

# Inspection report for Blackhall Children's Centre

Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	362446
Inspection dates	20-21 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Karen Ling

Centre governance	Durham County Council
Centre leader	Mrs Pauline Cogan
Date of previous inspection	n/a
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Linked school if applicable	Blackhall Colliery Primary School 114201
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Giant Steps EY340478

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

An inspection of the maintained primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the manager, senior leadership team, staff, representatives of the governing body, strategic leaders from the local authority, 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

Blackhall Children's Centre opened as a phase one centre in 2006 and is the smallest of 13 designated centres in the Easington area. Of these, six form the Peterlee cluster and operate under one manager. The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery at Blackhall Children's Centre is the responsibility of Durham County Council. The centre is situated on the site of Blackhall Colliery Primary School. Also on the site is Giant Steps, a 40-place privately run childcare setting for children under eight years of age. It is open for 51 weeks of the year. Children enter childcare with levels of skills and ability well below those expected for their age.

Blackhall is a small rural village and the centre serves a community that ranks in the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The centre reach contains parts that are both advantaged and significantly disadvantaged. Employment figures in the area are very low, with many families having a variety of benefits as their main source of

income. Qualification levels are very low. The vast majority of families are of White British heritage. The centre offers the full range of integrated services for children and their families. Some activities are run from Blackhall Colliery Primary School, St Joseph's Primary School, the village community centre, Hesleden Methodist Church and other children's centres within the Easington area. The centre has achieved the Healthy Early Years Award.

## 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

Blackhall Children's Centre meets the needs of users well overall. Care, guidance and support are outstanding in this very welcoming centre which has created a whole-community approach to supporting every aspect of family well-being. In the words of one parent interviewed during the inspection, 'The staff here are brilliant; you can't get any better than these.' These words reflect the views of many. The coordination of a range of guidance and support is very good and users say that the services provided are having a positive impact on their lives. As a result, the well-being for many families is improving.

The centre is totally inclusive providing for a wide range of users and promoting equality well. Activities and learning opportunities focus on the immediate needs of users and are adapted to support their changing requirements. While the centre is very much a focus of the community for many, it is not very visible within the community because of where it is sited. Staff work hard to disseminate information beyond the centre and have a general knowledge of the representation of users. Work on establishing an accurate picture of how well current users represent the reach area, including hard-to-reach groups, is at an early stage.

Effective collaborative working operates between partners and the six children's centres within the Peterlee cluster. Resources such as staff are shared across the children's centres. Activities and training are coordinated effectively to ensure a sustainable rolling programme. As such, users are able to access services across the joint reach areas.

Exemplary procedures and protocols for safeguarding are robust and regularly reviewed. All staff are well trained and continuously update their knowledge to ensure they have the most current guidance. Consequently, staff effectively ensure the ongoing safety and well-being of children and their families. Users, including parents and children, feel very safe at the centre.

The manager shows drive and ambition and successfully uses the skills and talents of the centre coordinator and team to full advantage. Consequently, strong teamwork, high expectations and continuous improvement are central to the work of the centre. The local authority is aware of the limitations of the data it has access to and the difficulty faced in getting current, accurate data from service providers. In addition, much data collected represent the Peterlee cluster of six centres and are not broken down sufficiently for each designated centre. This impedes the efforts made to evaluate the full impact of this centre. The advisory board is at an early stage of development having moved from a management board model. Parent representation is not yet strong enough and an independent chairperson has yet to be appointed. Nonetheless, an increasingly robust quality assurance role is being provided by the local authority and the advisory board is becoming increasingly effective in identifying priorities through effective consultation. Managers and staff routinely reflect on practice to evaluate the impact of provision. Self-evaluation is accurate and informs the development plan. This has a positive impact on developments made to provision and meeting individual needs. However, managers are aware of the need to collect and use data more astutely. As such, the centre is in a good position to build on successes in the future and further improve outcomes for families and children.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen parental representation on the advisory board and appoint an independent chairperson.
- Develop availability of accurate and current data which is specific to the immediate reach area in order to make clear comparisons with national indicators and accurately measure the full impact of the work of the centre.
- Develop strategies to make the centre more visible to the reach area to ensure all relevant users including the hard to reach groups are targeted.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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Evidence through case studies and discussions with partners and parents all reflect the very positive impact of partnership working on children's and families' emotional well-being and physical health. As yet, however, there is limited statistical evidence to demonstrate high levels of impact. Families engage well in the services offered by the centre. The good advice and training on health issues and safety in the home are

having a positive impact on how well families keep themselves and their children healthy. For example, antenatal and postnatal support is well attended and there is an improving picture of smoking cessation during pregnancy as well as sustained breastfeeding. Users completing the home safety course improve their safety awareness and develop a very good range of knowledge including how to reduce potential dangers in the home, and basic first aid. This enables them to promote the safety of their families. Children using services at the centre are effectively safeguarded including children from vulnerable families and those who are hard to engage. The knowledge and involvement by the centre in the use of the common assessment framework and those subject to a child protection plan is highly effective in improving the safeguarding of children.

Children make good progress in their learning and development and those who attend the registered childcare provision achieve exceptionally well. Transition arrangements prepare them very well for their move to school. Children with speech and language difficulties are quickly identified by well-trained staff and referred to speech therapy where they make good progress. Courses such as 'You make the difference' are also having a positive impact on the support parents give to their children, particularly in terms of their language development. Parents report that they really enjoy and benefit from the recreational activities, such as the fathers' Sunday group, 'Big cook, Little cook', and parenting courses. Skills learnt, such as making cakes together, are then repeated in the home. Those who attend adult training and education courses develop relevant skills such as numeracy and literacy. Some have achieved accredited qualifications and have gone on to secure employment. The courses planned are decided upon in light of the changing job market. For example, some have gone on to become qualified teaching assistants while others are working towards a social care qualification.

