

Inspection report for Chilton Children's Centre

Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	365663
Inspection dates	6–7 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Glickman

Centre governance	Durham County Council
Centre leader	Carole Dawson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Chilton Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY391259 Brandon Happy Times Daycare Ltd

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 maintained nursery 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.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre management and staff, representatives of the local authority, health services, and other partner organisations, members of the advisory board and parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Chilton Children's Centre is located in the village of Chilton in the south of County Durham and serves families in the immediate vicinity. Most of the area falls within the 30% most deprived category on the index of multiple deprivation and is among the 15% most deprived areas in the country. In addition, 36.5% of local families have no-one working in the household and 62.5% of families are eligible to claim the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills below average for their age. Almost all local families are of White British background.

The centre consists of a number of rooms attached to the local primary school and community college, with which it shares a common reception area and also has access to a secure outdoor play area. Crèche facilities are available on the same premises, staffed by the private childcare provider.

Chilton Children's Centre is one of eight centres which make up the Sedgefield cluster with management and administration at Dean Bank Children's Centre. There is a permanent administrative presence at Chilton, but management and family

support staff work across the whole cluster, although each centre has its own designated family support workers. The centre opened as a Sure Start Local Programme in 2002 and became a Phase 2 children's centre in 2008, delivering the full core offer, including health and education services. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority and there is an advisory board in place which includes parent representation.

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

Chilton Children's Centre provides a good service to the children and families who live in the village. The centre is small but warm and welcoming and staff are committed and enthusiastic about their work. Although the centre is part of a larger cluster, managers know the area well and are able to deliver the services that local users require. They are able to respond quickly to individual needs and are flexible in their planning and use of resources. This means that the centre has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Family support services in the centre are delivered by both local authority and National Health Service (NHS) staff. A particular strength is the close cooperation between individual workers from both services. Because they have good working relationships and confidence in one another, they are able to share information informally to ensure that families receive the support they require, no matter who delivers it. However, local authority staff do not have access to the data management system used by the health staff. This causes unnecessary duplication of record keeping and could result in information being lost.

The local authority has carried out extensive analysis of data on the local area and programmes delivered from the centre and can clearly show where progress has been made and where further work is required. However, it is unable to obtain statistics on services and programmes being delivered by the local NHS Foundation Trust and is, therefore, unable to measure their effectiveness.

The close cooperation among centre staff extends to the private childcare provider and the local primary school who share the same premises. Staff from the childcare provider also provide crèche facilities during children's centre activities and visit the school nursery, which means that both parents and children see familiar faces as they progress through the system. Childcare staff value being able to call on the expertise of the children's centre when they identify children who may need further support and, in turn, this enables the family support workers or specialist health staff to become involved at an early stage.

The outdoor area in the centre of the school is well equipped as a play and learning area and is used by the childcare provider, the children's centre, parents and childminders and the school. The free interaction between the various users further promotes information sharing and joint working. Children's centre staff were observed to take pleasure in observing the progress of school children whom they used to support and for whom they clearly still felt affection.

Until recently, Jobcentre Plus and the Citizens' Advice Bureau held regular advice sessions in the centre. These were popular and successful, as their workers were able to gain the confidence of local families. However, these services have now been withdrawn and, although they are available from other locations in the vicinity and Jobcentre Plus maintains a telephone presence, staff feel that many families will now be reluctant to access the services.

Although the local community is almost exclusively of White British background, the centre, childminders and the private childcare provider ensure that displays, toys and resources represent the multicultural nature of society. The centre has identified a lack of activities specifically aimed at increasing children's awareness of other cultures and is now producing an action plan to address this.

Fathers and male carers are encouraged to participate in centre activities. One father remarked that he was made to feel 'like a parent, not a man' and that he was always treated with respect. Grandparents, too, are encouraged to participate and intergenerational exchanges benefit all participants.

Parents commented that they felt that the centre really listens to them and that 'the service fits the person, not that the person is made to fit the service'. When negative feedback is received, the centre acts quickly to make changes. For example, when a new cookery course turned out to be not what parents wanted, plans were immediately made to reinstate a previous popular cookery course.

Parents say that they feel safe and welcome in the centre. The entrance is protected by physical security arrangements and all staff have received appropriate child protection training. Although family support staff are not permanently based at the centre, there is usually at least one worker on the premises and if none is available,

the reception staff are able to provide support until a family worker can be summoned from a neighbouring centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The NHS and local authority should work together to ensure data is shared and data management systems can be accessed by all family support staff to:
 - prevent duplication of work
 - to ensure information about families is not lost
 - ensure that the centre has data from all agencies delivering services out of the children's centre so that they can prioritise services appropriately
- Explore ways of working with Jobcentre Plus and the Citizen's Advice Bureau so that services meet the needs of local families

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Although children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with abilities below average, they make remarkable progress and considerably more children achieve at least 78 points on their Early Years Foundation Stage Profiles than the national average. The school is clear that this is a direct result of the early interventions undertaken by the children's centre.

