

Inspection report for Ridgeway Children's Centre

Local authority	South Tyneside
Inspection number	366404
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre governance	Ridgeway Primary School
Centre leader	Judith Gordon
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Ridgeway Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY261422 Ridgeway Children's 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 Ridgeway Primary School was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, elected members, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health and education professionals and representatives from Making Headway and Cleadon Regeneration Partnership.

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

Information about the centre

Ridgeway Children's Centre is located in the East Shields area of South Shields. The reach population of the centre is just over 290. There are four super-output areas in the children's centre reach, all of which fall into the 20% most deprived in the country. Recent figures show that around 34% of households are lone parents with dependent children. Estimated weekly income is significantly lower than the South Tyneside average and the percentage of children aged nought to four living in households dependent on workless benefits is around 45%. The majority of local families are of White British heritage.

Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than expected for their age. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.

Ridgeway Children's Centre developed from a former family centre and was designated in November 2007. The centre is located within the Ridgeway Primary School campus which is situated in the Cleadon Park area of South Tyneside. The area is currently undergoing significant regeneration. To date, over 500 former homes have been demolished and a further 750 new homes will eventually be built. A new primary health centre opened in July 2010. This houses many of the local health services to which the centre signposts families. Governance is through Ridgeway Primary School and the head of the centre is the headteacher. There is also an advisory board for the cluster of Whitburn and Marsden, Bolden, Horsley Hill and Ridgeway children's centres. The centre has close links with two local early years and childcare provisions, Bungalow Playgroup and Horsley Hill Day Nursery.

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

2

Main findings

Ridgeway Children's Centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families. Strengths include the impact of the work undertaken to build up trust and respect among local families which in turn ensures that outcomes for people living within this locality are beginning to improve. The support, dedication and commitment of all staff have enabled the centre to establish its position at the heart of the community it serves.

A range of services successfully work together to support the health and well-being of children and families. There is a good focus on reducing health inequalities. However, the under-18 conception rate remains high at 57.8%. Support for teenage parents is currently delivered through a town-wide dedicated service. Partnerships between this service and the children's centre are underdeveloped. As a consequence, early opportunities for teenage parents to engage in the range of activities available in the centre are missed. The centre is aware that more needs to be done to increase the proportion of mothers who breastfeed and to reduce the incidence of smoking especially during pregnancy. These are both key priorities for South Tyneside Children's Trust.

Parents and carers describe the centre as warm and welcoming and say they know

that they can trust the staff who willingly listen and respond to their needs. Well-targeted actions are taken to support vulnerable families, as well as those who need support in times of acute need or crisis. Parents and carers particularly value the personal attention that they and their children receive and, increasingly, some have the confidence to ask for help and support before they reach a point of crisis. The family support outreach service is increasingly supporting more hard-to-reach families and children. However, managers are aware that there is scope to extend this service further, enabling them to identify and target additional support more effectively. Services are increasingly integrated to good effect, particularly the shared actions taken to support and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The centre manager, with support from the area manager, has developed a clear and focused vision to make a real difference to this community. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is evidenced in the increasing range of activities that families, particularly the most vulnerable, can access. Managers are aware that there is still some way to go to ensure all needs are targeted. Through knowing the community well, and having a good understanding of the strengths and gaps in service provision, the centre manager is aware that support for teenage parents and those who wish to stop smoking needs to improve.

Members of the advisory board are fully supportive of the work of the centre and meet regularly to monitor what the centre is providing. However, their ability to evaluate fully the impact of the centre's work is limited. This is because the centre does not yet have well-embedded, systematic and accurate management information that records the full impact of its work, enabling them to set consistently challenging targets for improvement. However, a significant amount of time has been invested in developing systems to address this and so strengthen the centre's performance further. The most recent advisory board minutes provide compelling evidence about the positive impact of this work. As a result, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

Safeguarding is appropriately prioritised, with robust policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and protection of both families and staff. All staff are confident in their understanding of child protection policies and procedures and are confident about identifying signs of abuse, referring quickly and appropriately when necessary. This, coupled with the centre's flexible approach to service delivery, ensures that where support is provided it is responsive to the changing needs of the community and so it remains correctly targeted. Equality is promoted sensitively, with robust systems in place to identify and tackle any forms of discrimination identified at a community or multi-agency level.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend outreach working to make sure all unmet need is identified and, where relevant, tackled through multi-agency partnership working.

