

# Inspection report for Middleton-in-Teesdale Children's Centre

Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	365700
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Alison Veal HMI

Centre governance	Durham County Council
Centre leader	Janet Jackson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Middleton-in-Teesdale Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY274336 Dawn Till Dusk Childcare

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the cluster manager, senior centre staff, parents and carers, local authority representatives and partner agency representatives. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Middleton-In-Teesdale Children's Centre is a smaller than average children's centre set on the site of Middleton primary school in a small rural town in the Durham Dales. The centre is one of three children's centres in the Teesdale cluster of children's centres. The inspections for each of the three centres were carried out at the same time. This phase one centre was designated in 2006 and was developed from a Local Sure Start Programme. It is governed and managed directly by the local authority. An acting cluster manager is responsible for delivery of services across all three centres. Middleton-In-Teesdale Children's Centre shares a team of staff with either one or both the other centres but has its own administrative support staff. Some services delivered by partner agencies are also cluster-wide. Services delivered through the centre include those delivered by health professionals, outreach support, targeted support for vulnerable families, adult and community learning, and activities for children and adults to play and learn together.

The centre covers a wide geographical area. The population in the reach area of the centre is largely White British with very few families from minority ethnic groups. The majority of children enter early year's settings with skill development that is broadly in line with national expectations. Within the centre's reach area there are few children under five whose families are dependent on workless benefits. Unemployment is low when compared with national and regional averages. Take-up

of the childcare element of Working Tax Credits is below both local authority and national averages. The population is made up of a wide socio-economic mix with families having a range of complex and diverse needs. For a number of families rural isolation is quite extreme with limited access to infrastructure services and poor transport links. Travel impacts on the accessibility to services for users and delivery of services by staff.

The children’s centre’s designated nursery provider is Dawn till Dusk Childcare the report of which can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## 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**

<b>2</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>2</b>
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## Main findings

Middleton-In-Teesdale Children’s Centre provides good quality services. This well-led centre is friendly and welcoming to all users. Many parents told inspectors it was their ‘lifeline’. The centre reaches a high proportion of children and families in its areas. Sessions and groups are very well attended and the outreach work in the local community is consistently reaching more families and identifying the most vulnerable. New and prospective parents benefit greatly from the targeted support and an extensive range of services to promote health and well-being. As a consequence, rates in breastfeeding initiation and obesity reduction have improved so significantly they are well above county level and above national level. A comprehensive programme is in place to target other key areas.

The centre makes an excellent contribution towards the educational achievement of all children. Those who attend the day-care facility, crèche services and the linked school are making excellent progress in all areas of learning with significant progress being made over the last three years. The linked school’s data show children who have attended the early years services achieve above the national average across all areas of learning by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Centre users report they feel safe within the setting. This reflects the high priority given to ensuring the premises are fully secure and good attention is given towards ensuring the welfare and safety of all users. Parents are developing an understanding of how to keep their children safe and how to minimise hazards and reduce risks to infants and toddlers. There are good safeguarding arrangements in place and the promotion of children’s

safety is supported well through all activities.

The centre consistently delivers outstanding care, guidance and support through a full range of services. The support given to families who experience social isolation as a result of rural life is exceptional. They go the extra mile to do all they can to help families overcome some of the barriers associated with this. Partnership arrangements between all services are good. All partners who spoke to inspectors were quick to identify how the integration of services is helping to improve outcomes for children and their families. They also complimented the centre's proactive approach towards adapting services to meet local needs.

The centre is well led and managed by a principal family worker who has been acting as a cluster manager with responsibility for delivery across three children's centres for 15 months. This has been as a result of a recruitment freeze by the local authority which has also led to a number of other posts being left vacant. A significant strength of the centre lies in the commitment of its staff and the acting cluster manager. They have overcome a number of staffing difficulties as a result of the recruitment freeze in order to ensure limited disruption of the services to children and families.