Parents' and carers' views are acted upon and while a small number of parents currently take part in decision making more work needs to be done to increase the level of their engagement in this aspect of the centre's work. One area of impact is the recently improved outdoor play area. A family activity day was arranged for parents and children to brighten up the area and introduce plants. Such positive contributions made by users and the achievements of families and children are leading to improved outcomes and well-being for families and their children.

*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 the core offer well. It is valued by the community and users say they find the centre extremely approachable. All provision is of good quality and contributes effectively to improving outcomes for children, parents and carers and all users of the centre. This is because staff get to know families well and assess their individual needs. Effective partnership working with child and health services ensures that assessment is robust and families benefit from the wide range of activities on offer. Assessment of individual cases is robust and the common assessment framework is successfully ensuring teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as being in need.

Parents report that the care and support given are exceptional and staff ensure that support is provided for as long as needed. The well-planned activities for babies and toddlers ensure children are well cared for while receiving stimulation and the opportunity to explore their environment. Baby massage, well baby clinics and weaning advice sessions are well attended and provide excellent guidance and support for parents and carers.

Learning, development and enjoyment are promoted well. Good and developing partnership working with childcare providers and the school is ensuring that aspirations are raised. The quality of provision in the childcare provision commissioned by the centre is excellent. Collaborative working with the centres' early years teacher is having a positive impact in raising the quality of early years provision across the centre and beyond. The level of individual care provided by staff is excellent because of their commitment to enabling families to succeed. This is evident in the range of qualifications achieved by users which has provided them with the means to secure employment locally. The centre provides a daily update of jobs. These are displayed in the welcoming reception area and staff are always available to help download application forms and offer support in completing them. In addition, while there is no direct input to the centre from Jobcentre Plus, a member of staff attends the local jobcentre each month to help and support children's centre users who attend.

Staff work with users well. Appropriate services are provided to support those experiencing alcohol and drug misuse and staff continuously reflect on how and where services are provided to better meet the needs of users.

However, the information collected about the uptake of services and activities is not always specific to this centre. As a result, data do not show trends over time of participation rates, or how well target groups are being met within the reach area.

*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>1</b>

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

**2**

Governance, lines of accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood. As a result, multi-agency working and performance management are effective at all levels. The manager continually strives for the centre to offer the best service possible. This ambition is shared by all staff who work together exceptionally well. Good lines of communication exist and morale is high across the centre. Much has already been done to analyse local needs and staff are not complacent about the ongoing need to target the hard-to-reach. The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision.

Development plans show some rigour in evaluating the work of the centre. However, information tends to reflect the work of the Peterlee cluster and lacks rigorous data analysis of this centre's work and the impact it is making on outcomes. Consequently, while priorities for development are realistic, challenging targets are not measurable or sufficiently specific to this centre.

The centre has high quality arrangements for safeguarding all users. The vetting of staff is rigorous and relevant training is regularly updated. All staff, including administration and cleaning staff, have a secure knowledge of policies and the manager ensures that they consistently have access to current guidance. Comprehensive risk assessments are completed and regularly reviewed. Staff are vigilant in identifying and responding to potential dangers that users may encounter. Robust procedures and protocols ensure that information is shared between partners so that the needs of children and families at risk are prioritised.

The centre deploys staff well and uses resources effectively to ensure that users of this centre can benefit from a wide range of integrated and cohesive services delivered from a number of venues. For example, while the number of teenage pregnancies in the area is relatively low, prospective mothers can join with those from other centres to receive advice and support. The involvement of the centre with the co-located school's Early Years Foundation Stage unit is having a positive impact on the quality of provision. This is proving to be successful in tackling variations in outcomes and narrowing the achievement gap. The creative use of accommodation and resources is impressive. Leaders and managers have plans to maximise the available space even further to better meet the needs of users and ensure the centre continues to provide good value for money.

*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 agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The registered childcare was inspected on 19 October 2010. It was not inspected fully as part of this children's centre inspection. The co-located primary school was inspected on 19 and 20 October 2010. [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Blackhall Children's Centre on 20 and 21 October 2010. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with parents and carers, the staff, a range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We judged the centre as good overall. It has outstanding procedures to safeguard all users.

Parents and carers told us that this is the centre of the community and that you can trust staff to help you. We found your children's centre to be a very welcoming place to be and you are able to talk freely to staff about your child's development or things that are causing you concern. You told us that staff listen to you and make sure that the right advice and support is offered. We found that the centre is excellent at helping people at times in their lives when they most need it; action is taken quickly and different people and organisations work exceptionally well as a team to support children and families.

The centre offers a good range of services and activities which are led by dedicated and skilled professionals. Parents we spoke to thoroughly enjoy attending services such as the weaning course and baby clinic and activities such as 'Twinkle Time' and 'Messy Play' with their babies and children. The centre offers regular activities to involve dads, such as the Sunday morning activities and family fun days. Good opportunities are made available for those of you who wish to improve skills and qualifications and this is helping some of you to secure employment. We also found that services work well together as a team to provide help and support to families with children or parents who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The people in charge of running the centre are doing a good job. Under the careful direction of the manager and centre coordinator, staff provide excellent care, guidance and support for you and act on your views and suggestions. To develop the work of the centre further we have asked staff and the local authority to encourage more parents to be involved in the management of the centre. We have also asked staff and the local authority to improve the way they monitor the impact of the work they do and ensure that as many families as possible benefit from its provision.

We thoroughly enjoyed the time we spent at your centre. Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak with us and we wish you every success in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).