In particular, speech and language development has been identified as an area of concern. The centre benefits from a speech therapist who not only works with children and parents but also trains staff and who has developed a series of programmes to help parents improve their child's language skills. This results in speech and language development being central to most of the centre's activities, including 'Tuneful Tots' and 'Infant Massage'.

The centre works hard to deliver services that meet the needs of all its users. When a carer identified a need for an activity for families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, a group was started and every effort made to continue it even when attendance fell to only one child. When it became necessary to close the programme, an individualised session continued to be offered.

Families are encouraged to have healthy lifestyles by cooking courses, one of which is run by a volunteer. Parents and carers said that they now felt more confident using ingredients that they already had in the house rather than buying meals. They also said that they had learned budgeting and household management skills.

'Mini Movers' encourages physical development in younger children and 'Outdoor Explorers' gives an opportunity for messy play in the fresh air. Here, children also learn about healthy eating, when they have their fruit snack, and about staying

healthy when they wash their hands before eating. The use of the shared outside area promotes social development as children of different ages share toys and equipment.

Childhood obesity in the Reception class is lower than the national average and continues to fall. The number of mothers breastfeeding is in line with the national average and is a slight increase on the previous year. Smoking cessation programmes are delivered by the NHS Foundation Trust, and the centre itself has begun to promote smoke-free homes.

Staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to develop support plans for families with specific needs. Where necessary, families will be offered temporary respite placements with the private childcare provider or with childminders. Free childcare places for two-year-olds are also available where a need is identified. A small number of children in the area are subject to child protection plans and the centre has been successful in significantly reducing this number.

Many adults in the area suffer from low self-esteem and a lack of ambition as a result of long-term unemployment, and the centre works hard to promote adult learning and volunteering. Centre staff are quick to encourage parents and carers to join courses or gain qualifications and, although there are limited local employment opportunities, some successes have been achieved.

The centre encourages parent participation. Parents and carers are represented on the advisory board and play an active part in the management of the centre. They assist in and run groups and feel able to suggest new activities when they see a need, sometimes taking on leadership roles themselves. The centre consults regularly with current and potential users through its quarterly 'Parents' Voices' forum.

Children are also encouraged to become involved. For example, a recent consultation event asked children from the centre and the primary school for suggestions to improve the approach to the building and some of their ideas are now being implemented.

The centre has an active childminder network. Childminders are supported to access training and achieve qualifications. They are encouraged to use the centre facilities and this results in mutual confidence and good information sharing. As one childminder stated, 'We are under the one roof and so we can all work together'

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	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 is well aware of the needs of families in the village through considerable experience and supported by consultations with users and partner agencies. Some of the staff live in the area and local volunteers are responsible in some cases for both identifying and responding to needs. For example, a grandmother caring for her grandchildren is now setting up a mutual support group for grandparents in similar situations.

Consultation takes place at the end of every event and the opinions of users and the self-evaluation of the staff involved are used to shape future planning. In practice, users are quick to make their feelings known and staff have a very clear understanding of what works well.

Many families in the village have lived there for several generations and are suspicious of approaches from outsiders. Centre staff go to considerable lengths to gain the confidence of families, for example by adopting an informal approach or by making contact via friends. Parents and carers who become involved are vocal in their praise for how the centre has helped them and their children and are keen to spread the word. The centre has found that this approach is most effective.

Staff make use of every opportunity to promote children's centre services to the community. Parents speak of seeing children's centre leaflets in the doctor's surgery and the staff visited a community centre to speak to parents and carers and invite them to visit the children's centre. The centre is currently planning to hold an outdoor event in one of the most deprived areas as a publicity and recruitment exercise. Staff say that experience has shown that once families can be persuaded to visit the centre, they are keen to become involved.

As a result of the centre being quite small, it is not possible to have an open drop-in facility. However, the centre has an active outreach programme and family workers provide personal support in the home for parents or carers. When one mother was unable to attend an 'Infant Massage' course, a staff member visited her at home to deliver the training. Much of the centre's work, in fact, takes place through outreach, which is so successful that some parents do not feel the need to attend the centre at

all. Activities are also delivered from the nearby health centre when there is insufficient space in the children's centre.

The centre offers a range of basic skills and adult education programmes and signposts parents to higher and further education. Parents were quick to comment on how these courses had helped develop their confidence. They complimented the tutors on some courses whom they felt understood their needs and made learning enjoyable and relevant. On the other hand, they were clear when courses did not meet their needs or expectations and the centre was quick to accept this criticism and act upon it. Parents were conscious, too, of the emotional and social benefits of what they described as 'me time'.

Centre staff can also advise parents and carers on benefits and employment opportunities or refer them to the appropriate agencies. Although the Jobcentre Plus adviser has been withdrawn from the centre, she maintains an interest in it and is available for telephone consultation. Similarly, the Citizens' Advice Bureau adviser who is now based in a neighbouring centre still feels a particular affinity towards the centre.

