

Inspection report for North Shields Children's Centre

Local authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	365825
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Margaret Garai

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Sir James Knott Memorial Nursery School
Centre leader	Sue Hucker
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Sir James Knott Nursery School 108563
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Smiley Club

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 maintained nursery 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.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, centre staff, parents and carers, governors, representatives of the local authority linked to the centre and partner professionals from other agencies.

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

Information about the centre

North Shields Children's Centre was opened in March 2007 and designated as a phase two centre. It shares a site and facilities with Sir James Knott Memorial Nursery School and the Smiley Club day-care provision. The nursery school children have access to these day-care facilities.

The North Tyneside Council undertook a substantial restructure in April 2010 and a strategic manager was appointed to oversee the work of five children's centres in the east of the borough. North Shields Children's Centre forms part of this group, which shares facilities with and signposts many local families to these neighbouring centres, thereby offering a full core service.

The children's centre serves part of North Shields, which is in the 30% most deprived area and also 70% of the more affluent Tynemouth and Cullercoats areas. The headteacher of the nursery school is the head of the children's centre.

The current head of centre was appointed in January 2008. The school and the centre share a governing body and while recognising the unique qualities of each of the service areas, they aim to deliver a fully integrated provision of high quality services for all families and those children under five in the reach area.

In July 2010, there were 923 children aged under five whose home address was within the reach area registered with general practitioners. Forty eight per cent of the children are female. Ninety three per cent of those children whose ethnicity is recorded are White, with the vast majority of those classifying themselves as White British. According to the 2001 Census, about 75% of the people in the area were economically active, exceeding the borough and national averages; 3.5% of people were claiming Jobseekers Allowance; about 70% of the people had at least a level one qualification.

The centre provides integrated childcare and early learning; health and family support services; outreach work and support and training for a childminder network. The centre commissions the services of a Relate counsellor and works in partnership with other organisations and professionals to provide a range of services, including a dietetic service; an inclusion service; an obesity strategy; breastfeeding and weaning guidance and support groups, together with speech and language support. When joining the early years provision, the majority of children have the skills expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

North Shields Children's Centre offers a good quality service to the local community effectively helping parents and carers to gain new skills and engage more confidently and positively with their children. The centre provides a very warm, welcoming, supportive environment where users feel safe and confident to share concerns, seek advice and become less isolated. All those who expressed an opinion value highly their experiences at the centre. Appreciative comments from parents and carers include, 'the centre is my lifeline', 'the support came just at the right time', 'they've helped me to go back into learning so I'll be able to help my child better'.

The centre's success is underpinned by the very good development of a seamless, coherent service within the centre. Accommodation has been adapted and reorganised to optimise access to good quality learning resources and both indoor and outdoor facilities, in order to integrate effectively the work of the nursery school, day care and children's centre for all children from birth to five. Staff work closely together, share knowledge, and plan to provide good support and a high quality, inclusive learning environment.

Staff have appropriate and regular training in child protection and safeguarding and pay good attention to helping children learn about safe play. Adults develop a greater awareness about keeping their children safe. Satisfactory procedures are in place to ensure the safeguarding of all who use the centre.

Adults and children show a strong sense of respect for others and show high levels of enjoyment. They thrive on the good opportunities to learn, play and have fun together. A good sense of purpose and enthusiasm permeates all the centre activities where all users feel valued and accepted. Children respond well to the calm, constructive, learning atmosphere and are settled and relaxed.

Parents and carers contribute enthusiastically to centre activities. Their views are well represented through parents' forums, representation on the governing body and informal discussions with staff. They appreciate the open door policy of the head of centre and feel confident that their ideas and contributions make a difference to the centre.

The centre's capacity to improve is good. The head of centre and her team work purposefully together to implement a clear vision of developing a holistic service and a very strong learning culture, with the child at the centre of all the centre's work. They have implemented successfully the improvements in accommodation to optimise access to the resources and develop a wider service offer for all users.

The centre's self-evaluation is mainly accurate. Evaluations about the impact of its work are largely based upon case studies and staff's in-depth knowledge of the families they serve. Session leaders and participants evaluate courses and individual sessions. Close working relationships between staff in the different organisations lead to swift identification of and provision to meet families' needs. However, the centre does not have enough information about the impact trends over time of any intervention programmes for individuals nor has it yet received impact data from all partners. The local authority strategic children's centre team and the centre's governance have recognised this and are introducing new systems to offer more useful information.

