

# Inspection report for Dean Bank Children's Centre

Local authority	County Durham
Inspection number	362464
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Wendy Ripley HMI

Centre governance	Durham County Council
Centre leader	Carole Dawson
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY 281593 Sure Start Ferryhill and Chilton Family Centre

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers and staff, health care and other professionals, local authority and voluntary sector representatives and groups of parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

The linked child care, Sure Start Ferryhill and Chilton Family Centre, is managed by the Sedgefield locality children's centre cluster manager who also manages Dean Bank Children's Centre but has separate Early Years inspection arrangements. It was inspected on 7 March 2011 when the quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children were judged to be satisfactory. The inspection report is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## Information about the centre

Ferryhill is a small town in County Durham with around 10,000 inhabitants, almost all of whom are White British. The area experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage as a result of the closure of the coal mine that the town originally grew to serve, and the decline in local manufacturing industries in recent years. There are four super output areas of which one is within the 10% most deprived areas in England and two are within the 20% most deprived.

Dean Bank Children's Centre serves the communities of Dean Bank, Ferryhill Village, Broom, Ferryhill Station and Mainsforth. It provides the full core offer and delivers a

wide range of integrated services that includes health, family support, adult learning, day care and education for nought to two year olds and wrap-around-care for three to four year olds. Dean Bank developed from a former Sure Start Local Programme and is the largest of the eight children’s centres that together form the Sedgefield Children’s Centre Cluster. It is located in a purpose built centre which opened in August 2003. The majority of parents and carers living in Ferryhill walk to this main centre. An outreach centre caters for families living in Ferryhill Station. Services are also provided from Dean Bank Institute and Ferryhill Library.

The Sedgefield Children’s Centre cluster manager and service leads are responsible for the delivery of services across the eight children’s centres in the cluster including those provided by Dean Bank. This team is based at Dean Bank. The children’s centre management group established in 2006 has very recently been replaced by an Advisory Board, which now has responsibility for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic management.

There are currently 489 children aged under four known to be living within the centre’s reach area. Of these, 261 are registered with the centre. Approximately 80% of children aged under-four are known to be living in households dependent on workless benefits. Around 73% of eligible families benefit from the childcare element of workers’ tax credits. The majority of children enter early education with knowledge and skills that are below expectations 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

Dean Bank Children’s Centre makes a good contribution to improving the lives of children and families in the local area. The good quality advice, guidance and support parents and carers receive ensures they feel comfortable and well cared for in the centre. Parents and carers report that the centre is their ‘first port of call’ and pay tribute to the work of the ‘absolutely fantastic staff who give amazing support’. They provide many moving accounts of the difference the activities and support they have

received have made to their own and their children's enjoyment and well-being.

Sure Start midwifery services were withdrawn from all children's centres in the area in April 2010 and Jobcentre Plus service delivery through Dean Bank is negligible. Despite this, partnership working with other agencies is a strength. The services that the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Connexions deliver for instance, helps to draw users from the wider community into the centre.

The centre achieved the national Healthy Early Years award in April 2010. Breast feeding take-up and continuation rates in the locality have improved considerably in the past three years although these remain below the average. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through effective partnership working between the centre staff, health visitors, and family support services. 'Jabadao' and 'Mini-movers,' for example, make a strong contribution to children's physical development and enjoyment of movement. The centre uses its allotment next to Ferryhill Station to encourage healthy eating and to promote the benefits of being outside in the fresh air extremely well. However, the good range of outdoor play resources available at both Ferryhill and Ferryhill Station are not being used effectively to provide opportunities for children and parents and carers to learn and play together outside.

The centre provides a safe environment for both adults and children, supported by robust safeguarding arrangements that meet current requirements fully. Staff work closely with parents and carers to help them understand and adopt safe practices. The centre is used regularly to provide supervised contact time for children in the care of the local authority when they meet with their parents. Risk assessments for this and all other centre activities are robust. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively when appropriate.

The steps the centre takes to develop children's speech and language are excellent. Activities, such as 'Toddler Talk' 'Dads into Nursery', 'Allsorts' and 'Twinkle Time,' make a strong contribution to children's development. Consequently, children who use the centre during their early years get off to a good start that sustains them well as they move onto school. Adults report that these sessions, as well as the parenting and study skills courses open to them have also given them confidence, reduced their isolation and enabled them to make friends.

