

Inspection report for Howdon Children's Centre

Local authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	362501
Inspection dates	17 -18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre governance	North Tyneside
Centre leader	Gillian Darby
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Howdon Children's Centre Nursery and Crèche

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.

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early year's inspector. The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners; health, education and children's social care professionals and representatives from Tyne Metropolitan College, Barnardos and Jobcentre Plus. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Howdon Children's Centre is located in the south west of North Tyneside. It falls within the top 2% of deprived wards in the country. The reach population of the centre is just over 1000. Recent figures show that over 37% of households are lone parents with dependent children. Estimated weekly income is significantly lower than the North Tyneside average, and the percentage of children aged nought to four years of age living in households dependent on workless benefits is 45.6%. The majority of local families are of White British heritage. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average, as is the proportion of children aged under four who are living in households where no-one is working. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.

The centre is located in two buildings on one site, and operates as a 'one-stop-shop' model, providing the full core offer. It opened in 2001 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. The centre hosts a full-time day-care provision for children from three months to school age and this is managed by a private provider. The team and centre managers work across the west of North Tyneside, which

comprises of five further children’s centres. Governance arrangements transferred to an advisory board in 2009.

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

“Life changing, brilliant, fantastic, empowering;” words used frequently by parents and carers to describe the impact Howdon Children’s Centre has had on their lives. This highly effective centre sits right at the heart of the community it serves and has worked hard to build up this trust and respect amongst local families. The exceptional support, dedication and commitment of all centre staff and services has ensured that the life chances of people living within this locality have dramatically improved, often in the face of the most challenging of circumstances.

Provision is exemplary, both in relation to the high quality activities delivered within the centre, and the outreach work carried out by family support staff. The importance the centre gives to reaching out into the community and developing positive relationships with all users is the foundation stone of its success. The expertise and breadth of knowledge demonstrated by every staff member within the centre is impressive and has ensured the provision of high quality support and guidance to all families whom they meet. This deeply embedded sense of security, which emanates throughout the centre, ensures that parents and carers have the confidence to ask for help and support; increasingly before they reach a point of crisis.

All staff, partners and volunteers are united in their vision to secure outstanding outcomes for every family and this is a real strength of the centre. A rigorous cycle of monitoring and evaluation means that the management team are always striving to improve the quality and impact of the services and activities provided, demonstrating exemplary capacity for improvement. The recent provision of access to a wealth of information available through the ‘integrated children’s services’ database has greatly enhanced the depth of the centre’s data analysis. The senior management team realises that there is scope to develop the use of this resource further in order to sustain the high levels of engagement and progress made by families across the locality.

The children’s centre demonstrates a genuine commitment to ensuring the voice of the community is heard within the centre and that this influences the ongoing development of services in a meaningful way. This coupled with the centre’s flexible approach to service delivery, ensures that the exceptional support provided is responsive to the ever changing needs of the community, and so remains correctly targeted. As a result, equality is promoted sensitively, with robust systems in place to identify and tackle any forms of discrimination identified at a community or multi-agency level.

Safeguarding is given the utmost priority, with exemplary policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and protection of both families and staff. All staff are confident in their understanding of child protection policies and procedures and are adept at identifying vital signs, referring quickly and appropriately when necessary. This is facilitated further by the exemplary partnerships which exist across agencies locally, ensuring a seamless, coordinated approach to service delivery.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop the use of data available through the local authority to enhance the delivery of targeted services in order to sustain the exceptional levels of engagement and progress made by families across the locality.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Described by one parent as, ‘a haven of support and opportunity’, Howdon Children’s Centre has effected real lasting change; improving life chances for the majority of families and children within the locality it serves. Central to its success has been the time taken by the dedicated staff team to secure their trust and respect, ensuring that the voices of local parents and children remain at the heart of all they provide.