The centre gives parents and carers the opportunity to meet with a range of agencies with whom they might otherwise be reluctant to engage. For example, the local Police Community Support Officer attended a 'Tuneful Tots' session and joined in the activities, building up a relationship with mothers whom she might not have been able to contact in any other way. The speech therapist, too, is able to identify and support parents during activity sessions without the formality of a visit to a clinic and the library outreach worker is able to promote books to parents who would not probably visit a public library. The headteacher of the primary school believes that parents and carers have the confidence to approach him because they have seen him during their visits to the centre.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

Although they are employed by a number of different agencies, the centre staff work well together as team. Their commitment to their clients is clear and they speak with enthusiasm about their successes. They have confidence in the cluster manager and, because of the widespread area that she covers, she allows them considerable independence. The cluster manager knows the area well and can clearly identify where further development is required.

There is a clear management structure and staff know their responsibilities. Staff have monthly supervision which includes reviews of safeguarding and CAF cases and regular training is provided where specific needs have been identified.

All staff have had enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks and the information has been recorded in a single central register. They have also received child protection training appropriate to their job roles and this is regularly revised by a family outreach worker who has been given that responsibility. Family workers have been trained to recognise and respond to domestic violence and this training is now being provided for the administration staff who may be a victim's first point of contact.

The centre has an active advisory board, chaired by the headteacher of the local primary school, which includes parents and childminders as well as representatives of all the agencies which deliver services from the centre. Although the actual management of the centre is by the local authority, the advisory board plays a key role in deciding priorities and ensuring that users' voices are heard.

The centre makes maximum use of its facilities. When rooms are vacant, they are usually used by the childcare provider, the school or the local community. The reception area is shared with the school. As no family support staff are permanently based at the centre, they can be deployed as required and are available for outreach work as well as delivering programmes. The result is that the centre is efficient and provides good value for money.

The centre works well to include children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. They are supported into mainstream groups and individual sensory sessions are also offered. Although the dedicated session for children with disabilities had to be discontinued for lack of support, the centre continued to run it for some time with only one participant and made every effort to improve numbers.

Although there are no identifiable members of ethnic minority communities in the

village; the centre, the childcare provider and childminders all ensure that their toys and play materials reflect other cultures and faiths, as do display materials on the walls and the plasma screen in reception. Other centres within the cluster specifically incorporate awareness of other cultures in their activities and the cluster manager is currently planning to do this in Chilton.

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	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	2
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

Concurrent inspection of Chilton Primary School.

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 the Chilton Children's Centre on 6 and 7 April 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our inspection, we spoke to many of you as well as to the centre manager and staff and some of the other professionals who work in the centre. Please accept our thanks for your help and co-operation.

You spoke highly of the children's centre and its staff and told us how you feel that the centre has made a real difference to your lives and the lives of your children. We know that the centre has helped many of you through training and advice and has supported some of you into employment or to become a volunteer. In fact, we were impressed by how many of you are prepared to volunteer and to get involved in helping others.

You also told us that the centre has helped you to improve your parenting skills and that your children have benefited from attending groups. The centre puts a lot of emphasis on improving speech and language in children and this has made a big difference. The head teacher of the primary school confirms that children who have attended the children's centre come into his nursery better able to learn and to play with other children and the figures show that they make better progress, too.

We saw how much the centre does to help families of children special educational needs and/or disabilities and how it encourages all members of the family, including dads and grandparents, to get involved.

The centre has also helped you and your children to be healthier. Children in Chilton are less overweight than elsewhere in the country. You told us how much you have learned from cooking courses in the centre and how they have helped you use ingredients that you have at home as well as to take care of your household budget.

We were impressed by the way that all the staff at Chilton Children's Centre work together to help you, whether they are employed by Durham County Council or by the NHS Foundation Trust. However, we noticed that they use different systems for recording information and that the council cannot use the NHS system to find out how successful their programmes are. We are, therefore, recommending that all staff use the same computer system to keep their notes and that the NHS Foundation Trust passes on its information to the council.

We were also told that many of you found it very helpful to have advisers from Jobcentre Plus and the Citizens' Advice Bureau regularly visiting the centre and that you find it harder to use their services now that they are not based in the children's centre. Our other recommendation is that the centre should try to find some way of providing these services again.

We know that the staff listen to what you want and try to provide it. Some programmes have been introduced or changed because of your comments. The centre listens to children, too, and is making changes to the approach to the building as a result of their suggestions.

The centre may be small, but it is well used and it was a pleasure to see young children from the centre and older children from the school playing together in the beautiful outside play area. As well as getting fresh air and exercise, they were learning about getting on with others, which is something that the centre feels is very important.

Once again, many thanks for your help during the inspection. It was a pleasure meeting you all and we wish you every success in the future.

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