

Inspection report for Riverside Children's Centre

Local authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	367861
Inspection dates	25-26 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Nora Waugh

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Keith Berry
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Riverside 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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the Head of Children's Centres East, senior managers from the centre plus representatives from childcare, parents and carers, volunteers, members of the advisory board, the local authority, and a number of professionals including health, education, further education, Jobcentre Plus and family workers.

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

Information about the centre

Riverside Children's Centre is located adjacent to a large social housing estate in North Shields. It was originally set up in 1994 as an Early Years Training Centre and nursery, in response to local community need. In 2006, it was designated as a phase two children's centre and is now part of the North Tyneside East locality under the leadership of the Head of Children's Centres East. The centre has a separate Local Advisory Partnership Board.

Riverside Children's Centre meets the full core offer, working with the nursery which is located in the same building. A core locality team of staff is employed and is located in the children's centre alongside the borough Health and Well-Being Team, the Pre-School Learning Alliance, Adult Learning Alliance and Tyne Metropolitan College. The borough Disability and Additional Needs Service, which includes Parent Partnership and Family Information Service, has recently moved to Riverside. The services work together through an arrangement of formal commissioning and informal links.

In April 2011, there were 1309 children under five whose home address was within the reach area registered with general practitioners. The majority of the area served by the centre is one of disadvantage, including in its reach three communities in the 3% most disadvantaged in the country and a further six within the lowest 30%. The number of adults who are economically active are well below borough and national figures. There are, comparatively, high levels of dependency on benefits and low levels of adult qualifications. Children enter childcare with skills and experiences more limited than those expected for their age. 94% of children whose ethnicity is recorded are White and the vast majority of these classify themselves as White British.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

A retired volunteer who had worked on reception in the past explained, " I wanted to be a 'Hello, goodbye lady again' "; a reference to how a child had once referred to her. This perfectly describes the ethos of this outstanding centre where families are welcomed and supported from the moment they enter and where their needs, particularly those of the most vulnerable, are exceptionally well met. Leadership is extremely strong and constantly trying to improve services. Everyone involved is passionate about children and families and determined to make a difference. Riverside has a tradition of excellent nursery and training provision and as it has evolved into a community-based children’s centre, with some borough-wide services on site; the original strengths have been retained, while new dimensions have been added.

Exemplary partnership working is a key factor in the success of Riverside Children’s Centre. Everyone working there is determined to provide the best services they can for families and work across professional boundaries to ensure this happens. The Health and Well-Being team go happily into different groups to recruit families for their activities. Although a borough wide service, they are having a significant impact on reducing obesity and improving families’ understanding of healthy lifestyles. Attending a cookery group, participants were happy to chat about how they had tried

the previous week's recipes at home and young parents received excellent advice about where to buy nutritious cheap food in a very relaxed and informal session. This multi-agency approach was seen in all aspects of the centre's work and taken together with the excellent leadership and ongoing evaluation of services gives the centre an excellent capacity to improve.

The excellent support for parents and carers into training and work is one of the main strengths of the centre and again reflects high quality partnership working. Parents and carers are encouraged to participate in introductory courses to increase their confidence and then to move on to more structured courses, including those leading to a qualification. Last year 34 parents achieved a nationally recognised qualification. This year, 67 have achieved a qualification and another 27 expect to do so. The next step into work is supported by enthusiastic and effective liaison with Jobcentre Plus, the Working Homes Outreach team and community entrepreneurs who support local people into training or to set up small businesses. Already this year, 35 lone parents have moved off income support in the area. An underpinning belief that values everyone and aims to raise expectations was articulated wonderfully by a parent who said, 'Who would have thought me from the Meadowell estate would be doing a degree? Gives me goosebumps'.

Riverside Children's Centre falls within the remit of the Head of Children's Centres East. Both at cluster and at centre level there is high quality data available, which is used rigorously to support identified priorities and to ensure all priority groups access services. All activities have to show who they are targeting and identify how far they have succeeded. This has had a very good impact on the range of services offered in the centre, although currently most of the activities for fathers are delivered from other centres within the cluster. This commitment to reaching the most excluded is supported by high levels of flexibility and by rigorous cross-agency identification of those in the greatest need. In a predominately White British area, every opportunity is taken to increase understanding of different cultures and to celebrate diversity. All of this, combined with genuine sensitivity to people and high expectations, promotes equality extremely well.

