

Inspection report for West Middlesbrough Children's Centre

Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	362617
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Melanie Cadman
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY272716 Stainsby Neighbourhood Nursery full day care

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 the centre manager, senior management team, representatives from the advisory board and local authority, a range of agencies and parents and other users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

The Sure Start children's centre is named and known as West Middlesbrough Children's Centre. This is a phase 1 children's centre providing the core offer to a community which covers four wards, three of which are in the 30% most deprived wards in the country. The children's centre is situated very close to more affluent areas and can attract parents who are less hard to reach. The centre also operates from two satellite sites, Archibald and Newport.

The centre provides a range of integrated services that include health, family support, and links to Jobcentre Plus, adult training and early years advice and guidance. It takes referrals from, and supports families with children in three local schools and four Early Years Foundation Stage settings. The centre coordinator manages the services provided by the centre.

The local authority is responsible for the performance management of staff in the centre and the local partnership board is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. The centre has an on-site Early Years Foundation Stage provision and has links with other settings in which some of the families within the reach area attend.

Within the community served by the children's centre there are eight super output areas. The area is made up of a multi-ethnic community. The children's centre serves a population of 698 children, 621 of these children in the catchment area live in the

10% most deprived communities around the town centre. There are currently 305 workless households in the reach area.

Integrated education and day care is met with existing provision. Evidence indicates that the skills and knowledge with which children enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage are significantly below those expected nationally for their age.

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

The outcomes for users are good overall. The centre is very well led and managed and supported by a highly effective team. They set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of the local community. This has ensured that families, particularly those that are vulnerable and disadvantaged, benefit from a range of good quality services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

The centre provides a very warm, welcoming and safe environment for all its users. They appreciate the work it does and recognise the positive impact it has on their lives. As one parent reported, explaining the benefits the centre has brought to her family, ‘I would not have my children with me now if it hadn’t been for the children’s centre.’

The centre has high quality arrangements for safeguarding all users and is rightly recognised by users as a place of safety. Staff work closely with carers to confirm that they also understand and adopt safe practices. The centre has a good record of improving the safety of children subject to a child protection plan. There is a strong commitment to promoting equality and diversity.

The centre’s self-evaluation is mainly accurate. Evaluations about the impact of its work are largely based upon case studies and staff’s in-depth knowledge of the families they serve. Users’ views are sought regularly, although involvement of all users and partners, particularly children and the advisory board, are not as fully developed as they could be in contributing to the self-evaluation and driving improvement.

The improvement plans show that priorities are based on a sound understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for further development. This is because the centre understands the needs of its users very well. However, centre leaders have correctly identified that better use could be made of sharing information to introduce and promote antenatal and post-natal activities, and improve the opportunities for parents and carers to access training and employment through Jobcentre Plus.

High quality care, guidance and support, together with good multi-agency working, ensure that families' have personalised support. Parents and carers, particularly those with complicated needs cannot speak highly enough of the quality of the care, guidance and support that they receive. As one user reported, 'I was suffering from depression, but now I am very positive about the future. I wouldn't be the parent I am now without the centre's support, guidance and understanding.'

The children's centre demonstrates good capacity for improvement. The leadership of the centre coordinator is very good. She demonstrates a passion and relentless determination to improve the life chances of families in the local community. She is ably supported by a very strong team that work extremely effectively together and with their partners. Staff are extremely passionate about the centre and its community. They are effective in ensuring that all children, parents and carers, regardless of differences, achieve and have the same access to a range of experiences.

The local authority has successfully established robust procedures for supervising staff and holding them to account for the quality of their work. The recently integrated pathway of care ensures that the services are developed collaboratively with partners and agencies to meet local needs. The local authority has exceeded expectations and secured three advisory boards across the children's centre and satellite sites. The advisory boards demonstrate a good understanding of the work of the centre and its priorities, although they are not yet fully embedded in their duties to support, challenge and contribute to the self-evaluation to drive improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the involvement of users and partners, particularly the advisory board, in the evaluation of the centre's effectiveness and preparation of the development plan.
- Improve the opportunities for parents and carers to access training and employment through Jobcentre Plus.
- Make professional partnership with Health Services, particularly midwives, more effective to develop and promote community based antenatal and post-natal care in support of the healthy child programme.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Children's healthy lifestyles are promoted well. The centre is developing good strategies to help reduce obesity in children. Children benefit from physical exercise through activities such as 'Little Kickers' which has been very well received. They have fun, learn social skills and build confidence. Parents also benefit from their involvement and are more proactive in supporting their children in physical exercise. The centre supports parents with physical and emotional difficulties very well. Parents openly and confidently talk about how their health and well-being have greatly improved and how this has impacted on their ability to become better parents and improved outcomes for themselves and their families.

