

Inspection report for Felling Children's Centre

Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	362476
Inspection dates	6 – 7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre governance	Gateshead Local Authority
Centre leader	Mrs Beverley Coombs
Date of previous inspection	n/a
Centre address	58 High Street Felling Gateshead NE10 9LT
Telephone number	0191 433 5646
Fax number	0191 433 5640
Email address	beverleycoombs@gateshead.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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 and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners; health, education and children's social care professionals and representatives from Jobcentre Plus, Relate and Adult Education.

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

Information about the centre

Felling Children's Centre is located in the east of Gateshead. The locality is urban in nature with industrialised areas lining the riverbank. Felling ward is ranked 216th in the index of multiple deprivation, falling within the 10% most deprived wards in England. In 2001, 11.2% of households were lone parents with dependent children; an increase from 9% in 1991. Overcrowded households have increased from 3% to 8.9% and in 2008 there were 283 people registered unemployed representing 8.8% of the residential labour force. The majority of local families are of White British heritage. The proportion of children attending schools in the area that 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.

The centre opened in 2005 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. The current purpose-built centre operates as a 'one-stop-shop' model, providing the full core offer. The team and centre manager work across the wider, east area of Gateshead. This comprises two further designated children's centres. Governance arrangements transferred to an advisory board in 2010.

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.

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

Felling Children’s Centre provides good support to children and families who live within its locality. Strengths include the support for breast feeding mums, services for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, support for young mums and the well-established, effective multi-agency partnerships which provide good quality care and support. The centre’s approach to safeguarding, safe recruitment and child protection is robust and meets statutory requirements. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is mainly good across the area; outcomes are still below the national average but there has been some improvement in children’s combined personal social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy skills.

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 reducing health inequalities. For example, the centre has exceeded their locality target for increasing the uptake of immunisations. Working in partnership with Adult Education services, the centre has run a series of courses designed to develop skills for life. Parents and carers attending these commented that it had helped them ‘to develop their confidence and take steps to get more out of life for their children.’ This combined with a successful volunteering program has helped raise aspirations amongst some local families, so addressing one of the most significant barriers within the locality.

The vision for the centre is shared well between partners, and services are fully integrated, particularly the shared actions taken to support, involve and improve outcomes for parents and carers and their children. Centre staff are responsive to the requests of parents and carers and the majority of services have been developed and changed to meet these expressed needs.

The senior management team, together with staff and partners, have developed a clear and focused vision to make a real difference to the community, based securely on their needs and wants. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is evidenced in the range of activities that families, and increasingly the most vulnerable, can access. Managers are aware that there is still some way to go to ensure all needs are met. For example, 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 reduce smoking and particularly the impact of second hand smoke is a key priority, as well as improved engagement with those families living in the most deprived areas. Following consultation with the local community, ambitious plans have been developed that provide a clear agenda for future activities.

An advisory board, which covers the three children's centres in the east area of Gateshead, has been established. Members of the board we spoke to are fully supportive of the work of the centre and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Impact assessment tools have been introduced over the past year to improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation activities and, and the centre is proactive in using these to inform their future planning of provision. Whilst these systems are now embedded, the centre's ability to fully evaluate the longer term impact of their work is still developing. Whilst parents and carers have access to their own 'Parent Forum', their absence on the advisory board limits the extent to which they can effectively contribute to the ongoing developments of the centre they represent. The centre is aware of this and has taken steps to address this.

Taking into account the good outcomes, the centre's overall effectiveness is also good. This together with the leaders' 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 work around participation to ensure that parents and carers 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

Evidence through case studies, discussion with partners and parents and carers all reflect the positive impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and their physical health. This includes the good work and dedication of health visitors, parent outreach workers and services commissioned by the centre such as Relate. The work undertaken in relation to the promotion of breastfeeding is beginning to successfully change local attitudes with 44 parents

accessing the centre's breastfeeding support group 'Bosom Buddies' this year, a significant improvement when compared to only 12 in the previous year. Support and advice offered to teenage parents through the 'Young Mums to Be' group is excellent and many of the mums involved go on to attend other services offered by the centre. There are plans in place to run the level 2 'Parents with Prospects' course in the new year and a significant number of young mums have already signed up. Parent Outreach Workers use the well-attended baby clinics as an opportunity to catch up with parents in a relaxed, informal environment. 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. The promotion of healthy lifestyles is also well supported through initiatives such as HENRY (Health, Exercise and Nutrition in the Really Young). This combined with well-attended activities, such as Splash and Swing; Music and Movement and Little Kickers ensures that families are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy.

Good procedures ensure children are well-safeguarded. All parents and carers say they feel safe in the centre and have confidence that if there were concerns they would come to the centre as they are trusted. Partnership working with health visitors, a local child safety project, community police officers and neighbourhood wardens is helping to successfully raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and in their communities. Good multi-agency support to families referred to the centre in times of acute crisis is helping to minimise the number of children entering care or moving onto the child-protection register and re-referral rates having decreased over the past years.

The ongoing support of a qualified teacher for the early years and the centre's involvement in the 'Narrowing the Gap' project is beginning to have an impact on the achievement of children locally. Education professionals spoken to during the inspection testified to the positive impact close working with the centre has had in raising aspirations and improving outcomes for young children.