Improvements in the way in which local authority's intelligence and performance monitoring data are captured now enable the centre to have a clearer indication of the progress being made by users within its reach area. In addition, information gathered through discussions, for example, with the cluster manager, staff, partner agencies and parents suggests that the centre knows its users well and where its strengths and weaknesses are in service delivery. However, as a result of the inconsistencies in how information is presented by some external partners, the centre cannot be specific about the impact of all of its work. This has also affected the centre's ability to set sufficiently ambitious and measurable targets. The children's centre and the local authority are aware of this. They are committed to improvement and are working on a wide range of strategies to overcome this. This leads to the centre having good capacity for sustained improvement and value for money.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve leadership and management by:
  - increasing the use of data and user evaluations to monitor the effectiveness of the centre, demonstrate impact on outcomes and shape service delivery
  - ensuring that rigorous self-evaluation leads to the setting of ambitious and well-focused targets.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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Described by parents as a 'lifeline' the centre is well known and highly regarded in the area. There is a strong emphasis placed on improving emotional health throughout the services provided and case study evidence indicates this is successful. For example, feedback from parents attending the Incredible Years courses show improved attitudes to behaviour management and increased levels of self-assurance and general well-being. 'It helps you understand your child', is a typical comment. Parents state they feel safe at the centre and use the advice given to ensure the ongoing safety of their own children. Integrated delivery by children's centre staff and health professionals of the Healthy Child and Family Footpath initiative ensures ongoing contact with families from 36-40 weeks gestation. Continued breastfeeding rates and the reduction in obesity levels exceed county average as a result of this initiative and the ongoing targeted work. Parents develop an understanding of their own health as they attend exercise and healthy cooking classes.

Vulnerable families are well supported by a range of services, which have a very positive impact on their lives. Parents spoke about how the centre has helped them. 'It wakes me up in the morning', and, 'I know someone is listening, I'm not just talking', are typical comments. Individually tailored programmes provide practical and emotional support and enable users to deal with some of the problems associated with living in rural communities with limited and costly transport services. Outcomes for children supported by the Common Assessment Framework are good. Their lives improve because of effective inter-agency working and dedicated centre staff.

Children attending the wide range of childcare services including the linked school's nursery, the designated day nursery and crèche provision are making outstanding progress. Excellent transition arrangements ensure seamless provision. Tracking is showing a considerable improvement year-on-year particularly in relation to personal, social and emotional skills, and communication, language and literacy. Significant progress has been made in narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and others. Early monitoring is giving a much more accurate picture of children's achievements and areas for development. Adult users demonstrate improved outcomes as a result of attending groups and adult education with a high proportion moving onto volunteer opportunities, further training and employment. Users are supported well through a range of information provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau. They are enabled to make informed decisions about a range of benefits including workless benefits, maternity benefits, and budgeting and debt management alongside other services.

The centre is very effective in ensuring that users make a positive contribution. They are actively encouraged to participate in decision making. Their feedback on a range of issues and through a variety of mediums is meaningful and is being used to shape services. The chair of the advisory board is a parent who gives good encouragement to others in order to support their involvement.

*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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</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>2</b>

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

<b>2</b>
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Assessment of the needs of children and their families is systematic and effective. Services and activities are well signposted. Case studies demonstrate the progress children make in their personal, social and emotional development. Referrals to Middleton Children's Centre services come from a variety of sources including self-referral. Assessments are completed and presented at the weekly meetings between partner agencies where needs are identified and considered on an individual basis. This ensures that families are allocated the most appropriate support which may include a mix of targeted one-to-one support such as counselling, information and guidance for parents, attendance at one or more of the general sessions for parents and children, and, or the provision of a nursery place or crèche facilities. These meetings also review and manage workloads of individual staff ensuring that no member is overloaded. Parents say they feel very well supported on an individual level through the joint working of children's centre and health professionals, especially in times of crisis.

The qualified Early Years Teacher provides exceptional support for early years staff in the centre and other local settings and delivers highly effective activities for them as well as for children and parents. Joint working and improved assessment of children's starting points with the positive engagement of the parents has resulted in more accurate assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Evidence is now showing that children are making excellent progress and they are significantly narrowing the gap between the lowest and higher attaining children. Significant improvements in communication, language and literacy are as a result of the joint working between staff including the linked speech and language therapist. Chatter bags, Chatter and Rhyme bags and workshops delivered by the SAGE a musical outreach service help parents to understand the benefits of good communication with their children through songs and rhyme.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Skilled and committed staff ensure there is always a warm welcome for users even though their availability is stretched as a result of a lengthy period of staff shortages. Parents spoke about overcoming issues of isolation, and a typical comment is that, 'I felt on my own and dreaded the days, here you know you belong'. 'The bus comes earlier now so that we can drop into the centre, have a cup of tea and meet up with friends, it is so important.' Transport commissioned by the centre is invaluable to many families who live within the reach area and do not drive. Health visitors are proactive in their support of the children's centre by informing parents at the very first contact of the services delivered. They also undertake joint visits to individual homes alongside family support workers.

