

# Inspection report for Mount Pleasant Children's Centre

Local authority	Darlington Borough Council
Inspection number	365702
Inspection dates	2-3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Rachael Flesher HMI

Centre governance	Darlington Borough Council
Centre leader	Mel Douglas
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Newton Lane, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 9HE
Telephone number	01325 488176
Fax number	N A
Email address	mel.douglas@darlington.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Mount Pleasant Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Just Learning Nursery 301131

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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents and carers, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, the advisory board and the local authority.

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

## Information about the centre

Mount Pleasant Children's Centre is situated on a shared site with Mount Pleasant Primary School, in the West of Darlington. It serves a community where 50% live within the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Families face issues of third generation unemployment, low-income households, lone-parent households, poor housing, social deprivation, drug and alcohol misuse, crime, domestic violence and low levels of skills, including literacy and numeracy. Children attending the attached primary school are from the 20% most income-deprived Super Output Areas in the country. The large majority of families in the centre's reach area are predominantly White British with a small percentage of families from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of children who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.

The full day care element of the provision is provided at the nearby Just Learning Nursery. Children enter the early years provision with skills that are much lower than those typically expected for their age, particularly in relation to speech and language.

Mount Pleasant Children's Centre is establishing its own advisory board, to meet the needs of the local community. The children's centre is governed by Darlington Borough Council. The centre provides the full core offer.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

The overall effectiveness of Mount Pleasant Children’s Centre is satisfactory. The centre has the capacity to improve outcomes and provision based on what it has accomplished so far. Self-evaluation provides the centre with an accurate appraisal of its effectiveness and what it needs to do in order to secure further improvement. It gives those in charge a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and enables them to secure steady continuous improvement. The local authority asks challenging questions of the leaders to improve provision and outcomes and plans for the future are well targeted to bring about further improvement. However, systems to gather and analyse reliable data and evidence to monitor and demonstrate the impact of services and activities on outcomes for children and their families are limited. This includes the identification of target groups, those hard to reach and the most vulnerable, which would enable the centre to better secure early intervention, prevention and user engagement. The centre promotes equality and diversity and the inclusion of all children and their families.

The centre has focused on improving some areas of weakness and gaps in provision and outcomes. Some users and partners are involved in the self-evaluation process. However, there are limited opportunities for all to contribute to the decision-making and governance of the centre and in shaping the services. Systems to keep users informed of developments and seek their views are not fully in place and as a result, user satisfaction is not always positive. Actions taken to tackle identified weaknesses have been steady and effective in delivering improved provision and outcomes.

The safety and welfare of users is given high priority. Strong policies and procedures are in place to ensure the safety and health of users, staff and partners. Protocols and practices for making referrals and sharing information between the relevant agencies are very effective. Staff development and training is effective and appropriate in order to meet current and future needs. 'Being healthy' outcomes are good. A wide range of activities and services are provided to support the take-up of healthy lifestyles and most parents and carers are engaging well with universal services. However, not enough support is provided to parents and carers to access

training and employment to improve their economic and social well-being. Those working in the centre are committed to bringing about sustainable improvements and have confidence in the leaders and managers to provide effective leadership.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- In partnership with the local authority develop systems to gather and analyse reliable data and evidence across all key services to:
  - monitor and demonstrate the impact of services and activities on outcomes for children and their families
  - identify target groups and better secure early intervention, prevention and user engagement.
  
- Improve user engagement and partnership working to ensure more are making a positive contribution to the decision-making and governance of the centre and in shaping the services by:
  - establishing an advisory board
  - re-introducing a parent and carer group
  - developing effective systems for users to communicate their views
  - developing effective information sharing systems at a strategic and local level.
  
- Support parents and carers to develop economic and social well-being by:
  - securely identifying their needs and ensuring provision is matched to requirements
  - providing effective support to those seeking employment including developing partnership working with Jobcentre Plus and increasing access to training
  - monitoring the progress of users and planning for their next steps to ensure progression in their learning and development.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>3</b>
----------

Overall outcomes for users are satisfactory, with the centre achieving good outcomes for being healthy and staying safe. Users have good access to a wide range of health services and parents and carers are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy, for example, through the weaning group. The centre has achieved the Healthy Early Years Standard due to the provision and promotion of healthy lifestyles. The good take-up rates of health services and activities are leading to improved outcomes. Health visitors are based in the centre and are an integral part of the centre team. They work in good partnership with the centre staff and midwife to ensure identified vulnerable families receive the support and guidance they need.

