

Inspection report for Newsome and Lowerhouses Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	365743
Inspection dates	5 – 6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Priscilla McGuire

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Kerri Flanagan/Sarah Lazenby Wood
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Hillside Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior managers from the centre and local authority. They also held meetings with members of the advisory board, the family forum and partners from health, education, voluntary and community organisations. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Newsome and Lowerhouses Children's Centre is a phase one centre formed from two separate centres which merged in 2010. There are no direct public transport links between the two sites, which are about one mile apart. Two managers job share the role of centre manager. Governance is provided by the local authority and an advisory board with representation from parents and carers and partners is also involved in decision making.

The centre provides the full core offer of services and also offers outreach provision in community venues. The reach area is diverse in relation to ethnicity and social background. Most families are of White British heritage but there are also small populations of Black, mixed White and Black heritage and other minorities within the reach area. There is also an increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees. The majority of children live within parts of the reach area that are within the top 30% most deprived areas in the country. Across the reach area there is a mix of privately owned houses, social housing and privately rented houses. There is also a high level of student accommodation in the area.

The reach area has the third highest number of reported domestic violence incidents in Kirklees. Worklessness is also at a higher rate than any other part of Kirklees and

over 35% of children live in households that are dependent on workless benefits. There are high numbers of lone parents in the area. Overall, children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and abilities that are lower than other parts of Kirklees and also lower than those found nationally. The reach area also ranks high within Kirklees in relation to the number of children who are subject to a child protection plan or are children in need.

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

‘We would be lost without the centre – it has had a massive positive impact on the children’ was the comment from one user whose views are typical of what others say about Newsome and Lowerhouses Children’s Centre. It offers good quality provision and is well managed. Staff are successful in engaging high numbers of users and registration rates are very high. The centre is recognised as a safe haven within the community it serves and staff are trusted. Users not only say they feel emotionally and physically safe at the centre but feel welcomed and valued. For users living in parts of the reach area where fear and suspicion of authority figures exists, the ability to access statutory services within an environment that is considered safe is a significant asset to those users.

Safeguarding arrangements are good and early intervention for families identified as potentially vulnerable is recognised at local authority level and by centre staff as a priority. Safety and safeguarding is visibly promoted throughout the centre through numerous posters and leaflets. Provision is carefully balanced to ensure universal services are offered but also targeted services to meet the needs of vulnerable families with complex and in some cases multiple needs. Activities are continually monitored to ensure the needs of the potentially most vulnerable are met. Parenting training has been used to develop better parenting skills within families but the centre has recognised that this is an area for further development and plans are now in place to offer accredited parenting programmes.

One of the outstanding features of the centre is the quality of care, guidance and

support. Centre staff offer very personalised support and care for families. The positive impact of this is clear from case studies and testimonies from users. Because of the significant social problems that exist within the reach area as a whole, some families have multiple needs and require support and care at different levels and from a range of agencies. The centre works well with partners to provide the required intervention care and support for families at the appropriate level.

The quality and range of information, guidance and advice that is available from partners is impressive. Partners who regularly work with the centre include the Citizens' Advice Bureau, health services, social housing, the police and other agencies and organisations. Partnership work is another outstanding feature of the centre and partners share a strong common purpose with the centre to improve outcomes for families. Information sharing between partners and with centre staff is excellent and is used effectively to promote positive outcomes for families.

The reach area is diverse and includes families and individuals from a range of ethnic and social backgrounds. The centre constantly analyses its participation rates to remove barriers that may prohibit participation. Some parents and carers who speak English as an additional language regularly attend an 'English Confidence' course which is held at the centre and offered in conjunction with the local school. The needs of families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also well recognised and good work is undertaken with these families to ensure they are aware of support they can access to ensure their children can thrive. Consultation with families is good and used frequently to identify how the centre can improve the quality of its provision.

Although registration rates are exceptionally high, some parts of the reach area present a greater challenge to the staff and families from these areas are harder to engage because of the distance that families have to travel to get to the centre. The staff are, however, constantly monitoring outreach provision to ensure how best to encourage more families from these areas to use the centre.