The conspicuous impact of exemplary partnership working which promotes children’s and families’ emotional well-being and their physical health is evident across the work of the centre. This includes the tireless dedication of all staff including, health visitors, centre support workers, speech and language therapists and dieticians, as well as services commissioned through Relate and Barnardos. The promotion of healthy lifestyles threads through every activity within the centre, from cookery classes to locally acclaimed weaning programmes. Creative play groups are attended by centre staff who demonstrate to parents how to prepare healthy snacks and offer sound advice around cooking healthy food on a budget. Children within the nursery have ample opportunities to learn about healthy eating, and growing vegetables has become an annual event within the centre. This produce is then used by the nursery in the meals it provides. The impact of this work is reflected in the 2.5% drop in obesity rates amongst reception children seen over the past two years, the current figure of 7.2% being well below the local authority’s target of 10.5%. As part of its

relentless pursuit to ensure a whole-family commitment to a healthy lifestyle, the centre has worked closely with the health and well-being champion to develop the family focussed Fit4life programme. Without exception, parents we spoke to showed an increased awareness of the importance of staying fit and healthy, the numbers attending a weight watchers drop-in reflecting this determination to make lifestyle changes. The work undertaken in relation to the promotion of breastfeeding is also beginning to successfully change local attitudes. The excellent support provided by the Up Close breastfeeding groups, assisted by peer support volunteers and the much improved links with the Royal Victoria Infirmary continue to contribute to an improvement in the numbers of new mums who choose to breastfeed their babies.

A recent focus on the promotion of issues around child safety, combined with highly productive working partnerships with the local police and fire service has resulted in an increase in the number of parents and carers requesting safety equipment for their homes. By turning the on-site bungalow into a hazardous house, staff at the centre were able to offer practical examples of dangers in the home and inform parents of how to minimise these. Exemplary multi-agency support ensures that children subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework processes are extremely well supported. The 'Request for Services' meetings ensure that appropriate information is shared between professionals, with care packages identified to meet need in a consistent and rigorous manner. There is a genuine commitment to ensuring that family remains at the centre of these processes. For example, parents are actively encouraged to attend panel meetings and contribute to the decision making process. The effectiveness of this approach is reflected in a reduction in the number of re-referral rates.

A close working partnership exists between local early years providers, the early years educator and North Tyneside's early years improvement team. This combined with the centre's ongoing involvement in the 'Every Child a Talker' project has had a significant impact on the achievement of children, particularly in relation to their personal, social and emotional development as well as their communication, language and literacy skills. The gap between the lowest 20% of children achieving expected levels in key early learning goals, and that for all children in North Tyneside has narrowed considerably over the past year. The work of the speech and language therapist within the on-site nursery and crèche has empowered staff with the knowledge to consistently apply best practice in the development of all children's communication skills, securing accelerated progress and so improved outcomes in this key area. Education professionals spoken to during the inspection testified to the positive impact of the centre particularly in relation to raising aspirations.

There is compelling evidence of how the centre has helped parents and carers into learning, training and employment, thereby providing economic stability and independence. Exemplary partnerships with the local college and other training providers, has enabled a large majority of parents to access a plethora of accredited training opportunities. The completion of these courses, has given individuals a real sense of achievement. Many parents told us how they are supported and assisted in setting and achieving their own goals, their confidence and self-esteem improving as

a direct result. The very real impact of this support is clearly evident in the increased aspirations of parents and carers we spoke to, many of whom talked about going back to work or completing higher level qualifications.

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

All centre staff, partners and the local authority have an in-depth understanding of the issues and challenges facing the community. This ensures very well-targeted support for all children and families, which has helped them to make the best of those opportunities available. The centre can identify numerous striking examples where families have been supported, helping them to fully engage in everyday life and enjoy their families again. The work of the centre, particularly with its most vulnerable families is commendable, a clear reflection of the caring yet expectant ethos, which is deeply rooted at all levels. This flexible and personalised approach to identifying and assessing need is a key strength of the centre.

The shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are excellent. A close working partnership has been established between relevant external agencies and the centre's family support team. This ensures the provision of individualised packages of support. One parent we spoke to told us of the invaluable support she had received and explained how funding from the two year old pilot had enabled her to receive the respite care she needed. The dedication of the centre's team has been key in empowering parents to make informed decisions, alongside professionals, regarding the packages of care put in place for their children.