The views of parents and users of the services are regularly canvassed and are taken into account when planning and determining future provision. However, children's feedback about the activities they do and their involvement in the centre is not regularly captured and is therefore not always used in the planning and delivery of services.

*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>1</b>

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

<b>2</b>
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Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. Regular meetings between the children's centre acting cluster manager, her peers within the Durham Dales and senior managers guarantee there are good links between strategic planning and service delivery. As a result, there is consistency in service delivery throughout the Durham Dales while at the same time respecting the needs of each area. At strategic level effective relationships between children's centre, health and the Children's Trust managers ensure clear direction in relation to partnership working. The local authority now provides detailed data and analysis of how well the centre is doing. It also evidences the comparison between Durham county and national progress. However, managers are not using this information along with large number of user evaluations sufficiently well in order to monitor the effectiveness of the centre, ensure rigorous self-evaluation or to set ambitious and challenging targets. The advisory board has recently come through a transition stage and is providing support and an element of challenge. It is aware that it now needs

to increase its focus on holding the centre to account for its performance. Despite there being several temporary posts due to a recruitment freeze, the senior leadership team led very effectively by the acting cluster manager provide good management support. Programmed and effective supervision ensures they are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Good relationships mean that staff work very well together to improve outcomes for users. During discussions with staff and partner agencies their passion for the centre and its community comes across strongly. They are effective in ensuring that children and families have access to a wide range of experiences.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. All services are fully inclusive for those that do attend, although some groups particularly the travelling community are still less represented than others. The centre promotes inclusive practice for children with disabilities. However, the centre cannot be certain of how equitable its service delivery is until it is able to accurately collect data in relation to this group or to monitor outcomes overall.

Good safeguarding arrangements are in place and keep children, parents, carers and staff safe. All actions are in line with the policies and procedures set by Durham County Council and the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board. Systems in place ensure that all staff are subject to enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks. Confirmation that third-party staff checks have been undertaken can be evidenced by the children’s centre’s acting cluster manager. There are systems in place to ensure that staff are safe when lone working. They are monitored effectively by the administrator within the centre who plays an important role in supporting the delivery of services. The Children’s Trust provides training and guidance and monitors the effectiveness of the Common Assessment Framework.

*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>3</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>3</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**

None

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 Middleton-In-Teesdale Children's Centre on 9 and 10 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation and talked with a range of children and adults including parents and carers, staff, community representatives and partnership workers. We also read some of the things you have written about the centre when you have been on courses or attended activities with your children. Through our discussions and observations we consider that the centre's particular strengths relate to enjoying and achieving, and care, guidance and support.

Under the careful guidance of the manager, staff provide excellent care, guidance, and support for all you who use the centre. Those of you who spoke to us said that you feel the centre helps to overcome isolation and the thought of dropping into the centre, 'helps you get up in the morning'. Most importantly, you said it helps improve your lives and those of your families, particularly for those of you who are facing difficult challenges. Staff place the utmost importance on providing a warm and welcoming environment. As a result, you value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly. Inspectors were impressed by the support and the emerging challenges made to the centre by the newly constructed advisory board. We are confident that when the centre is able to provide you with detailed information in relation to how effective it is you will be in a much stronger position to question and challenge.

Many of you who start by making contact with the centre become more involved than you expect to. We saw that for some of you, your contact with the centre has led you to develop new skills, go on to further training, gain qualifications volunteering and to find work. Many of you said how this is improving your lives, and how much you appreciate the support and encouragement staff give you. The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Creative Explorers', 'Baby Play' and the work you have undertaken with the qualified teacher from Middleton Primary School in relation to phonics. We could see how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

Children who attend the wide range of childcare services including the linked school's nursery, the designated day nursery and crèche provision are making outstanding progress. Excellent transition arrangements mean that your children enter the next stage of their care and education with confidence and are ready to get down to hard work. You should be very proud of their achievements.

Well-established partnerships ensure the health, safety and well-being of you and your families. The close working relationship between health visitors, midwives, speech therapists and children centre staff ensures that from an early age your children are getting the best possible start and you are getting good quality information.

To develop further the work of the centre we have asked the managers and the local authority to use all of the information they receive to monitor how effective the centre is. We have also asked them to make sure they are setting ambitious targets and to look at how well they meet these targets.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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