

Inspection report for North Tyne Children's Centre

Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	362536
Inspection dates	04–05 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Elizabeth Srogi HMI

Centre governance	North Tynies Childcare Ltd Voluntary Committee
Centre leader	Jenni Holland
Date of previous inspection	NA
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Linked school if applicable	Bellingham Middle School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY307505 North Tynies

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 early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, members of the voluntary management committee and stakeholder group, representatives from the local authority and a number of partners including childcare partners, health education and social care professionals and representatives from Jobcentre Plus, extended services and adult education.

They observed the centre's work both within the centre and in outreach services, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

North Tyne Children's Centre is a small children's centre set in a deeply rural area covering approximately 400 square miles of West Northumberland. It is made up of small communities where travel is an issue. There is limited public transport and distances between communities and the centre can be as much as 26 miles. This, along with a lack of sustainable employment opportunities, contributes to the area's social disadvantage. The majority of families in the area are of White British heritage. The proportion of children under four years living in non working households is 6.5%. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the reach area is low.

The centre opened as a children's centre in 2007 and has provided a full core offer of services since 2009. The centre is managed on behalf of the local authority by North Tynies Childcare Ltd voluntary committee and the centre manager is employed directly by them. However, her line management and supervision support is provided by the Northumberland County Council locality manager. The centre operates as a hub for services and provides some outreach services through four centres in the

area in Greenhaugh, Wark, West Woodburn and Otterburn where there is registered early years provision, Bellingham Fire Station and other venues.

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

North Tyne Children’s Centre is a very warm, welcoming and safe environment for all who use its services. The enthusiasm and commitment of the centre manager is evident in her attitude and actions to always work to significantly improve outcomes for children and families in the area. Many parents spoken to highlight how she is always prepared to go that extra mile and that no request for help and advice, no matter how large or small, goes unanswered. This way of working is replicated throughout the centre’s small workforce and the partners who work with them.

The overall management and governance of the centre is focused and ensures that the centre works towards specific targets to meet the needs of the children and families in the area. Evaluation of services, data and local knowledge is systematically carried out across the West Northumberland area and from this managers identify six key themes for the area as a whole whilst highlighting specific issues for each centre. Work to address these is carried out in reach areas. However, the large amount of evaluation material available in the centre does not always help the centre’s ability to evaluate services and their long term impact in a systematic way.

The centre’s work is greatly valued by all who come into contact with it. Parents, carers and professionals all speak highly of their involvement with the centre and its activities. Users particularly describe how support from the centre has changed and improved their lives. For example, parents have described the centre as their lifeline and that it has helped them in really low times in their lives.

Children’s and users’ enjoyment is evident in all activities provided in the centre. The linked early years provision was judged as outstanding in their last inspection. The

centre's work in improving children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is supported by a local headteacher and is said to directly contribute to children entering school with skills and experience in this area that are at or above those expected for their age. This also contributes to the significantly improving trend in children's achievements in the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and in narrowing the gap for children. Equality and diversity are considered in all aspects of the centre and its provision. The number of children and families for whom English is an additional language is very low in the area but recently a small number of families have come into the area and are being encouraged to use the centre's services. However, written information available in the centre is limited in their home language.

The range of effective services and activities provided for users promotes good outcomes for children and families within the local area. The activities provided within the centre and in its outreach work include 'stay and play' sessions, 'time out for mums' and Jobcentre Plus drop in sessions. The specific provision for dads and male carers to engage with their children in 'saturdads' has increased participation by dads in other centre activities.

Safety and safeguarding are very much strengths in the centre's work. All staff are fully committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of those who use its services and facilities. The centre manager and staff have a very good knowledge of the local community particularly in relation to the size of the area and the difficulties with transport and strive to involve users from across the reach area. Recent work in partnership with the health visitor has significantly improved not only the numbers registered with the centre but also the numbers accessing services.

The good outcomes for children and families and the manager's and staff's determination to continuously provide a high quality service that has a positive impact on children's and families' lives indicate that the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Streamline the amount of evaluation material available in the centre to ensure it can be effectively used to influence planning and longer term impact of services delivered through the centre.
- Improve the availability of written information in the centre to reflect the languages of the families and children using the services.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Evidence through case studies, observations and discussions with centre staff, partners and parents and carers all reflect that outcomes for children and families

who use the centre's services are good.