An excellent range of services and activities are designed and delivered through the centre, and reflect the specific needs of the community in which it is based. For example, the popular baby-ology course was developed by family support workers in partnership with the psychology service. This ante-natal group targets mums who

suffer low mood, supporting them through birth, thereby reducing the risk of them developing post-natal depression. Parents from this course spoke fondly of the lasting friendships made and the confidence they had gained, enabling them to try other courses and activities within the centre. The holistic approach to service provision is reflected in the seamless, individualised support which is provided for all families and children who access the centre.

High quality early years provision is ensuring that the achievement and aspirations of children are raised, a key barrier for many families locally. Each child who accesses the centre has an individual learning journey which tracks their progress and achievements during their time at the setting. The provision of training to raise awareness of the Early Years Foundation Stage amongst parents, has enabled many to better support their child's learning at home. As a result, many said that they now feel confident to contribute meaningfully to their child's learning journeys. The excellent and often innovative work of the early years educator in partnership with the day care provision has ensured the integration of the 'progress matters' principles into all aspects of their work. This, combined with exemplary arrangements for transition which involve parents, key workers and school as equal partners, ensures that children are well prepared for this challenge. Evaluations from individual parents about the quality of support all highlight the difference this has made to their own and their children's development and well-being. One parent described her journey from young mother to volunteer, to an inspirational community entrepreneur and explained how the coordination of support from the centre had ensured she had the confidence to take steps to change the direction of her life, improving not only her life chances but those of her children.

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	1
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 manager, ably supported by her senior team and advisory board are relentless in their drive for improvement. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures ensure that all staff and partners continually seek to improve their practice. The local authority has worked hard to develop a highly comprehensive data system, and access to this has now been granted to children's centre staff. This has provided a wealth of information to inform ongoing planning. A key strength of

this data system are the exemplary tracking procedures which enable staff to monitor the progress of specific target groups including; teenage parents, dads, those from workless households, prisoner families and those with a history of poor mental health or drug and alcohol misuse. This helps to ensure equality of opportunity and to identify potential barriers to access. The centre recognises that further work is needed to further refine the use of this data in order to sustain the exceptional levels of engagement and progress made by families across the locality.

The advisory board has an exemplary level of representation from parents and carers. Hugely knowledgeable about the centre's journey and the specific needs and challenges of their community, the advisory board are unrelenting in their drive to improve the life chances of every parent, carer, child and family locally, raising expectations and aspirations. The board actively subscribes to the well embedded ethos of self evaluation and reflective practice and use this exceptionally well to set challenging targets which perpetuates a cycle of continuous improvement, narrowing the achievement gap for those most disadvantaged.

The enthusiasm of all staff and partners within the centre is infectious and this is driven by the manager's high expectations. Without exception, everyone in the centre demonstrates high levels of dedication, commitment and determination to effect sustainable improved outcomes for every child and family. Staff recognise that there is no quick fix solution and have been resolute in their determination to build solid foundations, ensuring all change is deep rooted. The inclusion of all children and families is exemplary and a reflection of their genuine understanding of the community in which they are based. Staff are extremely motivated and committed in all aspects of their professional development. This is driven by the centre manager's commitment to empowering all staff to develop their skills, qualifications and knowledge in order to provide an holistic service to centre users. Individual strengths are recognised and used to develop services further. For example, the caretaker acts as a mentor to several young volunteers, sharing his expertise and knowledge with them. This helps to develop their confidence, self-esteem and work ethic.