Users state they feel protected at the centre and the premises are safe, clean and secure. Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others and are developing a sound understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves safe. Parents and carers receive good support and guidance to help them learn how to keep their children safe. Parenting programmes are improving parenting skills and outcomes for those users who are experiencing difficulties with children's behaviour. They told inspectors 'It has worked', 'It has brought us closer together', 'It has given me the strength to cope' and 'I now stay calm and walk away when I'm stressed'. The baby massage sessions are helping parents and carers to bond with their babies. Children subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are supported with the effective tailored package of support they receive from relevant professionals and inter-agency working. The centre provides accommodation for social care contact visits.

The centre has begun to take action to narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest to ensure children get a better start and make progress. A qualified teacher and The Child Development Programme support this work. However there is limited evidence available to demonstrate the impact to date. Parents and carers report their children are making progress. 'I can see she is moving on'. Children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making progress from their starting points and are generally well prepared for school. Parents and carers enjoy the opportunities to play, have fun and learn together with their children, for example, in the music and movement 'Wigglets' session. There is some improvement in users' outcomes in relation to educational, personal and social development but this is variable and not well evidenced by the centre. Many users report that their engagement in the centre services and activities is enjoyable, although others are less satisfied, reporting they do not always feel welcome and that many activities they enjoyed have ceased.

Children behave well, are making progress in their personal development and are developing sound relationships. There are limited opportunities for users to contribute to the decision-making and governance of the centre and in shaping the services. The advisory board has yet to be established, although the centre has firm plans in place and is taking appropriate action to address this in the immediate future. The parents group has dissolved due to members no longer having children attending the centre and has not been re-introduced. In addition, the systems for seeking the views of all users are not fully developed. This is leading to some users reporting that they do not feel listened to. The centre is beginning to establish its role in the community and users state that 'The new manager is improving things'. Users treat each other with respect and the children centre is represented on the local community partnership board. Community cohesion is developing as a result.

Some users are engaged in training and adult education programmes and participation rates are increasing. Some parents and carers have been supported in finding suitable employment and the centre can demonstrate some success in this area, particularly in relation to teenage parents. However Jobcentre Plus is not

delivering the much-needed services from the centre. Many parents and carers are improving their economic stability and independence with good support provided through the Mobile Advice Co-operative for those needing advice and guidance regarding financial concerns, benefits and tax credits.

*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>3</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>3</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>3</b>
----------

The centre staff, key partners and the local authority have a sound understanding of the issues facing families living in their community. However, not all partners are contributing data and information to the centre to ensure the needs of the centre's reach area are accurately assessed and services targeted accordingly. As a result, systems are not fully developed to ensure that all target groups, including those hard to reach and the most vulnerable, are identified in order to secure early intervention, prevention and improved user engagement. The centre has clear plans in place to reach out and engage more children and families with the centre services and activities. Good use is made of CAF processes to ensure effective provision is provided to those subject to these assessments.

The provision of services and activities at the centre meet most of the users needs with some users reporting that the provision satisfies their needs and is having a positive impact on improving outcomes. Most users enjoy the activities and the centre is meeting the needs of some of the targeted groups of users but the quality of activities and users' satisfaction is variable. Personal development and achievements for both children and adults are celebrated. Provision builds on children's prior learning, however, this is not always the case for adult users. Participation and attendance rates, although satisfactory, are variable and the centre reports approximately 50% of the most vulnerable children and families living in 30% most deprived area are engaged in services. Nonetheless, user engagement is not increasing rapidly. Crèche facilities are provided to ensure equality of access and opportunities for users. Two groups are now led by parents after they faced being

cancelled due to staff deployment. Parents led negotiations to take over the running of the groups, supported by the centre leader and staff to ensure the sessions were suitable and of good quality, and these are highly attended. This empowered the parents involved and demonstrates the centre's commitment to ensuring provision is sustainable.

The quality of care for young children, parents and other users provided by the centre is sound. The principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage are beginning to be embedded across all activities to ensure quality. On the whole, support for users is satisfactory, although the quality varies across services and outcomes. For example, information, advice and guidance users receive from health professionals and the Mobile Advice Co-operative are good. However, information, advice and support regarding employment, adult education and training opportunities are limited. Some families feel the centre has helped them in times of crisis and state the centre has helped to reduce social isolation and to build their confidence.

*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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>

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

**3**

Satisfactory governance and accountability arrangements are in place at a strategic and management level. However, the centre does not have an advisory board or parents and carers group, and, therefore, key partners and users are not fully involved in the decision-making and governance of the centre. Some key partners are also not engaged in supporting and developing integrated provision. Professional supervision and management arrangements at the centre are aligned and relevant information is shared. Staff state they feel supported through their supervision meetings and day to day support from the centre manager. They feel valued and report that 'The 'new manager has raised staff morale'. Users state the centre has improved since the arrival of the new centre manager. Leaders and staff are motivated to seek further improvement and engage in ongoing reflective practice.