The number of local families and children who access the range of services the centre provides has increased year on year. Data indicates that around 53% of eligible families are currently engaged with the centre. Most users report that they started attending the centre as a result of a direct referral from a health visitor, for instance, or because a friend told them about it. Several users report that there is more the centre can do to raise awareness of the centre's activities across the area and inspectors agree. Nonetheless, the activities the centre provides are generally well attended by a wide range of users, including fathers and those in the most challenging social and economic circumstances, as a result of activities being effectively matched to local requirements.

There is a strong commitment to promoting equality and diversity. The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the work of the centre. The support provided for families who are residents on the local traveller site is good. Case study evidence and conversations with parents and carers show that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families receive effective support that impacts positively on their lives.

Governance arrangements are currently in transition from the former well-established management group to an Advisory Board. The centre is experiencing difficulties in recruiting a chairperson and parents' representatives for the advisory board and in establishing formal mechanisms such as a Parents' Forum to capture users' views. This is largely because as centre users explain, 'people round here won't be organised into groups and committees'. Centre staff work diligently to ensure that user's views are collected in other ways, such as session evaluations, one-to-one discussions and specific consultations such as 'Parents' Voices'.

All of the staff are pulling together as best they can against a background of changing management arrangements for children's centres operated by Durham County Council and uncertainty about their own roles. The centre is well led. Day-to-day operation is efficient. Performance management systems are effective. Local authority officers provide good support through pre-inspection visits and checklists for example. Given the improving outcomes for children and their families and the effective and efficient management of resources the centre demonstrates it has good capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Make better use of the centre's outdoor resources in order to:
  - explore the benefits of play and learning outside with parents and carers
  - ensure children are provided with more opportunities to choose to learn and play outside.
- Develop more effective means of promoting the centre in the wider community.
- Ensure that information about each activity clearly describes its benefits, is easy to understand and is circulated in a timely manner so that potential users receive sufficient advance notice about what is going on.
- Ensure that the advisory board is fully representative and functional by the end of July 2011.

## **How good are outcomes for users?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre does not currently receive some health related performance data from the local Primary Care Trust (PCT), such as the rate of emergency admissions to

hospital or smoking in pregnancy/smoking cessation or immunisation rates. While breastfeeding take-up and continuation rates show an improving trend, the unexpected return of Sure Start midwives to health centres and hospitals last year reduced the centre's ability to deliver provision to support breastfeeding, smoking cessation in pregnancy and antenatal care for teenage parents. Centre staff have forged links with newly appointed Maternity Assistants employed by the PCT and an antenatal parenting programme is currently being developed. Family support workers have recently undertaken appropriate training so that they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to promote breastfeeding and smoking cessation and to support the 'Baby Friendly' initiative.

Good quality wall displays and information leaflets throughout the centre promote a wide range of messages very effectively and signpost users to other specialist services including those that support health. Fruit and water are freely available. A good range of activities including 'Tasty Treats', 'Cooking on a Budget' and the availability of free swim cards support healthy lifestyles well. Recognising that families have limited opportunities to buy fresh fruit and vegetables in Ferryhill and Ferryhill Station, the centre has arranged for the suppliers they use to be available on site for parents and carers to buy fresh produce. Parents report that this strategy has been very effective in helping them to cook meals using fresh produce while sticking to tight budgets. Similarly, the allotment next to the Ferryhill Station outreach centre has proved to be a huge success with children and parents especially for 'Outdoor Explorers'. The allotment has also helped forged links between centre users and other local residents. Staff and users are very excited about the opportunities this presents. All these very positive actions have helped to reduce the proportion of obese children in the Reception Year in local schools and this is now just below the average rate.

The centre makes a good contribution to the safety and welfare of its users. Robust systems for security in the building ensure that parents, carers and children remain safe when attending activities. As a result of the strong relationships with centre staff, parents and carers have the confidence to speak out about any issues that concern them. Effective personalised support ensures that even the harder-to-reach families are helped to access both targeted and universal services.

A significant strength of the centre is the way in which it supports the emotional well-being of children and adults, especially when they are experiencing difficult times. Centre users speak very positively about the impact of provision, such as the counselling service, the Webster Stratton programme and other parenting activities. One parent explained how the respite childcare had been 'a great help in getting through life's up and downs'. Another explained that after her period of entitlement to respite care had ended, she gave up smoking to pay for the sessions because she came to realise how much more beneficial that was for her and her child.