Early intervention and prevention work is key to the centre's success in delivering high quality sustainable outcomes for all families and children. Extremely well-skilled and knowledgeable, all staff and partners have the confidence to identify needs and issues facing families at the earliest opportunity. All have an in-depth knowledge of policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding children, and are confident to follow these as required. Exemplary partnership working ensures that the centre is able to offer a highly cohesive, timely package of integrated services, intervening at the earliest opportunity to prevent situations escalating into crisis. Staff are particularly well trained and experienced in sensitively working with parents experiencing domestic violence or abuse. The role of the centre manager as a MARAC (Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference) Champion has been hugely valuable in reaching out to families facing this situation, offering support and guidance. One parent described her experience of this as 'life-saving.' Robust arrangements are in place to ensure that all staff and other professionals who deliver services through the centre are suitable to do so.

Resources are used and managed extremely effectively to meet the needs of families and children in the community. The centre manager and service leaders all work closely with the support services team leader within the local authority, ensuring budget allocations are aligned to ongoing priorities and remain responsive to the changing priorities and needs within the local community. Staff are extremely well deployed and utilised ensuring excellent value for money, the centre manager is acutely aware of the need to procure the sustainability of the centre.

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 integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
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	1
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	1

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Howdon Children's Centre hosts full-time day-care provision for children aged birth to school age and this is managed by a private provider; Childcare Enterprise Ltd. Four local primary schools, Denbigh, Stephenson Memorial, Holy Cross and Wallsend St Peter's, with Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children over three years, are also part of the centre's remit. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections has been taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in the report.

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 Howdon Children's Centre on 17 and 18 November 2010. We visited activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with you and professionals. Following this work, we have judged the centre as providing outstanding support to you and your family.

The children's centre provides a wealth of excellent activities, which are aimed at helping families improve their lives. Your views strongly support this as you tell us that you are happy with the activities you use because they have helped you in lots of different ways. For example, some of you have received excellent support as young mums, whilst others have found the opportunities to undertake training or work as a volunteer to be 'invaluable' and 'life changing.' The hard work and commitment of the community entrepreneurs who we met was inspirational. In particular, activities and provision for children before they start school has improved greatly and many of your children are making outstanding progress as a result, especially in regard to making friends and developing speaking, listening and reading skills.

We found that the children's centre offers lots of high quality programmes and activities aimed at improving the health of people in your local community. In particular, it has done really well in reducing the number of overweight children, as well as helping people to live healthier lifestyles by stopping smoking and through the provision of activities to encourage healthy eating and exercise. Whilst there is still more work to do to increase the number of new mums who choose to breastfeed their babies, we were impressed by the progress made so far. The centre continues to take action to improve this for the benefit of you and your family.

Most importantly, you tell us that you 'feel safe at the centre,' and can 'trust the staff to help you when you most need it'. You particularly appreciate the advice and help of the family support workers and have welcomed home visits and the opportunity to go with someone to a group until you build your confidence and make new friends. We found that the centre was doing an excellent job of helping you at times in your life when you most need it. We found that action was taken quickly and that different people and organisations worked exceptionally well as a team to support both children and families.

The centre is working extremely well with other partners such as health visitors and counsellors. You tell us that it is good to go to the many support groups and clinics and welcome the opportunity to talk to the health visitor or the family support worker in a relaxed, informal environment. A lot of parents, especially those who are bringing up children on their own, told us that they felt really happy on the days when they have an activity to go to and have found the friendships made through

the centre to have been 'life saving'. There is exemplary support for children with disabilities and parents are encouraged to take an active role in meetings with professionals, ensuring they are involved in making important decisions about their children's future.

We found that those people in charge of the children's centre are doing an outstanding job. Managers, together with partners and other staff have worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a real, genuine and lasting difference to the area in which you live. We know that everyone who works with Howdon Children's Centre shares this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a real difference to your lives. The centre has access to lots of detailed information to help them plan future activities. We have asked them to continue to develop the ways in which this information is used so that they can continue to improve outcomes for you all.

The centre has spent a lot of time ensuring that you are involved in making decisions about its direction and the different services it provides. We know that you feel genuinely respected and listened to as a result. We were particularly impressed by the tireless work and dedication of the 'Parents and Carers group' and heard first hand about some of the fantastic memories this group has helped to create. We hope that you continue to have great success in this aspect of your work.

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.