A number of parents and carers we spoke to, including young mums, commented on how their confidence as parents has improved as a result of their participation in a number of activities offered by the centre. A visit to a baby massage session provided compelling evidence of babies and their parents bonding well, with opportunities provided for mums to share concerns and tips about dealing with issues such as feeding or sleep patterns. Most parents and carers feel that they have a voice within the centre through the 'Parents Forum' and that services provided meet their specific needs, for example, the extension of the age limit for the Tots Time group to enable parents and carers with older siblings to continue to attend. However, there is limited opportunity for them to engage meaningfully in the governance of the centre and to participate in key decision making at this level.

There is some good evidence of how the centre has helped parents and carers into learning, training and employment. There is an increasingly strong partnership with the local Jobcentre through joint working with the Information Assistants, in an effort

to reduce worklessness across the Felling locality. The centre has also established a close working partnership with Adult Education who provide a number of courses for local families. Indeed, many parents and carers we spoke to had increased aspirations both for themselves and their children as a result of the support received through the centre and talked about going on to university or completing higher level qualifications once their children were at school.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

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 of the community. A detailed action plan has been developed in response to the findings of a recent community engagement project, and a significant amount of work has been undertaken in relation to targeting particular groups such as dads and those living within the most deprived areas. As a direct result, there is evidence of an increase in the number of families accessing the centre. The dedication and commitment of the parent outreach workers ensures a continued focus on community development and engagement and recent case studies show the positive impact of work undertaken to date. The centre recognises there is still more to do to fully engage some communities; however, the distance travelled to reach this point is testament to the quality of the provision offered.

The shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are excellent. These include a number of courses to support parents and carers of children with autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as well as other conditions such as foetal alcohol syndrome. Partnerships with local hairdressers, shoe fitters and opticians also help to ensure that some day-to-day activities are made more accessible to these families without them having to travel to specialist facilities.

A huge amount of work has been undertaken over the past year to develop the newly established Referral and Allocations Meetings (RAM). As a result, 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 and carers can build their confidence, parenting skills, supporting them to independence at a pace that is appropriate to them. Effective partnerships between health visitors, police and neighbourhood wardens ensure any families known to be at risk are quickly identified and supported. This work has also helped to strengthen multi-agency working and streamlined processes to ensure that meetings successfully and efficiently identify and assess those children and families who need immediate support. Those that do not quite meet children’s social care thresholds but who would benefit from additional support are also provided with help from appropriate partners. Parents and carers, including young mums, 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. Learning and development in these settings have been judged at least satisfactory and sometimes good. All centre staff are being supported by the early years practitioner to integrate the Early Years Foundation Stage into all aspects of their work, ensuring that children are well prepared when they start school. Evaluations from individual parents about the quality of support pay tribute to the difference services’ support has made to their own and their children’s development, enjoyment and well-being. One parent described her journey from young single mum to volunteer to university student and explained how the coordination of services from the centre had ensured she had the support and confidence to take control of her life; improving not only her life chances but those of her child.

Sensitive, individualised and tailored support is provided for all families and children who access the centre. There is evidence of good multi-agency working, which ensures that families can access the right kind of support; be it from Relate, social workers, speech and language therapists, or support and advice on benefits.

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 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 hard to ensure that the profile of children's centres is raised through representation on a range of local strategic partnerships. Each 'under 11s lead' has responsibility for one of the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes, which 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, the overview and scrutiny committee, 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 parent outreach workers and other relevant partners. The views of parents and carers and users are collected through evaluations of individual activities and interventions in order to check quality, usefulness and to support improvement. However, these systems are yet to be fully embedded in order to ensure the consistent evaluation of the longer term impact of all services delivered through the centre. Resources are used effectively to provide a warm and welcoming environment. Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support to families.

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 dads, young mums, traveller communities 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, including with health visitors, social care teams, Barnardos and Relate, is helping families to develop fruitful relationships with their children and to build parenting skills, confidence and self-esteem. Partnerships are developing effectively, and this is due in part to the commitment of the centre's management to harness the energies of all local partners in their quest to reach out and support all families in the area.

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 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 carers.

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	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

There are two private sector childcare settings within the Felling Children’s Centre area. These are TiK ToK and Holly Hill Nursery. Four local primary schools; White Mere, St John the Baptist, Brandling, and Falla Park, with Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children over three years of age, 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 the Felling Children's Centre on 6th – 7th October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

Some strengths of the centre include the activities and support offered to families who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and young mums, as well as the good quality of care, guidance and support offered by those staff who work with you. 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.

The children's centre, in partnership with other local authorities, 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 that babies get their immunisations, as well as helping people to live healthier lifestyles through the provision of activities to encourage exercise in young children. However, the manager knows 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, working closely with partners, is already taking action to improve this in order to benefit you and your family.

Parents and carers who spoke to us all said that your children's centre is a warm and welcoming place, full of staff who they feel they can trust to help and support them. Parents and carers told us that staff listen to them and make sure that they get the right advice. We found that the centre was really good at helping people at times in their lives when they 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 services worked well together as a team to provide help and support to families where a child has a special educational need and/or disability and for parents and carers of babies and very young children. In particular, activities such as baby social, music and movement, baby massage, bosom buddies and the well-baby clinics were really good. Parents and carers we spoke to said they really appreciated the support of the parent outreach workers and could give lots of examples of how their advice had made a difference to their lives. 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 had an activity to go to and had made new friends through the groups at the centre.

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 Felling 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 whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is seen in the number of activities on offer as well as the increasing number of you who attend them. Managers know there is still more to do if they are to really get to know the needs of your community, and they have already developed plans to show how they will do this in the future.

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 limited. We know that it will take time for these things to be established but we 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 which 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 and carers 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.