Strategies are in place to meet children's individual needs quickly. Children thoroughly enjoy the range of activities on offer. One parent explained that her child 'gets really excited about coming because he loves it'. Another echoing the

sentiments of many, reported that her child’s behaviour and sleeping patterns have improved and this makes their relationship much better. Children benefit enormously from the high quality sessions delivered by the speech and language specialist and the family support workers she has trained. As a result, children’s language skills shows significant improvement and parents notice their child ‘making sounds and getting much more confident at saying words’. This helps children to achieve well when taking into account their often lower than average starting points. Consequently, children are well-prepared for the next stage of their learning and the gap between their achievements and those of children across County Durham is reducing.

Although the centre had to temporarily halt training for volunteers and community support parents because of other demands, these programmes are scheduled to begin again in the very near future. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that the training volunteers receive is of a high quality and delivered to nationally accredited standards. A recent well-attended celebratory event attests to how much users and members of the community enjoy their involvement with the centre in a voluntary capacity.

Adults are provided with some learning opportunities at the centre. These include accredited courses in basic skills and first aid. The proportion of adults who move into employment is very low. This is largely because there are very few job opportunities open to them in the area at present. Nonetheless a small number of parents report that centre staff had gone to great lengths to help them develop their skills and seek employment.

Information, advice and guidance available to users on a range of issues, such as support for health and well-being issues, housing, benefits and accessing employment and training are of good quality. Connexions deliver employment and training related advice for younger members of the local community at the centre one day each week. Advice provided by the Citizens’ Advice Bureau one afternoon each week is in great demand. There is usually a queue of local residents waiting to see the advisor. This service has provided greatly needed support to families struggling with debt and financial worries and has helped them to ensure they receive the benefits they are entitled to. As the very high proportion of parents receiving the childcare element of workers’ tax credits attests.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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Dean Bank provides good quality services, which are helping to improve outcomes for families attending the centre and for those who receive more targeted support in their homes. The needs of vulnerable families referred to the centre are effectively assessed and support is well organised. Staff have a thorough understanding of safeguarding and child protection issues so that referrals made to social care are appropriate and use the Common Assessment Framework when necessary.

Centre staff provide flexible one-to-one support in times of significant need. Staff act as good role models and work sensitively and effectively with parents and children ensuring that families can benefit fully from the provision. Parents interviewed confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the centre's provision and were very clear about the benefits. There are many examples of how parents have been helped to develop their parenting skills, self-confidence and emotional well-being.

The centre promotes purposeful learning and development opportunities for all who use it. Sessions for young children are well-resourced. Courses provided for adults are generally well attended and provide good quality learning and development in parenting and childcare in particular. The centre has developed very productive relationships with childminders and successfully engages with them. Childminders report that they feel well supported and have access to a wide range of professional advice to promote good quality provision and prepare for inspection. The qualified teacher provides good support for early years staff in the centre. She is currently working with staff in the centre and the co-located daycare to develop more robust systems to record children's progress in their learning and play. This and transition planning with local schools have rightly been identified as important development areas in the improvement plan. Appropriate strategies to tackle this are in place.

The care, guidance and support for families in difficulty or when facing particular challenges are good. All reception desk staff are well-trained, quickly put individuals at their ease and signpost them on to the right session or advice. While the engagement of Jobcentre Plus in the centre is extremely limited, parents and carers stated that the quality of advice and information about jobs and benefits they receive from centre staff and from the Citizens' Advice Bureau are very helpful.



*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

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

<b>2</b>
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Leadership and management at all levels are effective in promoting good quality multi-agency support for the most vulnerable and good quality universal services. The centre meets its duty to promote equality and diversity well and consequently its users reflect the community it serves. The centre manager and the broader management team work very closely together to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the centre and effectively manage the performance of centre staff. Professional supervision is regular and systematic and has a positive impact on improving the quality of services currently offered. Other professionals have a good understanding of the various line management accountabilities and work together respectfully and effectively.

Good safeguarding arrangements are supported by clear lines of communication. Effective collaboration and strong partnership working with agencies, such as the Supervised Contact Service, for example, reduces the risk of harm to children. All checks and vetting processes comply with current requirements. Training in safeguarding and child protection procedures is up to date and of good quality.

The local authority makes a good contribution to development planning through good communication and information sharing. While the Advisory Board is in the early stages of development, strategic leadership through the centre's management team and the Sedgefield cluster is strong and effective. Performance management arrangements through the local authority maintain close supervision of the centre's work. All partners have a clear understanding of the aspects of work that could be developed further to extend the reach and range of activities.