Children learn about oral hygiene from an early age and are encouraged to brush their teeth while attending nursery sessions. Baby massage classes are well-attended programmes. Parents talk confidently about how these sessions have enabled them to help their babies, for example, when suffering with colic or chest infections.

Children and users feel very safe at the centre. Participation in the city-wide 'Safe at Home' project has provided parents and carers with detailed information on how to create and maintain a safe environment for young children. The centre, in collaboration with most partner agencies, is very effective in identifying and responding to the safeguarding needs of children and their families. The use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) for recording and coordinating support programmes is consistent. Those children with child protection plans are extremely well supported. Case studies featuring family support workers illustrate how effective their support is in helping parents and carers to become more confident and successful in managing their family lives. An advocate for the centre is a parent whose child had been taken into care. She became involved with the centre and through the support and encouragement provided, attended a range of sessions including how to help care for her child. As a result, she now has her child back in her care and has gone on to study at college.

Partnerships with schools are highly effective in improving outcomes for children. The local primary schools speak extremely highly about the excellent partnership working and the positive effect the children's centre has in contributing to improved outcomes for young children. Hard to reach families, who have in the past, had no involvement in their child's education, are now enthusiastically engaging with the school.

The Early Years Foundation Stage profile data show that key outcomes in children's personal, social and emotional development have improved over the last year. However, children were not achieving six points on entry to school for writing and linking sounds with letters. Consequently, the nursery staff have introduced a letter and sound programme for two-year-olds and also work closely with the speech therapist and Cleveland unit. Baseline assessments are completed within six weeks of a child attending the nursery. Parents are actively encouraged to contribute to their children's 'learning journeys'. Children make good progress given their complex needs. Evaluations of activities, discussions with parents and carers and individual

case studies provide positive comments on the difference that activities and support have made to parents' and carers' own and their children's well-being.

Parents are successfully encouraged and supported by the centre to attend a good range of training both within the centre and beyond. For example, parents have completed training such as 'Fun with numbers' where they gain skills to teach their children numeracy skills, and first-aid training for young children. Parents have also produced activities and resources to use with their children at home to develop skills in reading, speaking and listening. Positive feedback from parents as learners include, 'I am now more confident and able to reach my children through play', 'I have learned more about how my child's language skills will develop', and, 'I have gained a lot of confidence with numeracy and understood a lot more'.

Staff provide strong role models that successfully support children's positive behaviour and a culture of respect is evident throughout the centre. Parents comment about how their children's behaviour has improved considerably since attending the provision. They observe their children interacting very positively with other children, developing relationships as they learn to share and play together.

Parents and carers say they feel 'included' and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence, aspirations and achievements as well as their children's progress and development. Parents talk passionately about how the staff support them through difficult times and that without help from the children's centre, their lives would be very different. For example, parents have been supported through dealing with the loss of family, post-natal depression and domestic violence, and believe their children may have been taken into care. As one parent's comment confirms, 'I wouldn't have my children now if it hadn't been for the children's centre.'

Volunteers, many of which are parents, regularly help with centre activities and enjoy their involvement. They talk proudly of how their confidence and belief in themselves, a result of the support from the children's centre, has enabled them to go on to further training and gain qualifications. Although there is a lack of presence with Jobcentre Plus within the children's centre, adults are effectively signposted to training and courses run at a number of local venues in close proximity to the centre. Adults have also attended further training at other venues across Middlesbrough. 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	2

develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	
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 assessment of the needs of families is good. Family support officers are highly successful and crucial to the rapid improvement in services for users. They expertly assess the complicated needs of families vulnerable due to their circumstances. They work with families directly or engage the appropriate service to meet a specific need, acting as advocates for users. The introduction of the new integrated pathway of care to support children and families achieve the Every Child Matter outcomes, ensures the CAF is well embedded. Partnerships with other agencies ensure that assessments of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are accurate. The range of services provided include outreach work to families such as Travellers and lone parents; sessions within the centre, for example speech and language therapists;; joint training between health visiting staff and the centre’s staff to provide information about early weaning; and the commissioning of a baby massage instructor to help parents and babies to be calmer and help improve bonding with their children.

