

Inspection report for Wheatley Hill Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Durham |
| Inspection number | 362623 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 March 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Elizabeth Srogi HMI |

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| Centre governance | Durham County Council |
| Centre leader | Sue Howe |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Centre address | Jack Lawson Terrace Wheatley Hill Durham DH6 3RT |
| Telephone number | 03000 269 850 |
| Fax number | Not applicable |
| Email address | sue.howe@durham.gov.uk |

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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | EY 330506 Wheatley Hill Community Nursery |

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with centre management, staff members, members of the advisory board, a local authority representative, partner agencies, parents and users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Wheatley Hill Children's Centre is a former family centre. It was designated as a phase one children's centre in March 2006. The centre delivers all core services including daycare and education, family support and outreach, and health services. It is co-located with Wheatley Hill Community Nursery. The nursery is subject to its own inspection and the report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk

The centre's governance is provided by the local authority. Membership of the centre's advisory board includes members of the local community, partner agencies and parents; it is shared with Thornley Children's Centre. The centre's manager has overall responsibility for seven children's centres in a cluster arrangement.

The children's centre serves a rural community which is identified as being in the 30% most deprived wards in the country. The levels of worklessness in the area and the percentage of families on benefits in the area are high. The population of the area are 98.5% White British heritage. The centre's reach area has an approximate population of 3181 with 169 children under the age of five years. Most children enter

early years provision with a much narrower range of skills and abilities than those typically 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

Wheatley Hill Children's Centre provides the children and families in its reach area with an overall good level of support to improve their lives. The centre over recent months has undergone some turbulent times due to changes to staff, including management, and significant building work which is only just coming to an end. This has impacted on the centre's ability to provide activities for families in its own building but centre staff have accessed other local buildings, such as the school and have successfully linked with Thornley Children's Centre to continue to provide good support to families. Despite the problems faced by the centre the commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism of the cluster manager and all staff to provide a high quality service that meets individual and community needs is very much at the forefront of all they do. This and an appreciation of the strengths and areas for improvement planned and required in the centre shows that the centre has good capacity to improve.

A significant strength of the centre is the priority it gives to safeguarding all children, users and staff. All centre staff, no matter what their role, see this as an essential and vitally important part of their work. The individually targeted work carried out by staff for children and families specifically referred to the centre for support clearly shows how they have helped to improve outcomes for them. This has resulted in better lives for children and families and case studies show how, for example, families have stayed together, have escaped domestic violence or improved their emotional health as a result of the centre's involvement. However, overall numbers of referrals and sharing of information to enable targeted input are moderate and therefore some children and families may not be getting the support that is available to them from the very experienced and skilled staff in the children's centre.

The centre considers that inclusion, equality and diversity is central to the work of the centre and works diligently to promote their centre as place for all. Parents and carers, including dads, regularly attend the sessions provided by the centre and one

parent told me that when inclement weather stopped her from attending, she could not wait to attend and see everyone. The vast majority of parents and carers have nothing but praise for the work of the centre and many see it as a lifeline. Comments made to inspectors include, 'Surestart has saved my life'. Parents and carers and their children are eagerly awaiting and anticipating their return to 'their' centre when building work is completed. However, evaluation has shown how using the school for activities has proved to be a great benefit in helping parents and carers and children to see the school as a good place to be, so one activity is to remain school-based when the centre fully re-opens. Enthusiastic staff have plans in place to celebrate the centre's re-opening and are advertising the services they will be providing in the newly refurbished centre. The advisory board, which has recently developed from the management group, has clear aims and objectives and supports the centre.

The centre provides effective access to training and development opportunities for users with good results. They work closely with Acumen, a charity based in East Durham and others to promote training and development and in encouraging people's aspirations and belief in themselves to achieve and improve their lives. The centre links with Jobcentre Plus and advertises the top ten jobs available in every session provided by the centre. However, Jobcentre Plus no longer provides services from the centre and, therefore, users do not now have immediate access to their services and resources to improve their opportunities to return to work.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority to encourage partners, including social services, to improve information sharing and referral rates to ensure the expertise and skills of the centre of the centre staff are more available to those who would benefit from children's centre intervention.
- Revisit with Jobcentre Plus their ability to work from the centre to support users into work. Improve resources to enable users to be able to access return to work information more comprehensively and easily by such things as, for example, providing an information kiosk.

