

Inspection report for North West Communities Children's Centre

Local authority	North Tyneside
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Centre governance	North Tyneside Local Authority
Centre leader	Gillian Darby
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Fordley Primary School URN 108611
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Childcare Wideopen URN 310205

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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 childcare provision was carried out in July 2010 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 the centre manager, local authority officers, representatives from the advisory board, outreach workers, health professionals and front line staff. They met parents and carers, observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

North West Communities Children's Centre is located in the former mining communities of North Tyneside. The catchment area includes four primary schools and operates on a recently refurbished site that includes a number of community venues so providing ready access for targeted families and their children.

The locality in which the centre works serves an area with many social and economic challenges, and includes significant pockets of deprivation and disadvantage. Most families earn below average incomes and one in four children lives in workless households who claim out-of-work benefits. Qualification levels are very low. Children's levels on entry to early years provision are below those expected for their age. Most families are of White British heritage.

The centre provides a range of services such as education and play for children, adult learning, childcare, child and family support, targeted services for lone and teenage parents, carer support and community-based health services. There are just over 250 targeted children under five years of age within the catchment area. The centre also provides for children with physical disabilities, or for those whose parents have physical disabilities.

North West Communities Children's Centre is directly managed by the local authority. It was designated as a phase two children's centre in May 2008. The advisory board consists of a wide range of representatives from the local community, including schools, service providers, parents and carers.

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 West Communities Children’s Centre meets the needs of its community well. Care, guidance and support are outstanding in this very welcoming centre which has created a community approach to supporting every aspect of family well-being. Managers demonstrate a clear vision for the centre and have an accurate understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement. The centre has good capacity to improve further. There are exceptional relationships with key partners and, together, they are taking steps to improve already good outcomes for users and reach more families. As one parent commented, ‘The support I received from the centre was brilliant – it turned my life around and I wouldn’t be the person I am today without their help’. Similar views are held by many parents, carers and users.

Outcomes for users are good and improving. Exemplary procedures, protocols and learning programmes ensure high quality healthy outcomes for users. For example, many children, parents and carers, are responding very well to the ‘Cooking for a Fiver’ and ‘Cooking with your Toddler’ projects. They experience the process of cooking healthily on a budget. The centre regularly provides fresh fruit for snack times as a means of widening children’s dietary tastes and helping children to understand the importance of eating a balanced diet. Users and their children feel the centre provides a welcoming and safe and secure family environment. Those using the centre thoroughly enjoy and are very appreciative of the increasingly varied range of services. They feel the centre is extremely responsive to their needs and cite many examples of how it has had a positive impact on their children’s and their own lives.

Children make good progress in their communication and language skills as a result of the input from specialist workers during ‘Story Sacks’ and ‘Messy Movers’ sessions. As one parent reported, reflecting the views of many, ‘It’s been great, it gets me out of the house and my child has gained in confidence from meeting new friends – and her speech and language have developed so quickly’. Users benefit from many other

adult learning courses which build their confidence and self-esteem. For the majority of users, this has resulted in access to further training and gaining employment.

The centre collects a wide range of data. This relates to events, courses, and visitors to the centre, referrals from health and outreach workers, as well as from the local authority. Monitoring information is used regularly and analysed with increasing accuracy to identify what the centre does well and to plan for improvement. There have been several significant improvements in the last twelve months with the addition of new leadership. Nevertheless, it is too early to see the full impact of initiatives in improving outcomes for users.