The appointment of the Family Support Team Leader as safeguarding champion has put safeguarding at the heart of everything the centre does. Systems are exemplary and policies and procedures are fully understood and implemented by everyone in the centre. The high level of detail ensures the best quality care and protection for everyone accessing centre services. The handover procedures for family support workers before leave or planned absence enable the highest levels of care to continue seamlessly. The partnership working and the referral systems in particular lead to a highly coordinated and seamless approach to service delivery.

What does the centre need to do he support to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that more of the good range of activities to engage fathers and male carers offered across the cluster are delivered, or easily accessed, from this centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

A wide variety of services to improve the health of children and families is underpinned by excellent partnership working, especially with health visitors. Beginning at the antenatal stage, there is a busy drop-in midwife service every morning where many parents first become aware of Riverside Children's Centre. Families can then move on to access a wide range of support around improving health and well-being. Breastfeeding is actively supported and all professionals are trained in promoting it. The number of babies still being breastfed after six weeks is improving, but is still low compared to local authority figures. There is excellent support from family support workers for mums with low mood and this continues to be available long after their children are babies. Other aspects of health work focus on more specific needs and include some very imaginative ways of working, for example, the Chataways creative playgroup for children with speech and language difficulties. Of 16 children identified most recently to attend this group, 13 now need no further speech and language intervention.

Parents and carers were all very clear about how safe they felt in the centre and how safe their children were. A recurring theme was how they could only access training and groups because they knew their children were safe in the crèche. Among the universal services the centre offers is a basic first aid course for new parents and carers, which runs regularly and always has a waiting list. The 'Request for Service' referral system, alongside well-embedded data sharing practices, means support for vulnerable families is extremely good. The centre is informed about children who have a child protection plan or who are looked after, allowing additional support to be tailored to their needs. Detailed case studies indicate the high quality work enabling parents to be in a position to have their children returned to them. Most referrals for family work and/or nursery places come from health visitors through the Common Assessment Framework. Rigorous implementation and review procedures ensure that the needs of each individual child are, and continue to be, met.

The nursery provision is very well established and was part of an original Early Excellence Centre. Nursery staff work closely with the early years professional and the centre family support worker team to ensure that outcomes for children are very good. The focus is firmly on children's personal and social development, communication, language and literacy and physical skills. This has been supported further by recent initiatives, such as, 'Every Child a Talker' and work towards the 'Communication Friendly' award. The impact can be seen by the gap between the

lowest achieving children and the rest in the nursery reducing steadily and, at 24.6%, is now well below the national figure of 32.7%. The early years professional has introduced very good tracking systems and, beginning with an entry profile collated with parents and carers, children's progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage is well documented to ensure maximum progress. Individual plans and detailed tracking are also in place for children who use the crèche facilities regularly, to ensure that they also achieve the best they can.

Children's behaviour throughout the centre is excellent and contributes to an atmosphere where all are respected. There are opportunities for parents and carers to be involved in the centre at all levels, including as members of the advisory board. For those who wish to do so there is a well-defined pathway to becoming volunteers. The volunteers spoken to were all passionate about the centre and what it does with one explaining that she had brought her own children to all the fun days 'and you have to give something back'. Parents and carers are also actively engaged in improving the building, having worked with an artist to create a stunning frieze based on 'Each Peach, Pear, Plum' and are now about to work on their own room and also on the central corridor known as 'the street'.

Apart from the exceptional work enabling access to training and work, other advice and support to improve families' economic well-being is securely in place. A free phone service links to a variety of agencies and sign posting to others, including voluntary organisations, is very well established. A simple but valued and well used idea, is the 'Clothes Swap Shop' where parents can take clothing that may be suitable for their children and leave any that is no longer needed.

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	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

Beginning at the reception desk, everyone receives a huge welcome to Riverside Children's Centre. The very strong centre team works closely with others, many of whom are now based at Riverside, to ensure that everyone's needs are met.

Everyone talked to expressed an extraordinarily high level of commitment to families and the local area. The local authority and health partners in particular, understand the challenges facing the community and the need for services to continue to meet a wide range of needs. A recent restructure has focussed work more tightly and empowered the development of new roles.