The centre's commitment to promoting healthy lifestyles is clear in its healthy pathways programme. Great emphasis is placed in the centre on the promotion of healthy eating. All meals offered in the centre use fresh vegetables, are home-cooked and are enjoyed by all. Parents have highlighted how such activities as 'tasty nibbles' a course for mums and children and 'the main meal' a course for dads have improved their eating at home. Children and families using the centre access a wide range of physical activities, such as trampolining for adults and children, rugby skills and baby yoga. Families are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy by accessing this provision and it is contributing to ensuring the levels of childhood obesity, currently assessed at 7% in the reach area, decrease. Children and parents and carers are improving their knowledge of dental health, following planned intervention based on local knowledge and data by the centre.

Effective partnerships with health services ensure that local families benefit from the range of services available. Breastfeeding in the area is higher than that generally in Northumberland and average sustainability of breastfeeding for the last three quarters shows that the North Tyne area is improving, whilst the numbers across Northumberland as a whole are decreasing. Smoking cessation advice is available from the health visitor, and centre staff play an active part in supporting users to stop smoking. Some parents and carers who use the centre have been successful in stopping smoking and are the faces on Northumberland's smoking cessation literature.

Good procedures ensure that children are very well safeguarded. Users comment how safe and comfortable they feel in the centre and that they fully trust the centre staff to care for their children. Children on child protection plans benefit from cooperative working and fewer children are going onto the child protection register due to the multi-agency support provided for families. Families increase their understanding of keeping children safe by accessing the provision of low cost safety equipment through the centre, by attending such courses, as first aid and by the detailed displays in the fun station at the fire station.

Children who use the centre and linked Early Years Foundation Stage facilities make good progress in their development. They enjoy activities such as 'stay and play' and, with the support of centre staff, parents and carers engage and get involved in their child's learning. Parents reported how they are encouraged to contribute to the children's learning journals.

Behaviour across the centre is good. Children observed in centre activities and local childcare provisions are well-behaved and relate well to each other and to staff. Users and staff treat each other with respect and consideration. Parents in the 'time out for mums' group spoke highly of how their views are listened to and how services have been introduced or changes made to existing services following their feedback.

Parents' attendance at the centre is helping to raise their aspirations and gain confidence in their own abilities. There is good evidence of parents and carers being helped to access training and employment. For example, some staff in the centre started their involvement as parents, went on to become volunteers and were helped by the centre to gain childcare qualifications. Others have been inspired, following support and activities in the centre, to start their own businesses. The Jobcentre Plus advisor regularly provides drop in sessions at the centre and the good links with centre staff means that any queries relating to work and benefits are quickly passed to the appropriate people to ensure guidance and support are given. Families attend services such as 'providing better-off calculations' to see if such things as taking up training and employment will improve their economic stability. All provision throughout the centre ensures children are helped to develop skills for the future.

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 provides good quality services, which are helping to improve the outcomes for families attending the centre and for those who receive more targeted work in their own homes through outreach work.

Partnership working and good assessment within the centre ensure the needs of users are effectively identified and that appropriate services and support are provided. Parents and carers identify how tailored support services meet their needs, improve their lives and are available to them as long as needed. They highlight how such things as the provision of transport make a great difference to their lives and can mean they may take advantage of services that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Learning, development and enjoyment are promoted well. Effective partnerships with adult education and family learning partners raise aspirations. The Early Years Professional supports staff across the centre in their work and development. Families

are helped to understand how their children learn in the early years and how they can support this through a series of workshops on the Early Years Foundation Stage story. Although these sessions were not well attended the feedback received was so positive that they will continue to be provided annually.

Achievement is celebrated throughout the centre. Work by children, parents and carers is displayed throughout the building. The widely distributed centre newsletter celebrates success.

There is a good range of provision available through the centre. Participation rates are generally good because the centre is making sure that the activities provided meet the needs and interests of individuals. The centre manager and staff are very aware that a major difficulty in this vast area is transport and isolation and therefore provide activities in other facilities across the reach area or facilitate transport provision, often in partnership with a local transport charity, 'Action by Differently Abled People in Tynedale. This encourages participation in activities. There are also opportunities for some parents and carers to access free driving lessons through a local scheme to reduce isolation and to improve access to work. The use of a playbus and the addition of the fun station for activities at the fire station further enhance the services and activities available.

Support for parents with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is provided by the centre. Services observed are clearly tailored to meet individual needs and to ensure, wherever possible, full integration into activities. Services provided develop confidence in parents and help them to make progress in their lives. Support is available to families from such services as parent support partners, portage and speech and language staff. Some staff have accessed specific training to further help and support children with speech and language concerns.