The centre recognises that there is more work to be done to engage greater numbers of disadvantaged families into the wide range of centre activities and record more effectively the skills development of families and children. Outreach workers have been redeployed to provide a good integrated approach across the five centres

in the locality with very good links and referral processes with health and other partners to engage families and children in need more effectively.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop further, systems to identify and engage more disadvantaged families and children within the reach area in the work of the centre.
- With the local authority and partners, improve systems to demonstrate impact and collect quantitative data to monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the centre on individuals.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for children and their families who attend the centre or who receive support through outreach and home visits are good. Users have good access to activities and learning to improve their health and that of their children. One parent described the great benefits she had gained in overcoming post-natal depression and her sense of isolation as a result of the sensitive support from a family support worker in building her confidence to attend the centre. Take-up rates for centre activities are high and many courses are oversubscribed.

Users gain great enjoyment from attending the centre and many access a number of activities as well as weekend and holiday outings. The accepting and welcoming atmosphere in the weekly baby group encourages new mums, who come initially for informal coffee mornings to meet other mums, to capitalise on the holistic support to improve their children's well-being. Parents speak highly of the breastfeeding support, and data indicate a 10% increase from 2009 and 2010 in mums continuing to breastfeed.

Good quality information is provided to all families to improve outcomes. Information from and work with the dietician has been effective in helping users make informed choices about the importance of healthy eating. Other advice has enabled parents and carers to be more effective in ensuring their children's good dental care. One parent also explained how she had changed to home produced foods when weaning her baby. She found a cookery course very helpful in teaching her how to prepare her own healthy meals. Children benefit from the healthy snacks and well balanced meals prepared at the centre. Childhood obesity rates have fallen by about 4% over the last three years in the reach area.

Children attending nursery school and day care make good progress in developing their social skills, confidence and concentration as they enthusiastically learn new skills. Parents and carers also learn new skills which contribute to their families' well-being. For example, an individual parent received help in developing a routine to tackle her child's sleep problems and a group of parents and carers used advice from

the centre to more effectively support their children's learning at home. Parents and carers gain in confidence, for example, by summoning the courage to attend the centre for the first time, and for others, to access formal learning. Fifteen parents successfully gained a nationally recognised qualification in the last academic year and a further group of parents are currently attending training.

Activities are often shared with parents and other users of the centre and the wider community, to impact positively on their learning and development. For example, members who reside in sheltered housing joined in the Christmas celebrations, and fathers engaged enthusiastically in a gardening project, for example, taking children to visit local allotments to compare the centre's garden with the local experts. Rocket making and 'Dad did it' sessions at weekends were also well attended and appreciated.

The centre ensures children are safe because this is a high priority around the centre, in the support given to families in sessions and by direct input by family support workers who, during home visits, can provide as required equipment to improve safety. The Common Assessment Framework processes are robust and well informed. The centre works closely with partners to refer children and adults to the most appropriate range of identified needs. This well planned multi-agency approach enables the neediest families to make good progress in taking first steps towards accessing centre activities, learning and health services.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre works very closely with other local children's centres, health visitors and other agencies, to ensure that the needs of families and children are accurately and appropriately addressed. Family support workers attend regular weekly meetings with the family support team to develop coherent, well coordinated support for identified families, to report on progress and to identify further needs. Signposting

and referrals to the appropriate health professional and other agencies are very effective. The staff work sensitively with users, developing small, achievable steps towards longer term goals. For example, nervous parents with language needs worked on an individual basis in the centre until they gained sufficient confidence to be supported into more formal, adult classes.

Good links and appropriate referrals to other professionals, such as the Working Homes Outreach team, support the hard-to-reach families to access education and training. Speech and language therapists provide early interventions for children with communication difficulties.

Staff are well qualified, highly motivated and enthusiastic. They have high expectations of users and create a vibrant, lively atmosphere and learning environment that challenges both adults and children to develop their curiosity, initiative and joy of learning, in a safe, non-judgemental setting. The flexible curriculum is well designed to meet the needs of adults and children and takes good account of the needs of working families, for example through the provision of wrap-around childcare and nursery provision. Weekend and holiday activities provide a range of opportunities for families to take part in learning together, enjoy the outdoors and to become more aware of their local community and environment.