- Ensure the Children’s Trust works with the centre’s staff to enable them to support more effectively the priorities of increasing breastfeeding rates and supporting teenage mums, which are identified in the Children and Young People Plan.
- Improve the advisory board’s ability to evaluate the impact of the centre’s multi-agency work by developing more systematic and accurate management information that records the full impact of their work and helps them to set consistently challenging targets for improvement.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Evidence through case studies and discussions with partners and parents and carers indicates the positive impact of partnership working to promote children’s and families’ physical and mental health. This includes the work of health visitors, health practitioners and outreach family support workers as well as the established links with the Choosing Health programme. Effective actions have helped to reduce, by half, the percentage of children in the Reception Year who are obese. Parents who attended the centre’s healthy eating cookery course talked of how this has given them a better understanding of how to be healthy. One parent spoke enthusiastically about how she now buys lots more fruit and vegetables for her children and has the confidence to cook healthier meals for her family. Other parents and carers, inspired by the healthy snacks available at the stay and play sessions, now bring new fruits for children to try. The productive partnership that exists between the centre and the sports development team has further secured the provision of a variety of family sports sessions during the school holidays. The impact of the centre’s work in relation to other key priorities, including improving breastfeeding rates, ceasing smoking and support for teenage parents, is insufficiently evidenced by the centre.

Parents say they feel safe in the centre and have confidence that if there were concerns they would consult the staff as they are trusted. The family support outreach worker has recently completed a home safety training course. This, combined with a recently introduced safety equipment scheme, is beginning to raise children’s and families’ awareness of safety in the home and in their communities. Effective multi-agency support ensures that children subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework processes are well supported. Sound procedures and protocols between relevant agencies ensure that appropriate information is shared between professionals, with care packages identified to meet need in a consistent manner. The progress of these families is monitored, and continued engagement with the children’s centre often provides a safety-net following more intensive intervention.

A range of activities help parents and carers to support and improve their children’s personal, social and emotional development and to build good relationships with them. Parents and carers talk positively about the impact of services on their own parenting skills and their children’s progress. During a visit to a stay and play session, there were many examples of babies and mums successfully bonding well and children developing their play, exploration and communication skills while having fun. Good links with the local library and effective signposting to their activity

sessions further promote children’s developing communication, language and literacy skills. Centre staff have recently introduced learning journals as a means of tracking children’s progress through their involvement with the centre. However, the impact of the centre’s work in relation to promoting children’s ongoing development is insufficiently evidenced.

Many parents commented on how their confidence has improved through participating in activities offered by the centre. The voice of parents is genuinely heard and respected, a sentiment echoed in the comments of those to whom we spoke. All felt they were valued and respected by all centre staff and their partners. The well-established parents’ network has successfully raised additional funds for the centre, enabling the provision of trips and fun days at little or no extra cost to families. Children who attend the centre’s activities are well-behaved and relate well to each other. Parents talk about how their children now share and take turns, and appreciate the tips they have been given to help manage more challenging behaviour. Behaviour management is facilitated further by the positive role models presented by the staff.

There are many good examples of how the centre has helped parents into learning, training and employment. Some, having undertaken the centre’s ‘softer’ informal training opportunities, felt empowered to pursue formal qualifications. In the past year, 22 parents have completed a level 1 qualification in sugar craft and several have now enquired about undertaking basic skills qualifications. One mother stated that these courses have helped her to regain her confidence and that she now ‘feels more positive about the future, both for myself and my children’. In partnership with local training providers, such as Groundworks and Northern Learning Trust, the centre also runs other accredited courses, including first aid and basic numeracy. Those families facing financial difficulties are directed to local partner agencies, such as Making Headway, where they receive timely support and advice to help them maintain financial stability.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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?

