

# Inspection report for Abingdon Children's Centre

Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	362419
Inspection dates	28 – 29 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Priscilla McGuire

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Elaine Teate
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Abingdon Road Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	508437 East/West Children's Centre

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 additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with a range of users, staff, partners, representatives from the advisory board and with representatives of the local authority linked to the centre.

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

## Information about the centre

Abingdon Children's Centre is a phase 1 children's centre and was originally set up as a Trailblazer centre providing the full core offer of services. In Middlesbrough, children's centres are clustered into four localities and Abingdon is one of three centres within the north locality. It is located in central Middlesbrough not far from the town centre and shares the same site as Abingdon Primary School and a nursery. The centre serves three of the most deprived wards in the country.

The local authority provides governance for the centre. There is also an advisory board that is responsible for providing advice and assistance for the purpose of ensuring the effective operation of the centre. The centre is managed by a centre leader who reports to a cluster manager who has responsibility for the three children centres within the north locality. The cluster manager reports to a service manager within the local authority.

Research shows that in Middlesbrough one in four children in the reception age group are overweight or obese and that the number of women smoking during pregnancy is significantly higher than the national average. Unemployment in the area is also well above the national average, with many families dependant upon workless benefits. The area has a significant minority ethnic population which is mainly of Asian heritage.

The majority of families accessing centre services live in the surrounding areas. The population is highly transient with students from overseas and families moving in and out of the area. The majority of users accessing the centre are from an ethnic minority background.

## 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

Abingdon Centre provides a warm, welcoming and attracting environment for all its users. 'I feel very happy coming here' said one parent, whose views are reflected by many other parents and carers. The centre is very effective in providing good overall support to children and families. Staff at the centre, and those working in the locality, know their community well and use local intelligence, input from parents and carers and effective partnerships to provide services that effectively meet the needs of the wider community and centre users.

The catchment area for the centre includes a large Asian community, members of whom are the main users of the centre. These users report that they feel very welcome at the centre and feel that their views are valued. Diversity is celebrated and staff have a strong personal commitment to promoting equality and inclusion. However, staff training in equality and diversity practice has not been systematic and the self-evaluation and delivery plan does not make sufficient references to actions to improve the approach to equality and diversity training.

Outcomes for users are good and the centre is effective in promoting healthy living. It uses local and wider comparative data about health priorities to ensure that the provision meets individual and group needs. Productive partnerships with the local Primary Care Trust, adult learning services, Connexions and other agencies is integral to the centre’s success. A range of good services are provided to equip parents and carers with the knowledge to improve their own health and that of their children. Health clinics and courses are organised to help parent recognise the importance of physical activities and play in promoting good physical and emotional health and

development.

The centre provides targeted and effective support for families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. Interventions have led to clear improvements in children's behaviour and development, which are recognised by parents and carers and by other agencies. Centre staff and staff within the locality use the Common Assessment Framework to identify the needs of families and to provide the most appropriate referrals and interventions. Universal services include health clinics, sessions such as 'Tots Have Fun' and 'Kids in the Kitchen,' which are very well attended and are very popular with users. During the summer, trips, such as a farm visit, are also arranged to promote learning and development.

Overall, the provision of information and guidance is good. However, although informal advice and guidance about welfare benefits is available from staff, there are no agencies as yet in place to provide professional advice about benefits, welfare or employment. This gap in provision has been recognised by the centre and staff are being trained to provide welfare advice.

Strategic and operational management of the centre are good. Staff at every level work well towards meeting the overall objective of providing services that link clearly to the Every Child Matters and Early Years Foundation Stage Strategy outcomes. Staff are also strongly committed to the overall strategy of providing early intervention to families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances and preventing problems from reaching crisis levels.

The centre's capacity to provide sustained improvement is very good. Performance management and accountability measures are set at local authority level and are robust and rigorous. There is a clear cycle of continuous improvement, which is based on the local authority's outcomes-based accountability' system. Managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and have actions in place to address these. Significant investments have been made to improve the quality of data provided by the local authority to centres. Available data is used well by the centre to identify and respond to local priorities, however, the use of comparison data and target setting, based on reliable and up-to-date information, is an area for further development. Good, effective safeguarding arrangements are in place. Staff have appropriate and regular training in child protection and safeguarding and know what action to take when risks to the safety of children are presented. The centre works productively with other agencies to protect children.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Strengthen the quality of self-evaluation and the delivery plan by setting and monitoring targets using as much reliable information as possible.
  
- Incorporate equality and diversity actions into delivery plans to ensure practice

is informed and supported by clear implementation strategies.

- Ensure formal arrangements are in place to provide good quality information and guidance about job opportunities, welfare and benefits advice.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>2</b>
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Users have good access to activities and learning to improve their health and that of their children. One parent said about the centre 'It is a life line, I am a single parent and had post natal depression... I was really down, but they came to visit me and brought me to the centre and I come every week now.' Her views are representative of other users, who have gained practical help to resolve health problems after attending the centre.