The centre has a good understanding of each user's needs, and takes every opportunity to promote and support their interests. Children whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit greatly from the good work the centre carries out with external agencies. The centre has established very strong links with other professionals, such as health visitors and a consultant community paediatrician to target specific support to those users who need it the most. Staff strive to eradicate any differences in equality of opportunities between groups within the community by ensuring each user is valued. The centre has good procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet all government guidelines and include high quality checks on adults and a carefully planned approach to managing the safety of children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Sharpen the impact of leaders and managers at all levels in sustaining improvement by:
 - ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is analysed robustly by setting quantifiable measures against which to evaluate success
 - increasing participation rates among target populations
 - extending the capacity of all staff to manage their areas of responsibility even more effectively.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for the children and families who use the centre are good. For example, parents and carers are very enthusiastic about the healthy cooking courses that encourage them to provide healthy meals for their families. Numbers of children under five who are obese are falling, and the centre is starting to have an impact on smoking cessation. Parenting courses are improving outcomes for children as their behaviour is better, and stress levels are reduced for parents and carers, especially mothers. 'Baby Massage', 'Baby Club' and weaning advice sessions are well attended and provide excellent guidance and support for parents and carers. Children and families feel safe when using services at the centre. Parents confidently discuss and share their issues, as they feel secure in groups such as those promoting positive

parenting.

Ensuring the emotional well-being of users is a high priority for the centre, particularly those children with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are subject to child protection plans. Strong inter-agency working and dedicated centre staff ensure that children supported by the Common Assessment Framework are well cared for. Outreach workers provide essential links when working with such families. They help families to build trusting relationships so they feel able to engage with other professionals to gain the required help. This is highly valued by users, for example, in the words of one parent, 'The personal support offered to me at a time of emotional crisis was excellent'. Regular home visits ensure that parents and their children show a growing understanding of how to stay safe in the home and community. For example, targeted users are given enhanced safety packs, in order to provide a safe environment for their families.

Activities and courses for adults are highly valued by parents and carers. These enable users to gain confidence with their parenting skills, in order to support their children's learning. Adults are prepared for the world of work by gaining recognised qualifications in childcare, cooking, literacy and numeracy. The 'Rainbow Toddler' sessions are popular and well attended. A focus on language and communication has seen positive benefits in improving children's speech and by increasing parents' understanding of how they can encourage their children's language development. There is growing evidence that, where children and families have benefited from contact with the centre, they have a made better start to school life.

Children's behaviour is good in the centre. They have positive relationships with adults and develop confidence to separate from their parents and carers as a result. Users' views are taken into account regularly through the 'Memory Books' for each activity, and have had an influence on provision. For example, following consultation, the format of the training leaflet was redesigned in order to be more user-friendly and understandable.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and 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 and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is effective at assessing the needs of the children and families who use its services. Assessments cover the wide range of needs, including those who are most vulnerable. Excellent relationships are in place with a range of key partners, including social care, health and other Early Years Foundation Stage providers and the safeguarding team. The centre follows clear processes to involve these partnerships in targeting services for individual children and families. The crèche staff and outreach workers use their knowledge and influence to help families engage with other professionals and so ensure the well-being of children and their parents. Children with complex needs are very well supported.

The children's centre is increasingly effective in engaging some harder-to-reach families and works very well with partners to gain the information they need to help these families. For example, those who are subject to domestic violence are referred speedily to therapeutic services. The crèche and toddler groups ensure equality of access to all users and particularly those from more vulnerable groups. Trips to local places of interest provide specifically tailored support for those who need it most. These provide a fantastic opportunity for families to have fun and engage in outdoor pursuits, while building confidence, relationships and parenting skills. There are highly effective transition arrangements as children progress into school.

The centre's services are increasingly well advertised in the local community through 'word of mouth'. A well-organised visiting programme is tailored carefully to meet the needs of users. Families in crisis are very well supported and centre staff have well managed and realistic caseloads to enable them to offer good levels of support. There is excellent advice and guidance for users accessing benefits and those seeking to gain employment. For example, the centre provides a daily update of available jobs in the local area, and staff are always available to download application forms and offer support in completing them. The use of volunteers within the centre is a strong example of the commitment to developing users' self-confidence and to supporting them to move into further training, education or employment.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leader's commitment and determination to improve the children's centre are good. As one parent commented, echoing the views of many, 'The centre leader is always calm and approachable and can speak to anyone.' The senior team communicates a clear vision for the children's centre, and a strong commitment to serving the local community and improving the life chances of all children and users. These intentions have been shared effectively with all staff who embrace and deliver them wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, due to ongoing restructuring of the leadership team the full impact of initiatives to engage the target population is restricted.