The centre's development plan ensures actions are well targeted to secure improvements and all staff, and some services, are involved in the centre's self-evaluation. Some key partners evaluate the outcomes of their service or provision and contribute to the overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the centre. Systems

for monitoring and demonstrating the impact of the services and activities on the progress and outcomes of users are not fully developed.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. Resource planning is managed well and takes into account the need to develop sustainable services. The centre works effectively with other services from the private, voluntary and independent sector. The available space at the centre is well utilised by a range of partners as a meeting place, and a base from which to deliver their services and activities. This includes local childminders and borough wide services, such as Social Care, the hearing impaired group and the Down's Syndrome group. The centre also provides office space for the wide range of professionals based at the centre. Having key partners co-located is having a significant impact on developing information sharing systems and partnership working. However, some users report the centre 'feels like an office'. The centre has some key staff on long term sick leave and others are no longer in post. Although staff are flexible, and well-deployed and arrangements are in place to cover these absences, some users feel this has had a negative impact on service delivery.

Good arrangements are in place to ensure all staff and other professionals delivering services from the centre are suitable to have access to children. Staff are well trained in child protection and safeguarding. The centre promotes the inclusion of all children and their families and actively promotes equality and celebrates diversity. There is a sound range of services for children and parents and carers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

*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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</b>
--	----------

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

The children's centre is co-located on the site of Mount Pleasant Primary School. The school was not inspected at the same time as the children's centre therefore, the previous inspection report was taken into account.

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 Mount Pleasant Children's Centre on 2-3 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection. We found your children's centre to be very welcoming and friendly. You told us you find the centre to be very clean and secure, ensuring you feel safe and protected. We agree. Your safety and welfare and that of your children are given high priority and you are developing a good understanding of how to keep your children safe.

Self-evaluation provides the centre with an accurate appraisal of its effectiveness and what it needs to do in order to secure further improvement. It gives those in charge a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and enables them to secure steady continuous improvement. However, systems to securely evidence the impact of services and activities on your outcomes and those of your children are limited. Systems to identify target groups, those hard to reach and the most vulnerable and engage them with the centre and services as soon as possible are also limited. Your children's centre has been asked to improve this. Your centre has focused on improving some areas of weakness and gaps in provision and outcomes. Actions taken to tackle identified weaknesses have been steady and effective in delivering improved provision and outcomes.

The centre provides office space for the wide range of professionals based there. Having key partners co-located is having a significant impact on developing information sharing systems and partnership working. However, some of you report the centre 'feels like an office' and you do not always feel welcome. The centre has

some key staff on long term sick leave and others are no longer in post. Although staff are flexible, and well-deployed and arrangements are in place to cover these absences, some of you told us this has had a negative impact on service delivery.

There are limited opportunities for all of you, and some partner services, to contribute to the decision-making and governance of the centre and in shaping the services. Systems to keep you informed of developments and seek your views are not fully in place. There is no longer a parent and carer group and the advisory board has yet to be established. As a result, not all of you are satisfied with the centre services and provision and some of you report you '...do not feel listened to'. Your children's centre has been asked to improve this. Those working in the centre are committed to bringing about sustainable improvements and have confidence in the leaders and managers to provide effective leadership. You also told us that the new manager is improving things.

A wide range of activities and services are provided to support the take up of healthy lifestyles and most of you are engaging well with universal services. You have access to good information, advice and guidance regarding financial issues, such as debt, tax credits and benefits through the Mobile Advice Co-operative. However, not enough support is provided for you to access training and employment in order to further improve your economic and social well-being. Your children's centre has been asked to improve this.

Most of you enjoy the activities provided and many of you tell us they are meeting your needs and are having a positive impact on improving outcomes for you and your families. However, the quality varies and this is reflected in your variable levels of satisfaction. Parenting programmes are improving parenting skills and outcomes for those of you who are experiencing difficulties with your children's behaviour. You told us 'it has worked', 'it has brought us closer together', 'it has given me the strength to cope'. Some of you told us you feel the centre has helped you in times of crisis and state that the centre has helped to reduce social isolation and to help to build your confidence. Your centre is supporting your children to develop and is preparing them for school. You told us your children are making progress with one of you stating 'I can see she is moving on'. Your centre has secure understanding of the needs of your community and satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity and the inclusion of all children and their families.

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