How good are outcomes for users?

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Evidence through case studies, observations and discussions with centre staff, parents, carers and partners reflect that all outcomes for children and their families who use the centre's services, are good.

Parents, carers and children are benefitting greatly from the services provided and are developing a good awareness of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles. Over time, the centre provides various courses on aspects of healthy eating; parents and carers have highlighted that these have made a significant difference in family eating habits. For example, they tell of how they now cook with their children, make

food instead of buying ready-made products and how they have learnt how to get children to eat foods they were adamant they did not like, by combining ingredients and providing 'hidden' foods. Sessions and activities provided by the centre encourage users to be active. Children, parents and grandparents were observed enjoying the activities at 'baby gym' and attendance at the walking group is seen to improve participants' physical and emotional health. Obesity levels in young children in the area continue to fall.

Effective and improving partnerships with health services ensure that local families benefit from the range of services available to them. Breastfeeding in the area is still low but is improving; breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are higher than the locality average. Baby massage facilitated by the centre and provided by very skilled staff enhances mums' and dads' relationships with their babies. Smoking cessation advice is given at every opportunity and there has been a 7% drop in the prevalence rate of smoking in the area.

Procedures ensure children are very well safeguarded. Users of the centre comment how safe and secure they feel when attending centre activities and that they fully trust the centre staff to care for their children. Cooperative working provides support for children and families identified as being in need, on child protection plans or looked after children. Case studies show how centre involvement has helped children and families to improve their lives and of how a multi-agency approach is helping families to stay together. The good take up of the WHOOPS safety equipment scheme enables parents and carers to show how they have considered and improved their ability to make sure their children are safe. As one parent highlighted, advice from staff and equipment, such as a safety gate, sockets covers and a fire guard from the scheme has meant her child can now play upstairs without falling down and she will not bang her head on the hearth.

Children who use the centre facilities and linked daycare/nursery make good progress in their development when acknowledging their low starting points. They enjoy activities such as Learning through Play, and with the support of centre staff, parents and carers engage and get involved in their child's learning. Specific input from such initiatives as 'Learning through Music' provided by the Sage music venue and education centre, Gateshead makes learning enjoyable and productive. This is seen to contribute greatly to children's personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy skills. A recent initiative is the introduction of learning journals for all children attending centre activities, parents and carers are involved in completing them and their comments recorded show how it is helping them with their child's learning. Parents and carers report how attending such courses as the Nurturing and Hanen parents programmes have significantly improved their parenting skills and have taught them, for example, patience when handling their children's behaviour and what to expect of their children. Data shows that average Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores are improving in the reach area.

Behaviour across the centre is good. Children observed in centre activities and the community nursery are well behaved and relate well to each other and to staff. Users

of the centre and staff are seen to treat each other with utmost respect and consideration. Parents' comments reflect this as they highlight that the staff are great and are there for them. Parents and carers clearly identify that they are very involved in the centre, they are listened to and are effectively involved in shaping services and identify how this is improving their personal confidence and development. Parents are represented on the advisory board, which has recently evolved from the management group and those at the recent parents' forum were very vocal in identifying their needs and wants. Parents and carers were consulted on the ongoing building work to improve the centre and they say how they cannot wait to be back in 'their' centre.

Parents' and carers' attendance at the centre and their usage of the centre's facilities and activities are helping to raise their aspirations and gain confidence in their own abilities. There is good evidence of parents and carers being helped to access training and in some cases employment. For example, some told inspectors how they had been helped by the centre to gain level 1 and 2 qualifications in numeracy and literacy, which had led to the confidence to access and gain accredited qualifications at level 1, 2 and 3 and in some cases employment, and of how this had bettered their lives. Users are provided with job vacancy information and signposted to Jobcentre Plus for further advice and guidance. However, the withdrawal of on site services from Jobcentre Plus and their resources impacts on their accessibility to specific help to enter employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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| 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 provides good quality universal and targeted services, which are helping to improve the outcomes for families attending the centre and for those who receive more specific work in their own homes, through outreach work. The centre is currently undergoing significant building and improvement work. However, this is

now coming to fruition and plans are firmly in place to re-launch the activities, such as 'messy play,' which local venues could not accommodate. The new programme is ready to launch from April 2011.