3

Assessment of individual cases is sound and the Common Assessment Framework is successfully ensuring teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as being in need. Careful exit strategies are in place to ensure parents can build their confidence and parenting skills, supporting them to independence, at a pace that is appropriate for them. However, some town-wide services are yet to recognise fully the good opportunities and support the centre can provide. Parents accessing the centre for contact sessions, particularly appreciate the timeliness and quality of individual support. They have found them a good introduction to the centre and the opportunities it provides. One parent told us, 'the staff are always welcoming; you can talk to them about anything ... they would never judge you'. However, the extent to which provision is leading to sustained improvements for families is unclear because impact is insufficiently monitored.

A focus on improving the quality of early years provision has ensured that the achievement and aspirations of children are improving. Staff within the children's centre have undertaken recent training in order to develop their knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result, they are beginning to integrate the Early Years Foundation Stage into all aspects of their work, ensuring that children are becoming better prepared when they start school. A close working partnership with the parent and carer support advisers from the primary school has facilitated the work of the children's centre, particularly in relation to supporting some individual families with the challenge of transition into school and nursery.

All centre staff share a sound understanding of the particular issues and challenges facing centre users in this locality. The centre can identify examples where families have been supported, helping them to re-engage in everyday life and enjoy their families and home life again. The dedication and commitment of all involved in the centre, ensures a continued focus on community development and engagement. As a result, the centre is becoming increasingly responsive to the more specific needs of this community. For example, the centre has built upon parents' interest in craft activities and used this as a first step towards encouraging parents to take up more formal training opportunities. This is also reflected in the centre's whole family approach, with activities provided for a range of age groups throughout the school holidays. This has ensured parents of under-fives who have older siblings have been encouraged to join activities.

Sensitive individualised and tailored advice, support and guidance are provided to those families and children who access the centre. Targeted outreach work is expanding and recent case studies show some positive impact from this work. The centre has worked successfully to establish itself as a hub within the community. This is evidenced through the well-attended fun days, holiday activities and stay and play sessions. Having established this firm foundation, the centre manager has plans to extend outreach services, delivering more targeted individual family support, including extending new birth visits to include home safety risk assessments.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
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?

3

The centre's management team, advisory board and partners have a clear focus on improvement. Roles and responsibilities are clearly set out and understood. The local authority, in particular, provides robust challenges to the manager and her team through quarterly performance reviews, attendance at select committees and the 'annual conversation'. There is a coherent link between the Children's Trust, Children and Young People's Plan, and the centre's action plan. As a result, the centre's priorities link effectively to those of the wider area. The local authority service manager continues to work hard to ensure that the profile of the children's centre is raised through representation on a range of local strategic partnerships.

As part of the planning cycle, the centre manager works with staff and the local authority's area manager to identify future priorities. These are based on an accurate evaluation of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. The centre manager ensures that the views of parents and users are collected through evaluations of individual activities and interventions. Responses are analysed in order to assess the quality and usefulness of the activity as well as to support improvement. Assessing the impact of the work with individual families also takes place within panel meetings and case studies and through regular supervision of staff. However, this information is not yet collated in order to measure the centre's impact at a more strategic level.

While the centre's action plan has success criteria, qualitative targets and reasonable timescales, it has fewer measurable targets and limited resource information. Consequently, this makes evaluation of the impact of the plan difficult, particularly in relation to cost effectiveness. More detailed targets are contained in the centre's delivery plan. However, progress against these is not evaluated in a consistent manner. Nevertheless, resources are used effectively to provide a warm and welcoming environment. Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support to families. Value for money is satisfactory.

The performance management of staff is in place and although not yet fully integrated across all services, processes provide for equality of opportunity. For example, there is a strong focus on developing skills of all staff, to deliver inclusive provision and to be sensitive to the needs and views of users. Focused action plans have been drawn up which reflect specific targets for particular groups of users, including dads and young parents, and there has been some improvement in the engagement of these groups.