Self-evaluation is honest and accurate. The advisory board is fully supportive of the centre's aims and fulfils its statutory duties well. The board has an intuitive understanding of the needs of the community and ways in which these can be met. Staff and volunteers undertake relevant training to enable them to support families effectively and keep them safe. The centre has very good procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment and the impact on hospital referrals is good. These meet all government guidelines and include high quality checks on adults and a carefully planned approach to managing the safety of children. Child protection procedures and responsibilities are clear and all staff attend regular training on safeguarding.

Staff know the community well and have developed excellent relationships with partners and professionals in social care, health and education. The centre has excellent links with the local community, particularly with its partner primary school, a secondary school, health care students from local universities and the multi-agency team at Jobcentre Plus. The head of centre works well with the headteacher of the partner primary school who has been instrumental in championing the cause of the North West Communities Children's Centre. As a result, the centre offers good value for money.

The centre has a strong commitment to inclusion and is increasingly successful at removing barriers to ensure that every child has an equal chance to learn. It works very effectively to eradicate any differences in access between groups within the community so that they are positively recognised and supported in the centre. They know their families well and quickly identify where additional support is needed. Staff are knowledgeable about the centre's vulnerable groups and take proactive steps to engage them in the centre's work, for example, using volunteers as role models for others. They have well established links with the police to quickly reach families subject to domestic violence. They work effectively to ensure the consistency of health referrals across the catchment area.

The centre deploys a number of ways to evaluate its services, ranging from questionnaires to one-to-one interviews with users and providers. As a result, the centre collects much useful data both from its own sources and the local authority. While the data supplied by local authority is helpful, it does not always indicate the

specific performance of the centre in relation to the national picture. There is evidence to show the good impact of the centre's work on outcomes, but the effective work it does is not always accurately analysed.

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	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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 the inspection

Information from the inspections of Childcare Wideopen on 1 July 2010 and Fordley Primary School on 2–3 March 2011 have been taken into account when compiling this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the North West Communities Children's Centre on 2 and 3 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall with some outstanding features.

Under the good guidance of the centre leader, staff work very well as a team to

provide outstanding levels of care, guidance and support for all its users. Staff are committed and keen to support both children's development and to develop adults' skills and levels of confidence. They have established some excellent partnerships with other professionals and organisations to ensure users have access to a full range of support and guidance. They are providing excellent guidance to parents on how to keep their families healthy and have focused efforts on children's speech development through the 'Messy Movers' and 'Story Sacks' groups. Some parents told us that they found the support of the centre 'a lifeline' in times of crisis.

North West Communities Children's Centre is a safe place for parents and carers to bring their children. The rooms are welcoming and allow children to play happily while they learn inside or outdoors when attending the crèche. Parents and carers said their children were happy in the crèche while they attended a variety of helpful family learning courses.

The centre is a good place for users to meet other parents and people who can help them and their families. The centre regularly seeks the views of users on the quality of its activities and courses through the use of 'Memory Books' for each activity. As a result of listening to users' views, the leaflet for advertising courses was redesigned to be more user-friendly and understandable.

The advisory board meets regularly to ensure that the services the centre is providing meet the needs of users. They provide an effective link between users of the centre and senior leaders, who listen to and take account of their views. Staff look at ways of providing interesting activities and courses that will be of most benefit to its users. They receive a lot of information from users and many others about how well they are doing, as well as information about other families in the local community who may benefit from the services at the centre. Leaders at all levels are looking to use this information more precisely by extending their capacity to reach more families and increase participation in activities at the centre in order to improve outcomes even more.

We thoroughly enjoyed the time we spent at your centre. Thank you to everyone who took time out from their busy schedules to speak with us. We would like to wish you every success for the future.

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