

Inspection report for Chatham House Children's Centre

Local authority	Hartlepool
Inspection number	362454
Inspection dates	20-21 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre governance	Hartlepool Borough Council
Centre leader	Mrs Sarah Foster-Elsdon
Date of previous inspection	n/a
Centre address	29 Chatham Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland, TS24 8QG
Telephone number	01429 284466
Fax number	No Fax
Email address	Sarah.foster-elsdon@hartlepool.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Chatham House Day Nursery

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 years inspector.

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents, 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 Jobcentre Plus, Barnardos, MIND and the West View Advice and Resource Centre.

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

Information about the centre

Chatham House Children's Centre is located in the north of Hartlepool and covers the Dyke House Ward. This is in the top 2% deprived wards in the country. The reach population of the centre is 433, however, the numbers of children under five years old has decreased steadily over the past three years from 471 in 2007/2008. This is possibly due to the local regeneration programme which has seen hundreds of houses demolished over the past three years, with a large number of social housing replaced by private dwellings. Housing is therefore, limited and the nature of the community is changing. Recent figures show that 47.6% of households are lone parents with dependent children, compared to 39.6% for Hartlepool as a whole. Estimated weekly income is significantly lower than the Hartlepool average, and the percentage of the working age population in receipt of income benefits is 35.9%. 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 opened in 2006 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. The centre, a three council house conversion, operates as a 'one-stop-shop' model, providing the full core offer. The centre hosts a full-time day care provision for children from three months to school age and this is managed by the local authority. The team and centre manager work across the central area of Hartlepool. This comprises a further phase 3 centre on the site of Throston Primary School. Governance arrangements transferred to an advisory board in 2010.

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

Chatham House Children's Centre provides good and improving support to children and families who live within its locality. Strengths include the support for those with mental health issues, services for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, support for young mothers and the well established, highly effective multi-agency partnerships which provide good quality care and support. The centre's approach to safeguarding is robust and in line with local strategic plans.

A range of partners successfully work together to support the health and emotional well-being of children and families and there is a strong focus on promoting healthy lifestyles. For example, the centre has achieved 100% immunisation rates for children aged four to five years of age. Working in partnership with MIND, the centre has increased the number of counselling sessions offered to local families due to increased demand and can point to numerous case studies to demonstrate the impact of this work. One parent commented that counselling sessions had helped to improve her confidence and made her feel like a 'good mum.' There is also a successful pathway of support for 'mums-to-be' through 'Bump to Baby' and the more targeted 'Ready for Baby' programmes which are co-delivered with health colleagues and which are both well attended. However, breast feeding rates across Hartlepool remain low at approximately 20% and work is continuing in partnership with health colleagues, including the breastfeeding coordinator, to address this. The proposed development of peer-support worker networks and a baby café are aimed at improving matters, and work is underway to achieve accreditation with UNICEF's 'baby friendly' initiative.

The vision for the centre is shared well between partners, and as a result services are fully integrated, particularly the shared actions taken to support, involve and improve outcomes for parents and their children. Centre staff are responsive to the requests of parents and the majority of services have been developed and changed to meet these expressed needs. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and there is convincing evidence that the developing outreach services are increasingly supporting more hard-to-reach families; reach figures for the past 12 months show an improvement of 40%. However, managers are aware that more needs to be done to make sure outreach is fully identifying the needs of the whole community, so that more families can benefit from the good support available. Links with adult services, such as the drug and substance misuse teams and the delivery of play sessions at some of their centres, are examples of the innovative approaches taken to engage the most vulnerable families in the community. Through knowing the community well and having a good understanding of the strengths and gaps in service provision, the centre manager is aware that support to improve breastfeeding rates and the uptake of training and adult education opportunities are a key priority. Following consultation with the local community, ambitious plans have been developed that provide a clear agenda for future activities. These plans have accompanying quantitative targets for improvement, thereby enabling the centre and the Children's Trust to fully evaluate the impact of their actions.