Very well-focussed family work is carried out at different levels to ensure that all needs are expertly met. Identifying that, for many families, extended courses were not the most effective approach, staff have developed an imaginative series of one-off workshops around common problems, such as 'temper tantrums' and 'faddy eating'. These are very well attended and parents and carers can then refer themselves onto the longer parenting course if they feel they need more. For parents and carers who find the idea of a group too threatening, parenting courses are delivered in the home on a one-to-one basis. An example given was baby massage in the home with a dad who was frightened to handle his baby.

Other groups work with more sensitive issues. The Freedom Programme takes referrals from a range of agencies including the police and works with women who are threatened by or are victims of domestic violence. The young parents group is borough wide but based at Riverside and includes young parents from the local area. They were impressive in their sense of responsibility and articulate about the friendship and support they got from each other. As one said, 'I don't have money or a baby sitter to go partying'. Another explained how she had been supported through low mood and health problems with her little boy who had been in the nursery from four months and was now about to access a funded two-year-old place. She was very proud of what she had achieved. English for Speakers of Other Languages training takes place in Riverside, again borough wide, but mums are encouraged to use other centre services including the crèche and were clear that the centre gave them the confidence to try more.

Health visitors are now committed to registering 100% of families they visit with the centre and this is increasing the percentage registered rapidly and increasing the demand for universal services. To ensure that priority groups continue to receive an excellent service it is hoped to add to the very successful outreach playgroup, Honey Bees, and offer more services closer to where people live.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well catered for. The nursery provision includes a teacher shared with portage working with individual children. The Saturday Club, also based in the nursery, allows families to meet together and access support. From the start, the Request for Service referral system ensures that families receive support precisely tailored to their needs. The recent co-location of the borough wide Disabilities and Additional Needs Support service has already led to new families attending the Saturday Club, as well as being seen as a wonderful source of advice and information.

Educational support is excellent at all levels. Children very much enjoy themselves in nursery and are very confident explaining what they are doing. The manager is

completely committed to involving parents and a wide range of information and books to borrow is available throughout the nursery. Nought to seven partnership funding has allowed the development of inspiring home loan bags used throughout the centre with the aim of encouraging child-initiated play at home. Support for adult learning and education, provided by a range of partners, is well established and exceptional. A young parent accessing training to work in childcare supporting children with special educational needs and/or disabilities explained how the college 'were fussy about sessions being missed,' but with the support and childcare available at Riverside she knew she could do it.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

At Riverside Children's Centre, morale is exceptionally high. Everyone knows exactly what their role is and is committed to continuing to improve outcomes for the families with whom they work. The visionary and inspiring leadership of the head of centre is very well supported by a clear structure within the local authority which defines roles and encourages the development of partnership working across and within localities. He is determined that nothing but exemplary services will be offered from his centres.

The advisory board is well established and is actively looking towards a parent as chair. Three parents are very energetic members and more are very interested in joining. A lively parents' forum underpins this, meeting regularly with the head of centre, and is confident to challenge him and other professionals. The advisory board itself has an excellent understanding of its role, not only in supporting and challenging the centre leadership, but also in suggesting possible future initiatives and directions for development.

Supervision and line management structures are exemplary, with monthly supervision recorded consistently across teams and outcomes of annual performance review used to identify priorities and inform self-evaluation. There is a total commitment to sharing information and to professional development. Workshops have been run for all staff to ensure excellent practice and consistency. These have included data analysis, case studies and measuring outcomes. All professionals are

also trained so they can support each other's work, not only in breastfeeding but, for example, in filling in Job Centre forms. Formats have been introduced, and are quickly becoming established, for recording case studies and they provide a wealth of qualitative data about the impact of services, again informing self-evaluation. All groups and services must submit a pro forma before running an activity or initiative, explaining the purpose, identifying the target group and showing how outcomes will be measured. The centre is quickly building up a large bank of data to illustrate the impact of its services. Self-evaluation is accurate, focussed and informative in showing priorities and future developments.

Resources, including staffing, are very well deployed to ensure that delivery of services is as effective as possible. The building is clean, bright and in good repair. It still feels like a conference venue in parts, but the parent-led work in the section used to deliver children's centre services has given a strong sense of identity and there are plans to tackle the whole centre step-by-step. The budget is carefully deployed and managed to focus support where it is needed most. The centre is giving very good value for money.

The safeguarding champion ensures excellent systems for and awareness of safeguarding throughout the centre. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out for all who work or volunteer there. Recruitment procedures are rigorous. Training needs are identified for each post and then recorded to show that the right level of training has been completed. Early intervention, often while a baby is still very small, and a multi-agency approaches are among the greatest strengths of a centre dedicated to meeting the needs of those within its reach. Emotional health and well-being are identified as crucial and whether working with low mood mums or developing well-being in young children, they are central to the approach of Riverside Children's Centre.

