centre. They feel nurtured and well supported, especially those who are facing temporary challenges in their lives. Feedback from parents and carers helps to inform future activities and they pay testament to the positive impact the centre has had on their lives. As one parent eloquently reported, 'Without Sure Start at Seaham, I can assure you that I would not be enjoying or succeeding at motherhood as I am now.'

Despite persistent efforts of family support workers and the community engagement worker, the centre is aware that while the number of families attending the centre is increasing steadily, there are still more in the area who do not yet take advantage of all the good things the centre provides, particularly some harder-to-reach families. In order to improve matters, the centre continues to consult with families and has developed a partnership with a local primary school to jointly deliver more services in the heart of the community. This partnership will be fully functional in the spring. Inclusion of all, particularly the most vulnerable, is at the heart of the centre's work. All staff take firm and positive action to promote equality and tackle discrimination of any kind. However, because only around half of all families who could benefit best from the centre's work do so, equality and diversity is judged satisfactory overall.

Leaders and the integrated teams work together well and all share a passion to make

a difference to the lives and achievements of the children and their families. Leaders continually seek out new and improved ways to develop services that will raise aspirations and meet the needs and interests of their community, particularly the most vulnerable. However, their ability to fully understand their community and evaluate the impact of actions they take is limited. The centre has only just developed a system to map which communities use the centre in order to identify gaps. Although the centre's self-evaluation is accurate in terms of the range of activities on offer, it lacks effective evaluation of the impact of those activities. Leaders ensure feedback is received from all who take part in activities through individual evaluations and this does contribute to some future priorities. This information is not collated and analysed systematically. There is a lack of robust performance information or targets to measure impact in the centre's self-evaluation process, service plans or the impact improvement plans of individual staff. Partners provide many services and support to adults and children but leaders do not always hold them to account fully for that work as service level agreements or partnership arrangements sometimes lack clear accountability measures. Consequently, leaders, the advisory board and local authority cannot fully evaluate the impact of the centre's work on outcomes for their children and families.

Governance arrangements are in transition and a new advisory board is being set up. Members of the current board are fully supportive of the centre and meet regularly to monitor its work. They too are aware that their role in holding the centre to account would be improved if they had access to evaluative reports, based on progress towards priorities and the key performance targets for children's centres. As a result of issues identified above, although outcomes for those using the centre are at least satisfactory and often good, value for money and the centre's capacity for sustained improvement are satisfactory overall.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve the local authority's and the advisory board's ability to evaluate the impact of the centre's multi-agency work by:
  - strengthening governance arrangements to provide robust support and challenge to the centre's leaders underpinned by rigorous analysis of performance information and targets
  - ensuring partnership and service level agreements hold all providers to account for their contributions to the shared priorities and for improving outcomes for children and adults
  - improving the effectiveness of self-evaluation through regular and rigorous evaluation of information and data that shows the full impact of the centre's work and helps leaders to set consistently challenging targets for improvement within planning.
- Extend opportunities for users to access information and support regarding their future employment or training.

## How good are outcomes for users?

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A range of integrated child and family health services promote children's and families' physical and emotional well-being and understanding of how to adopt healthy life styles well. Children in the nursery benefit from healthy lunches, snacks, and good opportunities to be fit using a wide range of indoor and outdoor equipment. They enjoy fresh air in the well-planned open spaces whenever they choose. Specialist support from health visitors, health care assistants, midwives and family support workers ensure good and timely bespoke care. Parents speak very positively about how they are helped to breast-feed their baby. Breast-feeding support sessions are well attended and although the centre cannot provide current data, available information indicates that while rates have been well below those found nationally, the proportion of mothers maintaining breastfeeding beyond six weeks doubled in the year from 2008/09 to 2009/10. Weaning courses and courses for children, their parents and carers to make healthy food together, such as Cooking Up a Story and Indian Cookery are making a positive difference to the health of families. They are well attended and enjoyed by adults and children alike.

Parents and carers say they and their children are very safe in the centre. The provision of crèche facilities for adults attending parenting, childminder and other courses gives them confidence to continue their training, knowing their children are safe and well-cared for. Parents and carers have an increased understanding of accident prevention in the home and first aid through the 'Whoops' safe at home scheme and through popular first-aid training courses. Children on child protection plans are well supported through multi-agency 'teams around each child'. The Common Assessment Framework process is used effectively to secure relevant agency support for vulnerable families including those whose children are at risk of entering the care system. Support from the domestic violence worker is making a significant difference to the safety and well-being of families at risk of harm.