An advisory board, which covers two children's centres in the central locality of Hartlepool, has been established. Members of the board spoken to during the inspection are fully supportive of the work of the centre and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Improved data systems and the use of impact assessment tools have been introduced to improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation activities. As a result, planning is well targeted and the advisory board members have the capacity to challenge the impact and progress made by the centre against its targets. However, whilst these systems are now embedded, the centre's ability to track individual family's journeys through the centre is still developing and this currently limits the ability to evaluate the longer term impact of the centre's work. Whilst parents have opportunities to discuss issues in relation to the centre through a 'Parents Forum', this is not consistent. Furthermore, their absence on the advisory board minimises the extent to which they can contribute to the ongoing developments of the centre they represent.

Taking into account the good outcomes, the centre's overall effectiveness is also good. This together with the leadership's determined focus on improvement, identifying and meeting needs indicates the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Continue to develop outreach work to secure improved outcomes for all families locally, particularly in relation to improved breastfeeding rates and the uptake of training and adult education opportunities.
- Continue to develop work around participation to ensure parents are empowered to contribute to the governance of the centre through meaningful representation on the advisory board.
- Further develop and embed systems to ensure the consistent longer term evaluation of the impact of all services delivered through the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Effective partnerships with child and family health services ensure that an increasing number of local families are benefiting from the wide range of activities offered. This includes antenatal classes, parenting courses, counselling sessions commissioned through MIND, well-baby clinics and weaning advice. The work undertaken in relation to smoking cessation has been particularly successful, and has achieved national recognition. Whilst there has been some reduction in under-18 conception rates, these are still too high, although the centre can point to a reduction in the number of second pregnancies amongst this group. There is good support and advice available to teenage parents and this is delivered in partnership with the teenage pregnancy support service. The introduction of a clinic at the centre, specifically for young mothers, has proved popular and gives them an opportunity to visit the centre and find out about the support available.

Families are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy through activities such as 'Tasty Treats' weaning advice, Crafty Cooking, Jump and Jive, Greenfingers and Aqua-natal sessions. Parents attending the weaning class spoke about how these activities had changed their practice and made them more aware of the choices they made about what to feed their young babies. The importance of the role of fathers is also extremely well supported, particularly through the work of the father's project commissioned by the children's centre to Headlands Futures. Fathers are involved in delivering services to support families, including 'dad's baby massage' and toddler groups. The very positive impact of this work is reflected in the increasing number of men who attend activities, many of whom commented on how included they now feel and how much more confidence they have in their very important role as a father. The introduction of the 'Dad of the Year' award had also helped to show fathers locally how much they are valued.

Good procedures ensure that children are well safeguarded. Parents say that they feel safe in the centre and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Partnership working with health visitors, Harbour, a local group 'PATCH' commissioned by the centre to deliver the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents scheme and the family support workers is helping to successfully raise children's and families' awareness of safety both in the home and their communities. Excellent multi-agency support for families referred to the centre in times of acute crisis is helping to reduce the number of children under five years of age entering care or moving onto Child Protection Plans.

The work of the early years consultants, combined with the centre's involvement in the ECAT (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 communication, language and literacy. The gap between the lowest 20% of children achieving expected levels in key early learning goals, and that for all children in Hartlepool has narrowed considerably over the past year. Professionals talked to during the inspection spoke of the positive impact close working with the centre has had in breaking down barriers, raising aspirations, and improving outcomes for young children.

All parents spoken to by inspectors commented on how their confidence had improved as a result of their involvement with the children's centre. A visit to the well- baby clinic provided compelling evidence of parents chatting to family support workers in a relaxed, informal environment, where they felt able to ask questions and seek advice. There are many examples of how this has ensured early intervention in relation to a range of issues including speech and language development, behaviour and post-natal depression. Parents all feel that they are listened to and that services provided meet their specific needs, for example, the construction of the garden room, and the development of new groups such as the Avondale Angels.