Guidance and support is also effective in helping users make informed choices about their health. For example, some parents and carers report that they started to participate in other physical activities after attending family swimming sessions. Parents and carers also learn about healthy eating through sessions, such as 'Kids in the kitchen' and the 'Premier Health' course, which is targeted at fathers. Parents and carers report that they have made positive changes at home as a result of their learning. For example, one parent reported that she learnt how to make baby food as a result of her participation on a course. There is also good planning of activities to respond to the local priority around reducing obesity. For example, regular weight management sessions are offered at the centre and also a 'weaning' course.

Safety is actively promoted at the centre and within the home. Through the 'home safety' Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents scheme, many parents and carers have had their home assessed for the risk of accidents and have subsequently had free equipment installed to make their home a safer environment. Safety is also actively promoted in the centre. For example, a coffee machine from an open access area was removed and replaced with a water machine to remove the risk of children being harmed by hot drinks. In spite of complaints from some users, the staff have continued to reinforce the message that safety has to be prioritised. Staff also act as good role models by making an immediate and effective response to any observed unsafe practice exhibited by parents and carers.

Family support workers are actively involved in multi-agency work to protect children who are deemed to be vulnerable and their families. They signpost families to appropriate agencies or to the centre for targeted parenting support or to sessions that will help them improve their parenting skills. Staff also use a local Common Assessment Framework database to collect information about assessments that have already been carried out by other agencies and to make an informed decision about how best to provide intervention and support to children on child protection plans or who have other needs.

Data and other information shows that the Early Years Foundation Stage profile for

children who attend the centre is improving and children in the childcare provider that shares the site with the centre are making good progress. Staff have a good understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and children are working well towards meeting outcomes. The progress in children’s learning is well demonstrated and children build on what they know and can do. Children observed during sessions were well-behaved. Case studies show that intervention and parenting guidance, through the ‘Triple P’ parenting programme, have led to improvements in children’s behaviour. Children enjoy attending the centre and parents and carers comment on how much they enjoy activities, such as messy play. ‘Children can do things here with messy play that they couldn’t do at home,’ said one parent.

Good development of skills has enabled some users to progress into employment. However, formal and regular guidance about employment from the Jobcentre Plus (JCP) is not yet established within the centre, due to limited resources and limited availability of staff from JCP to have a regular presence in the centre. A service level agreement with the centre is in place but has yet to have any impact.

*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>2</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>2</b>

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

**2**

The centre meets its core offer well. Provision is of a good quality and is explicitly linked to Early Years Foundation Stage and Every Child Matters outcomes. Learning is, therefore, purposeful as each activity or session has clearly identified and recorded outcomes, which are used as the basis for planning, evaluation and improvement. Reflective practice is encouraged for every planned activity or session. A good range of activities, trips and courses are provided for users. Health clinics such as, the ‘Baby & Child Health clinic’ are well attended. Users enjoy other sessions such as ‘Tots Have Fun’ and ‘Messy Mondays’. Good links with adult learning services are also used to promote learning that meets users’ needs.

Good support is available for mothers who feel particularly isolated because of being separated from relatives, who live in foreign countries, who may have language barriers or in some cases because of both issues. One parent commented, 'I am very shy so was a lonely parent. My family live away. I came here and met the nice staff. I did the weaning course and it has helped. I give no jars to my child now – all healthy stuff. I've also learnt lots about how to play with my child. We paint at home and make things.'

Translation and interpreter services are provided as appropriate and bilingual support is also available from within the staff team. Leaflets and booklets are also provided in a selection of community languages. Working parents and carers remain a target group for engagement with the centre and some adjustments have been made and activities, such as 'Little kickers,' is now offered on a Saturday morning to attract fathers who would not be able to attend weekday sessions.

Assessment of the needs of children, parents and carers and other users is systematic and affective. Case studies demonstrate the progress children make with their behaviour, personal and social development. One mother interviewed said that since her child started attending sessions at the centre, his behaviour had improved but also had his confidence, independence and language skills. Allocation panels are used to identify the most appropriate referral route for individual users. Regular meetings such as the locality coordinators meetings are also used effectively to monitor and track the progress of users. Data provided by the local authority is used as appropriate to identify priorities for the centre and to ensure provision is matched to needs of the wider community.

Parent consultation is ongoing and the 'parent voice' is highly valued. Parents and carers feel their opinions are respected and that they can make a difference to the way the centre operates. Suggestions for improvement are encouraged and acted upon as appropriate. A weekly 'Parenting Network' meeting is held which gives parents and carers the opportunity to discuss issues, make suggestions and plan events. For example, one major item on the agenda at the time of inspection was planning for Eid celebrations. During the network meeting, parents and carers discussed the meals representing their individual cultures that they were going to prepare for the event. A parent consultation board is also used to collect views from parents and carers, and this along with the regular evaluations and feedback collected from events and sessions, is used to ensure parents' and carers' views inform delivery.

The centre operates a 'handholding service,' which is particularly effective for outreach work with less confident and harder to reach members of the wider community. Centre staff accompany new users to the centre until they feel confident enough to make the journey alone. Home visits are also effective in providing individual support and guidance. Good child care is available from the East/West nursery on site, which works in partnership with the centre and is located on the

same site. The service was graded well on inspection in 2007.

The needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities or delayed development are also well met and the service works effectively with other agencies to provide physiotherapy and speech and language support for children with specific needs.

*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>2</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>2</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?**

**2**

The centre is well managed by the centre leader and the cluster leader. Leadership at local authority level is effective in providing a clear strategic direction for the centre. Communication is good and staff within the centre, the locality and the local authority meet at frequent and scheduled intervals to share information, share good practice and review performance. Staff have a good understanding of how their role contributes to the overarching regional strategy to provide support and early intervention to users and to the wider community. The advisory board has good representation from parents and carers and partners and contributes to decision making. However, its role as an independent body that can challenge decisions and review targets is still developing.

The centre manager, cluster manager and senior managers at local authority level know the local community well and have a very good knowledge of the centre strengths and areas for development. The self-evaluation is generally accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses in the provision. The centre has made best use of available data and local intelligence to identify priorities. The quality of data provided by the local authority has improved and is now being used more effectively to measure performance.

The service delivery plan and action plan is well informed by self-evaluation and articulates the direction of the centre and identifies key actions for improvement. Continuous monitoring at every level of service delivery is evident and is being used to drive improvement. The centre routinely seeks the views of parents and carers



and children and uses child/parent and carer friendly methods to collect views. Good value for money is achieved by the sharing of both practical and human resources across the locality. Best use is also made of the accommodation in the centre so, for example, an information and communication technology room was converted into a multi-purpose room and personal computers replaced with laptops to allow for greater flexibility of use of the room.

Effective strategies are in place to engage groups, such as fathers and Traveller families and diversity is celebrated. Inclusion of parents and carers who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also promoted through dedicated courses such as the '123 play group'. Case studies show that staff have used the 'Portage scheme' effectively to provide home-based interventions and support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Staff are well trained in safeguarding and training is up to date. Vetting is rigorous and robust and appropriate checks on external agencies are carried out as appropriate. Staff work well to follow policies and procedures and have a good understanding of the Common Assessment Framework system. Locality-based family support teams offer personalised and targeted support to vulnerable families and children. There is good multi-agency working to promote safeguarding and staff are proactive in implementing safeguarding procedures. Parents and carers say they feel safe and that the centre is safe for their children. Domestic violence is an issue within the community and the centre has worked in partnership with a local charity to provide the 'Freedom' programme, which provides support for women affected by domestic abuse.

Good multi-agency work with partners is used to support users and families and, for example, 'team around the child meetings' were arranged by a family support worker for a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, who was also violent and aggressive. After intervention and support, significant and positive behavioural changes in the child were noted.

*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>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	2
<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>	2
<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>	2

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

The report from the inspection of the Abingdon East/West nursery which works in partnership with the centre and is located on the same site was also taken into account. This inspection in 2007 graded the service as being good.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected Abingdon Children's Centre on 28-29 October 2010 and we met a number of you during our visit. We talked to staff from the centre, from other centres within the locality and from other organisations who work with your centre to provide services and activities. During our visit we were able to observe some sessions and activities. We judged the centre as good overall.

Those of you that we spoke to told us that you enjoyed coming to the centre and felt happy and safe there. You also told us that your children enjoyed coming to the centre and particularly enjoyed activities such as 'messy play'. You also liked being able to meet up with other parents and carers and share ideas. For some of you who do not have any relatives in the area, you particularly valued the opportunity to meet up with other parents and carers on a regular basis.

Your children's centre provides good support and is very much at the heart of your community. Abingdon Children's Centre is very well used and we know that sometimes this means that you have to go on a waiting list for an activity or course. The centre staff are constantly reviewing how to manage the demand for popular activities.

From our observations, discussions and case studies, we were able to see how much impact the centre is having on your lives. For example, some of you told us that you were able to improve your own health and that of your children after attending particular sessions at the centre or receiving guidance and support from some of the staff.

Your centre offers a good range of various activities, trips and training sessions, such as 'Kids in the Kitchen' and the 'Premier Health' course, which is aimed at fathers. You can also get good quality guidance and support to deal with health problems, parenting and safety in your home. Some of you also told us that you have received help to make your homes safer for your children by having the risks of accidents occurring in your home assessed and then by having safety equipment installed. The staff at the centre offer you home visits if required and give you personal and individual attention to help you become better parents and carers and to help your children succeed in life.

We know that many of you who use the centre belong to the Asian community and some of you told us that you feel you are treated very well and respectfully by staff. However, there are many aspects to equal treatment and we feel that the centre can do even better to make sure all staff have relevant training in the different aspects of equality and diversity, and that it should include equality and diversity action points in its planning for the future.

Your centre is starting to use data and other information more effectively to make sure that what is offered by the centre matches what is needed. We have asked the centre to try and use as much information as possible to set targets to measure more accurately how well the community needs and local priorities for the area are

being met. We have also asked the centre to make arrangements to ensure that you have access to good welfare, benefits and employment advice.

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us during our visit. We very much enjoyed talking with you and we appreciated your willingness to talk with us about some of your personal experiences. 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)