The childminders' network group meets regularly at the centre and has very good access to the centre's activities and resources. The early years educator works closely with the group to develop further their skills and knowledge of creative play activities and improving outcomes for children.

Activities at the centre are open for all families. However, the centre is well aware that not many of the families in greater need, living within the reach area, are taking advantage of the provision and that more emphasis needs to be placed on encouraging them to take advantage of services in North Shields Children's Centre or a centre nearby. The centre values the work of community entrepreneurs and Jobcentre Plus outreach workers who successfully engage adults in the target group in education and training.

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

The lively sense of purpose and high expectations that pervade the centre, stem from the head of centre and all staff. All are dedicated to ensuring that the centre serves its users well, with a strong focus on keeping children at the heart of its work. The centre's resources are well managed. Financial management is robust. The careful deployment of the somewhat limited accommodation ensures the best use is made of classrooms, the kitchen and outdoor facilities, to benefit all users. The nursery school, day-care and children's centre provisions have been successfully integrated to provide a coherent service to the local community.

Inclusion is at the heart of the provision and the centre has a strong commitment to working with both adults and children from all ethnic and social backgrounds, as well as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Displays around the centre reflect positive images and promote equal opportunities. However, engaging more families from the harder-to-reach parts of the reach area remains a challenge. Staff development is a high priority and well targeted to reflect the centre's aims. Safeguarding requirements are met. All staff are checked for their suitability to work with children and vulnerable adults, and activities are suitably risk assessed.

Parents who use the centre are involved at all levels of planning and evaluation, both through informal feedback and as members of the parents' group and the governing body. The centre encourages involvement of local community figures such as community police and fire safety officers to improve local knowledge and awareness. The centre publicises its work well in the locality and is about to hold an exciting launch celebration of a lively, informative website as another means of linking with local families and further widening participation.

The recent reorganisation of the North Tyneside Council children's centres' management has strengthened the partnership working and multi-agency support. It ensures that those families and children in need experience a well integrated offer of support, starting with referral from health visitors concerning newborn children, to provide early intervention measures in a 'one stop' form approach, to address their identified and developing needs.

The local authority strategic manager for children's centres provides good supervision and support for the centre manager and the staff team. The team receive good support in implementing new systems to improve the measurement of the long term impact of the centre's provision on outcomes for families and children.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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

The Sir James Knott Nursery School and Smiley Club day-care provision was inspected at the same time by a parallel team of inspectors and this report takes account of the findings and judgements from that inspection in forming judgements on the work of this children's centre.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the North Shields Children's Centre on 8 and 9 February 2011. To help us make our judgements we observed activities, looked at documentation and spoke with a large number of service providers, professionals, parents and carers. Thank you very much indeed to all of you who helped us understand the quality of services provided by staff. We judged the centre as good overall.

Parents and carers who spoke to us all said how the North Shields centre is a very friendly and welcoming place. They find staff helpful and supportive and highlighted the fact that they do not judge to tell you what you are doing wrong but give you ideas of how to do things better. Many of you gave examples of how the support and the activities at the centre have made a difference to your families' lives.

Children who attend the nursery school and day-care provision make good progress in their learning and development. Children and their families who attend the many activities available in the centre enjoy the sessions. Many parents and carers tell us that these activities have made them more confident in bringing up their children.

The centre also helps parents to learn useful skills, such as baby massage, how to organise themselves better and to eat healthy meals. For example, mums particularly highlight the baby club, which has helped them to continue to breastfeed their babies, and the sessions on preparing healthy meals that have helped with weaning their babies and to serve healthier meals at home. We know that some of you progress to adult education courses to improve your own learning.

Centre staff are very good at asking your views on the usefulness of sessions and noting how, with the right support, individual families become more confident and self-sufficient. To develop further the work of the centre we have asked staff and the local authority to improve the way they monitor the work done through the centre to ensure that it continues to cater well for your needs. They had already planned to do this.

The centre works very closely with many other agencies, such as health services, to make sure that you have easy access to the help you need. It listens to the views of users and this information is used to make changes to the centre. Parents and carers are well involved in the helping with activities in the centre and now two more parents have joined the governing body to contribute to the management of the centre and represent your views.

The management of the centre is good and there are plans in place to improve things further. We have advised the centre's leaders that more needs to be done to ensure that some of the most disadvantaged families, who currently do not use the centre are encouraged to do so. We wish you all well in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.