Whilst children are successfully developing skills for the future, action to help parents into training and employment is not as effective. Effective partnership working with Jobcentre Plus has resulted in regular, individual advice sessions to lone parents, whilst the work of the West View Advice and Resource Centre is enabling families to successfully access benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled. The local Credit Union also works with families in the centre, and regularly attends a number of activities, offering advice in a more informal environment. In order to better meet the training needs of families, there are planned discussions with adult education services to close this already identified gap.

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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

2

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 the care coordination team and the centre's family support workers ensuring 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 scheme had enabled her to stay in employment. The recent provision of 'portage training' for both professionals and parents, has been key in empowering parents to make informed decisions alongside professionals regarding the packages of care put in place for their children

Participation rates in activities have been variable but are improving because the centre is making sure that they are better at meeting the range of needs and interests within the community. A detailed action plan has been developed in response to the findings of a recent community consultation, and a significant amount of work has been undertaken in relation to targeting particular groups, such as fathers, those with mental health issues or drug and alcohol dependencies. As a direct result, there is evidence of an increase in the number of families accessing the centre. The dedication and commitment of all involved in the centre, including the family support workers, universal outreach workers and the community involvement worker, ensures a continued focus on community development and engagement. The centre recognises there is still more to do to fully engage some families, however, the distance travelled to reach this point is testament to the quality of the provision offered.

Effective partnerships with local professionals means that the assessment of individual cases is robust and the common assessment framework is successfully ensuring that teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need. The role of the children's centre in the establishment of effective exit strategies is improving, ensuring that parents can build their confidence and parenting skills, and supporting them to independence at a pace that is appropriate to them. A focus on developing effective channels of communication has also helped to strengthen multi-agency working and has streamlined processes to ensure that meetings successfully and efficiently identify and assess those children and families who need immediate support. The inclusion of the children's centre team in this process ensures that those who do not quite meet children's social care thresholds still benefit from additional support, illustrating the vital role played by the children's centre in prevention strategies. Parents, including those from more vulnerable groups, testify to the timeliness and quality of individual support, which is available for as long as needed.

Improved provision from early years providers and schools is ensuring that the achievement and aspirations of children are raised, a key barrier for many families locally. Learning and development in these settings have been judged at least good and outstanding in some cases. All centre staff are being supported by the early

years consultant to integrate the Early Years Foundation Stage into all aspects of their work. This, combined with well-planned 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, 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 holistic approach to service provision is reflected in the seamless, individualised support which is provided for all families and children who access the centre. Key to this success is the effective multi-agency working which ensures that families can access the right kind of support, be it from MIND, health workers, social care colleagues, speech and language therapists, or support and advice on benefits. Outreach work is improving and recent case studies show some positive impact, particularly through the commissioned work of Reach Out. However, some families are not known to the centre, and so do not benefit from the good support available.

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	3
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 developing well. The senior management team, advisory board and partners have a clear focus on improvement and roles and responsibilities are clearly set out and understood. There is a coherent link between the Children's Trust's, Children and Young People's Plan, and the centre's action plan and as a result, the centre's priorities link effectively to those of the wider area. Senior leaders within the local authority work effectively to ensure that the profile of children's centres is raised through representation on a range of local strategic partnerships. Each Integration Support Manager has been allocated a specific area of development as a specialism and this facilitates an in-depth knowledge and understanding of priorities, not just for the authority as a whole, but for the specific work to be undertaken by each individual centre. The local authority is effective in providing robust challenges through the annual conversation, scrutiny committees, and regular performance audits.

The centre has made a significant commitment to developing its systems for

monitoring and evaluation. The senior management team work with staff and partners to identify future priorities and a number of action plans have been developed as a result. These are based on robust local data combined with good local knowledge provided by family support workers, outreach workers and other relevant partners. The views of parents and users are collected through evaluations of individual activities and interventions in order to check quality, usefulness and to inform the future planning of provision. There has also been some recent work to collect the views of those who do not currently attend the centre. However, systems to ensure the consistent evaluation of the longer term impact of all services are less well developed. Resources are used effectively to provide a welcoming and productive environment. The building is well used and staff's determination to take services out of the centre has extended the range of activities and resources available to the wider community. Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure and managers receive good levels of support from local authority finance officers. The effectiveness of partnership work across the locality has also been effective in streamlining services and ensuring value for money.