The centre is very proactive throughout in promoting equality and combating diversity. Everyone is equally welcome although most groups which specifically target men are delivered from other centres within the cluster. Riverside Children's Centre delivers exceptional, cohesive and non-judgemental packages of support that meet individual needs. Children with speech and language difficulties, families where the child has disabilities or very young and vulnerable parents needing help to access services all benefit enormously from this approach. Case studies provide excellent evidence to support a belief that the centre helps to keep families together.

Professional partnerships are a thread through everything that is done at Riverside. They are a mixture of the formal and the informal, developed through co-location. The significant fact is that they work so well. There are also very good links to a range of voluntary agencies so when a young parent needs housing support or families need help on debt management, the links to channels of support are already there.

There are a variety of ways for parents and carers to express their views about the work of the centre. A 'You said: We did' board in the entrance is very effective,

showing that comments are seriously considered and responded to when possible. A request for feedback for the inspection was very well responded to and overwhelmingly positive. Confidence ratings to evaluate every activity give a chance for immediate response and all parents and carers interviewed were confident that they were listened to and valued. A random questioning of users found that 100% were happy or very happy with the centre and with the centre staff. In all cases, the 'very happy' rating was over 90%.

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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	1

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

The childcare setting linked to the Children's Centre, Riverside Children's Centre was last inspected in 2007. This report has not been taken into account as part of the 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 Riverside Children's Centre, North Shields on the 25 and 26 May 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall. We visited the activities that were on while we there and talked to some of you and also the professionals who work in the centre. We also looked at plans and documents, including photographs from various groups and activities.

Everyone we spoke to was incredibly enthusiastic about the centre and the people who work there impressed both of us with their passion for what they are doing and with their hard work. The head of centre and his leadership team are totally wrapped up their work and are determined to make Riverside one of the best centres in the country. They are always trying to improve things and showed us several changes that have been made in order to make things better for you. One is that health visitors will now register you with the centre and tell you about what it does when they make their first home visit. Some of the changes, such as the brilliant frieze of 'Each Peach, Pear, Plum' in the main corridor, have been organised and done by parents and carers themselves.

Your centre does many things exceptionally well. One that we were very impressed with is the support they give you to go on courses, get qualifications and eventually find work. We heard from several of you how you are now doing things that you would have not have believed possible but the staff at Riverside have given you the confidence and belief in yourselves to do so. Many of you told us how flexible they are about this and that knowing that your children were safe in the crèche made it all possible. The nursery and crèche also offer excellent support for your children to play and learn. Children enjoy themselves enormously but staff are also careful to make sure they know what children need to do next to help them learn more.

There are lots of high quality activities aimed at improving the health of people in your community. There is an excellent range of cookery classes offering advice and recipes to make it easier to cook for yourselves at home. We know that the number of children who are overweight when they start school is beginning to drop. Baby massage classes and Save a Baby's Life first-aid classes are open to all of you and are very popular. Similarly all the help available to encourage you to breastfeed is beginning to make a difference, although there is still more work to do there.

We were also very impressed at how hard everyone works to make sure families have the support they need when they need it. Sessions such as, temper tantrums and ones about 'faddy eaters' or bedtime routines, deal with problems a lot of parents and carers need help with. For others who are struggling to come to the centre there is high quality support in the home until they feel ready to join in groups. Family support workers are very sensitive and flexible and do everything they can to help. Support for families at times of crisis or when in urgent need is excellent with everyone working together across different services to sort things out as quickly as possible.

Those of you we spoke to told us how welcoming the centre is and more than one of you explained how coming there had changed your lives. We found that everyone thinks very hard about ways to make sure that you all use the centre services and are going to deliver more groups from other venues closer to where people live. At the moment there are plenty of really good groups for dads and male carers in the east area but not many run from Riverside itself so we have asked your centre to try and do something about this.

You all agreed that you felt very safe in the centre. This is because from the moment you walk in the door staff are extremely welcoming and also exceptionally thorough in making sure you and your children are cared for well. This includes help and understanding for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, which are excellent. The people in charge of running your centre are doing an exceptionally good job.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful and hope you will continue to value your centre as highly as you do now.

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