Partnership working and good assessment of individual need using the available inter- agency referral form and/or the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and involvement in Team around the Child processes, ensures the needs of referred users are effectively identified and that appropriate services and support are provided. Parents and carers have identified how tailored support services provided to them particularly in times of crisis have met their needs and improved their lives. They highlight how such things as one-to-one support in their homes has helped them gain the confidence to come and use centre activities. The good relationships between staff and parents and carers observed give them the confidence to make their initial and ongoing needs known.

Learning, development and enjoyment are promoted well. Effective relationships with such partners as ACUMEN, a charity based in East Durham, raise users' aspirations and significantly contribute to their development and access to training and in some cases employment. Access to crèche facilities and/or daycare places means that parents and carers can access courses knowing their children are cared for well. The close working between the principal family workers, the daycare manager and the Early Years Foundation Stage lead teacher enables the quality of work with children and their families to be monitored and ensures the integration of the Early Years Foundation Stage in all of the centre's work. This close working has shown the benefit of early intervention to children involved in the two year old pilot scheme and has enabled the early identification of where extra support is needed to give children a better start when they enter nursery at three. They have also highlighted that the 'free school meals for all' programme is coming to an end and have clear plans in place of how they will be working together to help parents and carers to provide healthy food for their children if they do not continue to have school meals. There are good links in place with the dental health worker, who regularly visits the children's centre, daycare and local school to work with children and staff.

There is a good range of provision provided through the centre. The centre works closely with partner agencies and cluster children's centres to ensure the best use of resources, value for money and sustainability by sharing staff and some activities to avoid unnecessary duplication. Participation rates are generally good because the centre is making sure the activities provided meet the interests and needs of individuals. The centre is focussed on meeting the needs of its hard-to-reach groups and has, over the last year, had 100% success rate in engaging with teenage mums. Support for parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is provided by the centre and parents' comments and case studies show the positive impact that has been given to improve outcomes for families and children. Information on such services as sexual health and domestic violence are appropriately advertised throughout the centre.

Care, guidance and support are strengths of this centre. Parents and carers confirm that support provided is individualised to meet their needs and is provided in a positive and helpful way. The centre staff pride themselves on ensuring as many people in the reach area know about and access centre activities and publicise the work of the centre at every opportunity. The centre website is monitored for 'hits' and a recent initiative to widen the availability of information to further encourage participation is to advertise services in local clubs, betting shops and gyms. The centre's links with partners, such as domestic violence, drugs and alcohol scheme and Homestart means services for families can be organised quickly and efficiently.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Despite the upheaval the centre has gone through in recent months, the whole staff team have a determined attitude and infectious enthusiasm to ensure the services they provide will and do have a good impact on improving families' lives. The centre leaders have high expectations of the staff team and partners. Relationships between staff are very good and the varying roles among centre staff work extremely well together. All staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and know how they link to provide cohesive services within the centre. Staff value each other's knowledge and expertise and rightly highlight that operational work allocated takes into account their skills, knowledge and areas of interest as well as availability.

Governance is good and systems to ensure accountability are secure. Evidence shows how the local authority strategic management supports the day-to-day operation of the centre and the identification of priorities and local targets. However, the local authority has realised that the use of the annual conversation could be better and have changed systems to enable the input of senior managers to be more effective. There are clear lines of responsibility within the centre and in decision-making processes. Evaluation is carried out and action plans are currently being improved to be more focussed and measurable; all activities are subject to a development cycle process to ensure resources are targeted well. All staff are aware of the management structure and there are good supervision procedures in place. The advisory board is developing well, is made up of a broad range of people and is

aware of its aims and responsibilities. The cluster manager has overall responsibility for seven centres and acknowledges this means she cannot spend a great deal of time at the centre. However, she has clear management strategies in place to ensure she has a secure handle on the work of the centre. She does acknowledge this can impact on some things she would like to do in the centre, particularly in relation to having volunteers to support the work as she rightly identifies this would need a great deal of support and supervision for which she has not the time or resources.