The safeguarding arrangements to share concerns and record information are well developed. These procedures are used by a range of professional agencies to monitor children's welfare and increasingly, to provide appropriate early intervention and support where necessary. Policies and procedures are robust and there are good systems in place to maintain and update these. As a result, all agencies are well aware of the wider safeguarding agenda and collaborate effectively to reduce the risk of harm to children. All checks on the suitability of staff directly employed by the centre prior to their appointment are in place. The centre maintains a central register which records these checks. The centre has completed appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of children and their parents and these are reviewed quickly when necessary.

The performance management of staff is robust and arrangements for appraisal and supervision are thorough with outcomes used to plan training and support staff development. A commitment to the inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the centre's vision. Clear action plans have been drawn up which reflect ambitious targets for particular groups of users including fathers, young mothers, those with mental health issues and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and there has been some marked improvement in the engagement of these groups. This combined with effective partnership working, is helping families to develop positive relationships with their children, improving parenting skills, confidence and self-esteem.

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	2
--	----------

understood	
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	3
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

Chatham House Children's Centre hosts full time day care provision for children aged three months to school age and this is managed by the local authority. Two local primary schools, Throston and Jesmond Road, 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 Chatham House Children's Centre on 20 and 21 October 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 to be providing good support to you and your family.

The children's centre provides a wide range of activities, which are aimed at helping families improve their lives. Your views 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 support for families with children with disabilities 'invaluable' and a 'real lifeline.' In particular, activities and provision for children before they start school is improving across the area and your children are doing better as a result, especially in regard to making friends and developing speaking, listening and reading skills. We know many of you have completed training and now work as volunteers, but the centre knows it must do more to encourage you to take part in training and other adult education activities.

We found that the children's centre offers lots of programmes and activities aimed at improving the health of people in your local community. In particular, it has done really well in encouraging people to ensure babies get their immunisations, as well as helping people to live healthier lifestyles by quitting smoking and through the provision of activities to encourage healthy eating and exercise. However, there is still more work to do to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies, as well as to increase the number of new mums who choose to breastfeed their babies. 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 support 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 really good at helping you at times in your life when you most need it. We also found that action was taken quickly and that different people and organisations worked well as a team to support both children and families. However, there are some people who live in your area who do not currently use these facilities. So the staff at your children's centre are developing ways to encourage more families to use the groups and activities they provide, so that they can all benefit, if they wish, from the good support available.

We found that the centre is working very well with other partners, such as health visitors and counsellors. You tell us that it is good to go to the baby clinics and have the opportunity to talk to the health visitor or the family support worker in a relaxed, informal environment. For example, one mum had been able to get support for her child who was having trouble with his speech. 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. There is good support for children with disabilities and parents are encouraged to take an active role in meetings with professionals, ensuring they are involved in setting targets for their child's learning.

We found that those people in charge of the children's centre are doing a good 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 difference to the area in which you live. We know that everyone who works with Chatham House children's centre share this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a real difference to your lives.

The centre has spent a lot of time developing the way in which decisions are made about its direction and the different services it provides. As a result, some of these systems are quite new and so the ability of the centre to properly understand how well they are doing in improving the lives of you and your family in the longer term is developing. We know that it will take time for these things to be established but are confident that there are actions in place to improve this. We know the centre is good at asking you to tell them how you have found all the activities and services that you go to and that some of you have used the 'Parents Forum' to influence and change the way some services are delivered. However, the centre needs to increase the involvement and influence of you as parents in their work. We hope that this is something you might be interested in becoming a part of.

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.