Care, guidance and support are strengths of this centre. Parents confirm that support provided is individualised to meet their needs and is provided in a non-threatening and sensitive way.

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

Governance arrangements are clearly in place. Lines of accountability are

understood. The voluntary management committee closely monitors the work of the centre and provides challenge to the centre and locality manager to ensure that provision is of good quality and meets the needs of the people in the reach area. Monitoring is also carried out by the local authority through the annual conversation, quarterly monitoring reports and the work of the children's centre improvement partner.

The centre has systems in place to monitor and evaluate its work. A significant part of planning is done as a West Northumberland group of five children's centres. Centre and locality managers work with staff and partners to identify future priorities through themed stakeholder meetings that has as its vision 'Together we will commit to closer collaboration between agencies and professionals leading to improved opportunities and outcomes for families and children'. The views of parents, carers and users are collected through such things as evaluations of all activities and interventions to monitor the quality of services provided and to support improvement. However, the quantity of information is large and this impacts on its use to inform planning and evaluation of long term impact of services. The centre's action plan links to the local authority strategic plans and includes specific centre targets.

Strong financial management arrangements are in place to monitor costs of services and day to day expenditure. Resources are used effectively within the centre, and outreach services are well planned and, where possible, link with other services to promote sustainability and value for money. Data are used effectively, along with the extensive local knowledge of the centre manager and staff, to ensure that service development meets local need. Performance management of staff is in place and arrangements for staff appraisal and supervision ensure training and development needs are identified and actioned.

Policies and procedures for the safeguarding of children are robust. All centre staff, partners who work in the centre and volunteers have had the required checks and all staff have had relevant training. Risk assessments are in place for all activities and care is taken that when outreach work is undertaken in outlying areas to know where the worker is and her expected time of return. Security at the centre is given high priority. Security cameras and the vigilance of the centre staff ensure entry to the centre is monitored and recorded.

Inclusion is embedded throughout the centre's work and all activities encourage full participation by all. However, written information displayed does not reflect the languages spoken by families who have recently come into the area. All disability and equality legislation is implemented throughout the centre and the centre is user friendly.

Partnerships across a range of services including links with local schools are well used to promote good and improving outcomes for children and their families.

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 wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

Inspection reports for the linked early years and childcare of North Tynies NNI and reports for West Woodburn Pre-school, Wark Pre-school, Greenhaugh Pre-school and Otterburn Pre-school.

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 the North Tyne Children's Centre on 4 and 5 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

You spoke very highly of the centre and the support it provides. Many of you gave examples of how the support, the activities the centre provides and the quality of outreach work have made a difference to your lives. You also highlighted how well staff listen to you and that your views affect the activities provided. You said that nothing was ever a trouble for the manager and centre staff and that no request for help, no matter how large or small goes unanswered and that they are always prepared to go that extra mile for you.

The centre offers lots of activities and courses to help improve the health of people in your community; courses such as 'tasty treats' and 'the main meal' have helped people to live healthier lives. Parents told us of their enjoyment of activities, such as trampolining and how coming to the centre had helped them to become fitter and healthier families.

Children who attend the centre's activities and linked childcare provision are helped to make good progress in their learning and development. Children and adults enjoy and value the sessions such as 'stay and play' and 'baby yoga'.

Ensuring the safety of children is a strength of the centre and all staff work well together to reduce the risk of harm to children. All of you were very clear that you and your children are safe in the centre. Such things as the availability of low cost safety equipment and the safety displays in the fun station have helped you improve safety in your homes.

We found that services work well together to provide help and support to all families including those with members who have identified needs. Everyone is made welcome in the centre and great efforts are made to help with such things as transport so that as many people as possible can enjoy the activities that are held in the centre or in other places. The centre is a very welcoming place to all and there is lots of helpful information displayed for you to read. However, written information is not available in all the languages that you speak so we have asked the centre to improve this.

We found that the people in charge are doing a good job. The centre manager, locality manager and all staff have worked hard along with partners such as health, adult learning and Jobcentre Plus to make sure that all the centre does and the help it gives will make a difference to your lives. The voluntary management committee which governs the centre has some of you as members and its work is effective in helping to ensure services meet your needs. We know the centre regularly asks for your views on activities and services and has made changes where needed following your comments. However, the centre collects lots of information and we have asked it to consider the way in which it keeps this so that it is effective in helping with the planning of future activities and in ensuring that what it does has a positive long term effect on families' lives.

Please accept our thanks for taking the time to talk 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.