Safeguarding arrangements to share concerns and record information are well developed. These procedures are used by a range of professional agencies to monitor children’s welfare and to provide appropriate early intervention and support where necessary. Policies and procedures are robust and there are good systems in place to maintain and update them. As a result, all agencies are well aware of the wider safeguarding agenda and collaborate effectively to reduce the risk of harm to children. Prior to their appointment, all checks on the suitability of staff directly employed by the centre are in place. The centre maintains a central register which records these checks. The centre has completed appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of children and their parents and carers.

Effective partnership working, including that with local community organisations, is supporting the successful involvement of some harder to reach groups, such as fathers, in their children’s learning, care and support. It is also helping them to develop fruitful relationships with their children and build their parenting skills, confidence and self-esteem. Many partnerships are developing effectively, not least because of the strong commitment of the centre manager to encourage her colleagues to support all families in the area. While partners can often show the qualitative difference their contributions have made to individual interventions with children and families, they are not always able to show their impact quantitatively, particularly at a detailed reach level. There is less evidence of partners’ involvement in the ongoing evaluation of the impact of the centre’s work, other than through the advisory board’s scrutiny of reports and the self-evaluation document.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable	2

adults	
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
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

There are two childcare settings within the Ridgeway Children’s Centre area. These are Bungalow Playgroup and Horsley Hill Day Nursery. The centre is attached to Ridgeway Primary School which has Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children over three years. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections 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. 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 Ridgeway Children’s Centre on 24 and 25 March 2011. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre’s plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and the centre staff. Following this work, we have judged that the centre provides satisfactory, but improving, support to you and your families. Some of the good things that the centre is doing include the activities and actions taken to promote healthy lifestyles as well as the good quality of care, guidance and support offered by the staff who work with you. We know many of you have enjoyed the craft activity classes that the centre has run and that these have inspired some of you to work towards additional formal qualifications.

The children’s centre offers an increasing number of programmes and activities aimed at improving the health of people in your local community. In particular, it has been very successful in helping lots of people to lead healthier lifestyles, particularly in relation to the food they buy. However, the manager knows there is still more work to do to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies, as well as to increase the

number of new mums who choose to breastfeed their babies. We found that some partnerships with the children's centre were not working as well as they could and as a result some people living in your community are missing out on opportunities to take part in the good range of activities available. This is also something that the children's centre manager knows and continues to tackle.

All parents and carers who spoke to us said that your children's centre is a warm and welcoming place, full of staff who they feel they can trust to help and support them. They told us that staff listen to them and then make sure they get the right advice. We found that the centre is really good at helping people at times in their lives when they most need it. Action is taken quickly and different people and organisations work well as a team to support you and your children. However, while support is effective when families come to the centre, more needs to be done to ensure all families in the community who do not know about the centre can receive this support, so they too can benefit from the good support and activities available. In particular, attendance at activities such as messy play, parent craft and baby massage, as well as holiday activities and fun days, was good. Parents we spoke to said they had thoroughly enjoyed those activities they attended and that they felt happy on the days when they had an activity to go to. You also told us that the stay and play groups provided a much needed opportunity to meet up with friends and that these were very much at the heart of the community.

People in charge of the children's centre are doing a satisfactory and improving job. The children's centre manager is working hard to make sure that everything the centre provides will make a difference to the area in which you live. She has made sure everyone who works with the centre shares this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a difference to your lives. The whole family is at the heart of the centre's work and this is seen in the increasing range of activities on offer and the greater number of you who attend them. Managers know there is still more to do if they are to really get to know the needs of your community. We have asked them to make this a priority. For example, the manager knows there is still work to do to ensure more women stop smoking when they are pregnant and to increase the numbers of mums who choose to breastfeed their babies. The centre is also working hard to encourage more young parents to try out the different activities on offer.

The ability of the centre's management team to understand how well the centre is doing in improving the lives of you and your family is limited. This is because the centre is in the process of developing effective systems to monitor its impact. We know the centre is good at asking you to tell them how you have found all the activities and services which you attend through questionnaires and evaluations. Some of you have used the Parents Network to influence and change the way some services are delivered. The centre continues to look at ways in which it can increase your involvement and influence you, as parents, to become involved in its work. We hope this is something you will consider doing.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak 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.