Children attending the nursery make good progress in their learning, given their varied starting points. The percentage of children across the Seaham area achieving expected levels in their early learning goals continues to improve and, although remaining below the national average, the gap between children in the area and that of the county is narrowing well. Early identification through multi-agency working is helping to ensure young children in need can have nursery education at the age of two. Strategies are in place to quickly meet their individual needs, such as those with speech and language or special educational needs and/or disabilities. Learning journals in more informal activities such as Stay and Play help to celebrate children's achievements and identify what they need to learn next. A range of activities helps parents and carers to support and improve their children's creative, personal, educational, social and emotional development. These include Creative Explorers, Groovy Grandparents, Music Fun with the Sage, and the Saturday Family Man male carers group. Users say they these opportunities help them to develop their own and their children's self-esteem and confidence and improve their relationships as well as having a fun time together. Childminders particularly appreciate the sessions where they can bring their children to learn and play together in the well-resourced room, as well as the regular training opportunities provided that meet their needs and

interests.

Children behave well in activities provided in the centre and in the nursery and they show a high level of consideration for one another. Adults communicate their views about the services offered by the centre through questionnaires. This information is used during managers' quarterly reviews and provision can change as a result. For example, following concerns about lack of opportunities for children and families of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, a consultation took place. Following feedback, the centre developed a 'Krafty Kids' club for children with additional needs and their siblings. However, although numbers are increasing, approximately half of families who would benefit are not yet using the good range of activities and support on offer in the centre.

Through good childcare and early year's provision in the nursery and in activities held in the centre, children are successfully developing skills for the future. Action to help parents into learning, training and employment are satisfactory. Adults receive some assistance in looking for work, although this is limited due to the lack of on-site support from Jobcentre Plus. Learn East provide training and development opportunities for families through programmes such as family learning and Skills for Life. Partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau enables parents and carers to have on-site advice on issues such as benefits, tax credits and housing and a good number attend consultations. Their impact is hard to evaluate as the centre does not receive feedback on the bureau's achievements or record the successes of families' learning opportunities. Nevertheless, a sample of case studies from the Citizens Advice Bureau and individual evaluations of courses show the positive benefit to some families.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

**3**

Assessment of need is carried out effectively to ensure that those with the greatest level of need are prioritised. Referrals from other agencies are responded to quickly

by the integrated teams. Family support workers and health professionals provide flexible one-to-one support in times of significant need and this is valued by those who use this support and care. The charity Homestart is used to provide volunteers to support families facing temporary challenges in their lives and this is helping them to access services, build their confidence and self-esteem. Local knowledge is helping to identify more hard-to-reach groups and there has been an increase in the proportion of families from minority ethnic communities using the centre. The centre has identified a need to better support young parents and a programme has recently been developed. However, systems are not yet sufficiently robust to demonstrate that all potential users are being reached. Therefore, although the quality of outreach, services and the variety offered are good, the centre is unable to identify whether the needs of all potential users and those who could benefit best from their work are well met.

The centre promotes good, purposeful learning and development opportunities for those who do use the centre. Sessions observed by inspectors were of good quality. For example, a well-attended parent-craft session enabled a good range of information advice and guidance for pregnant women, their partners, or birth partners in a climate of trust and openness. Individual evaluations from parents and carers about the support, courses and activities provided indicate the difference their experiences have made to their own and their children's enjoyment and well-being.

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to young children, parents, carers and other users of the centre is good. Sensitive individualised and tailored interventions are provided to all families and children using the centre and they are well supported, particularly in times of crises.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

Leaders and managers at all levels strive to improve the effectiveness of the children's centre. Together with partners they are effectively involved in the development of the centre's plans and priorities. Identified actions within the centre's own action plan link well to the priorities of the wider-cluster plan and there are coherent links between these, the local authority's county wide Sure Start plan and Children and Young People's Plan. However, accountability arrangements are less clear. Plans are reviewed regularly alongside a rigorous review of budgets but they

contain few targets for improvement. An impact assessment tool provides a consistent approach to identifying individual staff' actions and monitoring progress against the centre's plans. These are monitored during regular supervision and team meetings but individual-impact assessments include too few challenging targets. Although actions might identify what staff need to do to improve, they do not indicate how much improvement is required.

Performance management arrangements support the centre's promotion of equality of opportunity effectively. For example, there is a strong focus on up-skilling and training all staff, including those of partners, to deliver inclusive provision that is sensitive to the needs and views of users. Parents pay testament to this in their evaluations and during discussions with inspectors. To break down barriers further, staff provide one-to-one support in individual homes when necessary and, at times, provide transport to help families in need.

Rigorous action is taken to ensure children are well safeguarded. Procedures fully meet requirements and all appropriate staff are suitably trained in child protection and safe recruitment. Security at the centre is good and underpinned by effective risk assessments that minimise risks to users. Simple, helpful posters, leaflets and the use of an electronic display board in reception make it clear to families what to do if they have any concerns. They also highlight the high expectations the centre has for assuring children and families are safe and keep safe.