The children’s centre works very effectively in partnership with the local school to engage with very difficult male carers. The ‘Dads into nursery’ project is a huge success. It enables fathers to establish productive relationships with their children and helps them learn more about how to support their child’s learning and development. The encouragement and support from staff gives fathers the confidence to become actively involved within the setting.

Parents improve their skills and confidence to enable them to go on to further training and help with their children’s learning. Children and parents’ achievement are celebrated well within the centre. Photographs are displayed on walls, certificates are presented and an annual celebration event takes place. Tailored classes such as ‘David’s fun and fitness’, first aid and ‘Little Kickers’, supported with crèche provision, help users access all that the centre has to offer and help include them in the community. Parents are highly satisfied with the services and support they receive. Their views are taken into account and used to shape services.

Excellent care, guidance and support, together with good multi-agency working, ensure that families have personalised support. This includes parenting groups, one-to-one guidance and advice in the centre or at home, family support and specialist health services. There are clear programmes in place to promote the health and social well-being of users, including a strong emphasis on providing emotional support to boost their confidence and raise their self-esteem.

The centre is good at working in partnership with area special educational needs coordinators, family support teams and other agencies, to meet children’s individual needs. The centre is effectively used for supported and supervised contact with parents and children. Users develop confidence and self-esteem through attendance at Harbour training (confidence and self-esteem) and Freedom (domestic abuse) training. Users attending the centre include those within and beyond the reach areas. This reflects how well the centre is providing opportunities that are needed and enjoyed by users.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is led and managed very effectively. The manager communicates high expectations and is determined to ensure that the centre is effective in improving the lives of all users. Since being in post, the centre manager has created stability and an excellent team who are dedicated to making a difference to the children and families they serve. Attendance of children accessing the centre has increased since 2008, from 247 to well over 500 in 2010.

Professional supervision is strong, with clear performance management structures and target-setting with staff, helping to ensure that their work is effective. All staff have continuing opportunities for training and many are undertaking further training to develop their skills and knowledge for the benefit of the centre.

The high quality of supervision that staff benefit from has been successful in establishing a very strong sense of common purpose. All staff feel valued and managers respect the contribution each makes to improving life chances of users. Consequently, the concerted and effective work of the centre has created a safe, friendly environment where there are high expectations of its users. The centre offers good value for money because of the great care taken to provide services for users that are specifically tailored around their needs.

The local authority has exceeded expectations and secured three advisory boards across the children’s centre and satellite sites. Each includes persons representing a range of interests, such as staff from the children’s centre, local primary schools,

primary care trusts, Jobcentre Plus and parents. Although governance arrangements with partners are strengthening and there is increased clarity of local needs, their duties to support, challenge and contribute to the self-evaluation to drive improvement are not fully embedded.

Self-evaluation, based on outcome based performance management of each activity, case study users' response to provision and input from staff and the parents' forum and focus groups, is largely accurate. The centre's priorities for improvement are realistic. Staff have a good understanding of the strengths in provision and where further improvements can be made and they respond well to the changing requirements of the area. The staff indicated that they would appreciate the opportunity to engage in additional preventative activities with midwives and General Practitioners (GPs), such as antenatal care and smoking cessation. The centre leaders have identified in action plans that this is a key development priority.

The centre knows its users very well and can demonstrate its success on an individual and activity basis because of regular evaluations by users and centre staff. Users' views are sought regularly, although involvement of all users and partners, are not as fully developed as they could be in contributing to the self-evaluation and driving improvement.

All provision is of good quality and helps to improve outcomes for children, parents and carers who come to the centre. The centre is successful in breaking down the barriers that vulnerable users experience ensuring equality of access to services. For example, users report how isolated they feel before becoming involved in the work of the centre. Staff successfully ensure that the CAF is used effectively so that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the services that they are entitled to.