The centre has at its heart that inclusion of all families and children is vital to promoting good outcomes for all. There is clear evidence of how diversity is celebrated within the centre and all children and adults, regardless of background or other differences have access to the range of services and activities on offer. Parents, carers and case studies evidence how, for example, the centre has supported not only their children with special educational needs but has helped the family as a whole and has helped those parents and carers with English as an additional language to obtain services, including domestic violence support and improve their access to benefits, therefore, improving their lives. Information available and displayed in the centre promotes equality and diversity and the newly refurbished centre is fully accessible for disabled people. Case studies, observation and data show how the centre is effectively helping to narrowing the achievement gap.

The arrangements to effectively safeguard all users are outstanding. Recruitment and vetting procedures are robust and there is very clear information detailing that staff from partner agencies using the centre are suitably vetted. All staff, including administration staff, have had appropriate training and are very aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and the processes to use. Detailed risk assessments, which are regularly updated, are seen as vitally important and are in place for all areas of the building and for every individual activity. There are very clear information policies and procedures in place to ensure that information known, for example, about vulnerable families is only shared with those who have a right to know. The centre's safeguarding file is detailed and covers policies and procedures not only to protect users but also staff. All staff are aware of the file, the content and location.

Partnership working is strong and improving and partnerships across a range of services and community groups are used well to promote good and improving outcomes for children and their families. However, although some partners, such as the social services safeguarding team, speak highly of the work done by the children's centre and are aware of the support and services it can offer, the sharing of information and the number of referrals for support are quite low, which impacts on the centre's ability to use their skills and knowledge to support more families and children.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| 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 | 1 |
| 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 | 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

Information from the recent inspection of Wheatley Hill Community Nursery was used to inform the judgements for the children's centre inspection.

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 Wheatley Hill Children's Centre on 16-17 March. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit we looked at the centre's activities and documents, and spoke to many of you as well as managers, staff and other professionals and partners involved with the centre and its work.

Overall, you spoke very highly of the centre and the support it provides for you and your families. Many of you gave examples of how the support, the activities the centre provides and the quality of outreach work has made a difference to your lives. Some of you gave examples of how you have been helped to gain qualifications, not only to help your own personal development but to help you return to work. The centre is good at bringing to your attention the most recent job vacancies. However, you do not now have access to Jobcentre Plus and their resources at the centre and it is concerning that this will not help you to have easy access to advice, guidance and opportunities from them to get into work. To help with this we have asked the centre to revisit with Jobcentre Plus how they can help you with this.

You are very clear as to how you are able to contribute to the running of the centre and how your views are listened to so activities meet your needs and wants. There are parent representatives on the advisory board and your recent parents' forum not only produced ideas of what you want from the centre but more volunteers to sit on the board. You were consulted on the building work currently being carried out at the centre and your enthusiasm and desire to get back into 'your' centre is very evident. However, it is good to know that where you have said that having sessions in the school has been helpful to you, the centre is going to continue to run an activity session in the school even when they have full access to the centre.

The centre offers lots of activities to improve the health and well-being of your families and you told us quite clearly how you have used information from courses attended to improve your children's diets and, therefore, their health.

Children who attend the centre's activities and the linked Wheatley Hill Community Nursery are helped to make good progress in their learning and development. Children and adults who attend the activities enjoy and value the sessions, such as Learning through Play and Baby Gym.

Ensuring the safety of children is a strength of the centre and the centre's commitment and actions to reduce the risk of harm to children are outstanding. You were very clear that you and your children are safe when attending activities at the centre or in other venues. You also highlighted to us how being able to access the WOOSH safety scheme has helped make your homes safer for your children.

We found that services work well together to provide help and support to families, including those with members with identified needs but that the centre is not always asked to help as many families as they could. To help more families have support as

you do, we have asked the centre to work with the local authority to see if more people can have services and help from the centre.

We found that the people in charge are doing a good job. The management team are working hard to make sure the centre is helping you to make a difference in your lives.

Please accept our thanks for taking the time to talk to us. We are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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