Self-evaluation is used effectively to develop the activities and services currently being offered. Despite the reluctance of users to be organised into a formal parents forum, users' views are collected in other ways and given due consideration. The development of the outreach centre at Ferryhill Station, for example, arose as a direct result of feedback from parents and carers who found it difficult to get to Dean

Bank. The centre's outreach work extends the reach and impact of the work of the centre and enables more users to benefit from the services it provides. Data relating to reach and priority indicators is becoming more readily available and is beginning to be used to inform centre planning and to set ambitious targets. Similarly, increasingly accurate evaluation of the impact of activities and visioning activities with centre staff are also starting to feed into the planning and target setting process. Resources are used well to provide a wide range of appropriate activities and welcoming environments across the area, which represents good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

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

Information about the Ofsted inspection of Sure Start Ferryhill and Chilton Family Centre that took place on 7 March 2011 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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Dean Bank Children's Centre on 9 and 10 March 2011. As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff and others who work with you. We have judged that the centre provides good support for you and your families.

The centre does some things especially well. For example, the steps taken to ensure yours and your children's safety and well-being and the good quality care, guidance and support offered to you. We found that the centre works very well in partnership with other professionals to deliver services, such as the financial advice and help with benefits that the Citizens' Advice Bureau provides. Health visitors work well with the centre staff and are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy, for example, through 'Outdoor Explorers' and 'Tasty Treaty Weaning'. The allotment and the fruit and vegetable delivery van are really great ways that the centre encourages you to eat healthily.

All of the parents and carers we spoke to told us how much their children enjoy coming to the centre and gave us some really good examples of how children have grown and developed as a result. Activities such as 'Toddler Talk' are extremely effective at helping your children develop their language skills. Many of you told us your child's confidence with sounds and words has grown enormously as a result. Your evaluations show that you particularly enjoy play sessions with your children as you receive lots of useful information and tips about how to manage behaviour and support your children in their learning. However, inspectors found that while there are lots of opportunities for learning and play indoors, the good resources outside both at Dean Bank and Ferryhill Station are not being used as effectively as they could be. We have asked centre leaders to create more opportunities for you and your children to play and learn together outdoors. This recommendation also applies to the linked child care and crèche facilities you use on site but which has separate Early Years inspection arrangements. That provision was inspected on 7 March 2011 when the quality and standards of the early years provision and outcomes for children were judged to be satisfactory. That inspection report is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

You told us the centre has helped you gain more confidence and self-esteem and develop closer and more effective relationships with your children through parenting programmes, such as Webster Stratton. The counselling service has really helped some of you overcome problems and worries. Most of you report being helped to gain qualifications and look for work. You also told us that the centre has provided opportunities to form important friendships and helped you feel less lonely. We could

see how much you enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the very positive impact these are having on you and your families.

All of the parents and carers we spoke to were full of praise for the staff and the activities on offer. This is because the friendly staff team are keen to ensure Dean Bank and Ferryhill Station provide you with a warm welcome. The staff put the upmost importance on you, the parents, and your families. Once families are known to the centre, they are quickly provided with support and help. You told us that the family support workers are 'absolutely fantastic' and provide you with 'amazing support'. However, we agree with some centre users who told us that centre leaders could do more to make sure other parents and carers and members of the local community know about all the good things that are on offer. We have asked them to improve the way they promote the centre in the local area and to ensure that information is easy to understand, explains what the activities are about and gives enough advance notice about what is going on.

Dean Bank is led well by the centre manager and the management team. The staff are knowledgeable and well qualified. They have good capacity to make further improvements and ensure outcomes for you continue to improve but they can do an even better job with your help. The centre has recently changed the way in which decisions are made about its work and the different services it provides. An advisory board has been established but as yet the board does not have a chairperson or any parent representatives. We have asked the centre manager to make sure that the Advisory Board is fully functional by the end of July 2011. Most children's centres have a group of parents that meet together regularly, consult with other centre users and works with the advisory board to implement changes users think would improve the services being delivered. It has been really difficult for Dean Bank staff to set up such a group, usually referred to as a Parents' Forum and to get parents to join the advisory board. You told us that this is because many of you don't want to feel you are being 'organised into committees'. While the staff have worked really hard to collect your views in other ways through discussions and evaluation forms for example, we do hope that some of you will take on these important roles because your involvement in shaping the centre's activities can make a real difference.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you happiness and every success for the future.

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