Diversity is explicitly valued and promoted. Welcome signs in different languages are displayed within the setting. Every effort is made by centre staff to work with families in need, including those who are hard to reach. Good support is provided to those who feel isolated. For example, good support is provided for the local Traveller community.

Partnerships, in most cases, are of a high quality because a strong belief in collaborative working is at the heart of the centre's ethos. Close, supportive and effective partnership working between the centre manager and leaders from the local primary schools has resulted in satellite services at Archibald and Newport Primary Schools. Users now access activities, support, advice and training across all three sites. These services, together with the home visiting outreach work have increased the attendance and take-up of services by the local community.

Although partnership working with health professionals has improved considerably over the past year, there are still fundamental weaknesses regarding partnership working with some health professionals, particularly midwives and GPs. Unfortunately, this is as a result of the shortage of midwifery services and not as a

result of unwillingness to be involved. Health visitors are now working well in partnership with the centre. The improvement in the professional working relationship has strengthened with the introduction of the pathway to care that has recently been introduced. Despite endless efforts to engage in partnership with professionals to promote antenatal care, this still remains an area of weakness in supporting the healthy child programme. In addition, the centre also struggles in trying to address smoking cessation, drug and alcohol misuse. However, to the credit of the centre manager and local authority, these have been accurately identified as weaknesses and action plans are in place to address the shortfall.

Staff are extremely diligent and understand their duty to safeguard every child. Robust procedures and protocols for sharing information, together with good partnership working, ensure that children and families at risk and in need are prioritised for support. All appropriate policies and procedures are in place and up to date.

The vetting of staff is secure and they are well trained. All staff are aware of key safeguarding policies and are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that users may encounter. Staff are effective in ensuring the ongoing safety, emotional health and well-being of children and their families. The centre provides a very safe environment that is appreciated by all users and partner agencies.

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	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the	2

wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The on-site nursery was not inspected fully as part of this children’s centre inspection. The previous inspection report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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 West Middlesbrough Children’s Centre on 17 and 18 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall. We talked with parents and carers, children, staff, a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre’s work and looked at a range of documents. We judged the centre as good overall.

The strong leadership of the centre manager and her dedicated team has provided families with a range of good quality services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs. Those of you who spoke to us said that you feel the centre is ‘very supportive and staff are kind, caring and give you good advice’. Most importantly, you said it helps improve your lives, particularly those of you who are facing difficult challenges. Your children’s centre staff team has drive and ambition; they meet regularly to discuss the centre’s work and plan for improvement. All staff place the upmost importance on you and your families and always provide a listening ear for you. They are passionate about creating an extremely warm and welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you value the centre and use the services regularly.

Staff listen to what you have to say about the centre and what you need. As a result, the centre offers a good range of services and activities that are tailored for all families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy and safe. Parents who spoke to us said that your children’s behaviour and their ability to socialise have improved and that your children are much more confident, independent learners and happy as a result.

People that use the centre are now much more able to stay safe and healthy and to provide for their families. Staff provide you with access to safety equipment and advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your home to keep your children safe. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by encouraging mums to breastfeed and to become involved in exercise through activities such as 'Little Kickers'. The parents we spoke to are particularly proud of their achievements. These ranged from becoming better parents to gaining voluntary or full-time work because of the skills they learnt at the centre.

The children that use the centre are also well catered for. This means that they settle well into the local nurseries and make better progress than they would if they had not benefited from the centres services. Inspectors think that some of the support services, such as Jobcentre Plus and antenatal care could make a bigger contribution to the life of the centre and the local community if they were offered more opportunities to do so.

The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Stay and Play'. You told us how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

To develop further the work of the centre we have asked the centre manager and local authority to increase the involvement of parents, carers, children and the advisory board, who are people who help run the centre, in the evaluation of the centre's effectiveness and preparation of the development plan. We have also asked them to improve the opportunities for parents and carers to access training and employment opportunities through Jobcentre Plus by having people visible at the centre available to talk to you. Finally, we have asked that they make the professional partnership with health services, particularly midwives, more effective in improving and promoting antenatal and post-natal care.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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