Partnerships with health services are particularly good, seamless and integrated. Partnerships with parents, carers and grandparents who use the centre are also good, as evidenced in the regular evaluations of activities and portfolios of the outcomes of consultations. The centre is well known in the area. Celebration days and the centre's high profile contributions to the Seaham Carnival extend the involvement of the centre in the work of the community and help to promote community cohesion effectively. Partnership working with the private, voluntary and community sector stretches resources further and enables services to support families where the centre has limitations. For example, volunteers are not allowed to work in the centre. However, staff refer potential volunteers to Homestart, who train and develop them to work with many families in the Seaham area. Regular working-breakfast meetings enable the centre to communicate and network with a wide range of partners. These are popular and well attended. They help partners understand what the centre can provide and also what they can do to support families and children in the area. Partnership with the nursery is helping to ensure younger children with additional needs can access timely provision, support and care. Despite ongoing and strenuous efforts, there is currently no parent and carer forum to help the centre to determine priorities and evaluate the effectiveness of their work, although plans are in place to tackle this.

Until recently the centre's understanding of the diversity of the community was developed through local intelligence and networks. They have recently developed a better understanding through postcode level data that pinpoints the current users of services across the town. This is helping to identify where the gaps are and who



could benefit further. The developing partnership with a local school will help to fill some of those gaps and help to make sure more families who would benefit from the services available, can do so more easily.

*These are the grades for leadership and management<*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## **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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected Seaham Children's Centre on 17 and 18 November. During this time we talked to staff, leaders from the nursery, local schools and representatives from other organisations who work with, or support the centre. We also observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

We judged the centre as satisfactory. There are some good features. These include actions taken to secure the safety of you and your children, and promote your healthy lifestyles, development and well-being. They also include the good quality education, care, guidance and support offered by all staff and provided in the private nursery within the centre. Partnership working with other agencies is also good and especially so with health professionals. Baby clinics and breast-feeding support groups are well attended and you comment positively on these. One parent echoed the views of a number when she said of the breast-feeding group, 'It gives you confidence to persevere, its good to hear that other mothers have the same problems as you and it is not just you.' Partnership with Jobcentre Plus is less successful because they no longer provide a service from the centre. That being said, the centre manager makes sure that up-to-date employment opportunities are posted in the entrance and staff have been trained to support and signpost you to the service should you require help.

The centre is not as good as it could be in making sure that some partners who provide services report back on the difference they are making. For example, a good number of you have attended on-site Citizens Advice Bureau sessions for help with concerns such as housing, benefits or access to tax credits, but the centre does not have summary (anonymous) information to show how successful the bureau has been in that work. Learn East provides good family learning opportunities that a number of you have attended and also some training such as Skills for Life, but they do not provide information on the difference this has made. For example, the number of accreditations you may attain as a result. We have asked the centre's leaders to improve this aspect of their work.

Seaham Children's Centre provides a welcoming and caring environment for all who enter. Good and timely support is provided to families who face urgent or temporary crises in their lives, especially those who are referred from other agencies. Activities, training and support available are good and valued by those of you who attend. We saw many of your individual evaluations of activities and sessions and they are virtually all very positive. People who spoke to us, or wrote to us, were full of praise for the impact of the work of the centre and of the support from staff. Some said you view staff as friends and confidants because they build up trust in a non-judgemental way. Dads from the male-carer group commented enthusiastically about the difference the sessions have made to their relationships with their children and the enjoyment they have with them. They are particularly happy that sessions are now held on Saturdays, and in the centre, following comments made by them. Some of you who attend activities such as Nurturing and Freedom programmes say what a difference these have made to the lives of your families. Childminders appreciate the

opportunity to have sessions with their children in the well-resourced multi-function room and the regular training opportunities provided.

The centre manager and staff know they need to attract even more families, especially those who would benefit best from all the good things the centre has to offer. Currently, although increasing, just about half of families who would benefit actually attend. They have identified on a large map of the area where there are gaps in people attending, to identify where to conduct further consultations and research. In partnership with a local primary school they are also developing facilities at the school, with an ambition to open them around Easter time in 2011.

The centre leaders and all staff work together well and they all share a passion to make a difference to yours and your children's aspirations, enjoyment, safety and well-being. They often ask for your views through evaluations and try to plan activities that meet your needs and interests. The leadership team, staff and partners meet regularly to discuss and plan how well activities are going and what needs to change. Leaders also report to an advisory board and to the local authority on how things are going. However, the ability of leaders, the local authority and the advisory board to properly understand how well the centre is doing is limited. This is because the centre's target-setting and reviewing arrangements are not strong enough. This lack of information also means that the centre's planning is not clear enough. There are few targets for improvement, or resources identified where needed. We have asked the centre's leaders to make sure actions are in place to tackle this.

I would like to extend a special thank you to those of you who took the time out of your busy lives and interesting activities to speak to us and 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).