The voice of users is highly valued and used to inform the improvement and delivery of services. Self-evaluation is an integral part of practice at the centre as is the culture of continuous improvement. This together with the good quality leadership and management ensures that the centre has good capacity for improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Centre managers and staff to further explore options to develop outreach provision as appropriate to engage users from areas where participation rates are lower.
- The local authority and centre to work together to effectively develop and review the provision of accredited parenting programmes to ensure the needs of users are fully met.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for users are good. Data shows that obesity rates for the reach area have reduced significantly over the last two years. The centre actively promotes healthy eating for users through courses and also through individual guidance and advice provided by health visitors and centre staff. Parents and carers were observed making a healthy meal during the 'Taste of Arabia' cookery session, which celebrates diversity, provides an opportunity for parents and carers to socialise and enables them to learn how to make healthy meals. Families have also increased their knowledge of healthy eating by attending other sessions at the centre and evaluations demonstrate the changes parents and carers have made to their lifestyles, such as using more vegetables in their meals. Healthy lifestyles are also promoted through sessions, such as 'Dance and movement' and 'Treasures and exploration,' which effectively promote physical exercise and outdoor play.

Users feel very safe at both a physical and emotional level in the centre. They have developed good relationships with staff at the centre and those from partner organisations and feel they can trust them. For users living in parts of the reach area where crime and threats of violence are a significant problem, the safe and welcoming environment offered by the centre is highly valued. Users feel safe to discuss sensitive issues that affect their personal safety, their safety in their community and their general well-being. The incidence of domestic violence is high in the reach area. However, staff have a good understanding of the safeguarding implications this presents and they make a sensitive response to families living with domestic violence. For example, there are numerous leaflets and posters throughout the centre which signpost users to source of support. Users are provided with discreet resources to use at home to obtain help if they feel at risk of domestic violence. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is also used well to identify how best to support vulnerable families.

Enjoyment and achievement for all users are good. Children make good progress from their starting points. Evaluations and progress tracking documents demonstrate the improvement parents, carers and children make in developing different skills and confidence. Adults and children enjoy activities, such as targeted 'Stay and Play' sessions and also the more universal services, which promote learning through play and provide opportunities for parents and carers to interact with their children. Children's skills on entry and exit to and from the Early Years Foundation Stage are significantly below those found typically for children of that age in some parts of the reach area. Staff are working effectively with early years settings and local schools to use the Kirklees devised 'Child's Journey' programme and other strategies to promote the children's good development and attainment.

Parents and carers also make good progress in their personal and social development by attending adult learning courses, such as 'DIY' and 'Paediatric First Aid.' Attendance and retention rates on adult learning courses are high and individual case studies show that many parents and carers progress from participating in activities at

the centre to enrolling on courses at the centre. Users enjoy courses, such as the 'Teaching assistants' course, which was specifically developed in response to their suggestions. Staff are further developing adult learning provision to include accredited courses.

Children were observed behaving well at the centre. Case study evidence demonstrates the improvements in both children's behaviour and parents' and carers' ability to manage their children's behaviour. One parent said, 'I've got ideas now about how to stop my child from being naughty'. Positive contributions to the centre and the wider community from users are good. For example, users told inspectors that their voice is valued and those involved in the Family Forum said, 'Our ideas are listened to and staff always try and put things into place.' Users are actively involved in decision making about service provision at the centre through both their representation on the Family Forum and on the Advisory Board. Some users also volunteer at the centre and in the community.

Worklessness rates are very high in the reach area and higher than the rest of Kirklees. However, staff make a concerted effort to change attitudes towards work and to raise aspirations. Evaluations, comments from users and impact analyses demonstrate the positive change in users' attitude towards work and also their motivation to improve outcomes for their families. One user said 'Staff put me in touch with other people who can help me take down my barriers and help me get back into work.' Children also develop good personal and social skills for the future and make good progress in developing communication skills.

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 quality of provision for users is good. Services and activities are offered at both a universal and targeted level to meet needs that are appropriate to different users and their families. Centre staff and their partners know their local community well

and understand the barriers and challenges faced by users living in different parts of the reach area. Productive partnership arrangements ensure that users benefit from a wide range of services, activities and support which help them achieve positive outcomes.

The merger of two centres in areas that have different features and characteristics has been successfully managed. Service provision has been maintained at a comparable level to ensure that users have not been disadvantaged by changes to the way the centres are run. Outreach provision is used well to engage users from harder to reach parts of the community. However, the geographical spread of the reach area presents a challenge for staff and participation rates are lower in those parts of the reach area that are furthest away from either of the two centres. However, some activities are delivered at community-based venues to encourage participation from users in these areas.

Assessment of individual needs of users and their families is good. Staff are sensitive to the needs of families and have a wide range of expertise and experience, which they use to accurately assess the needs of users. They also work very productively with staff from other agencies to ensure they make a well-informed and thorough assessment of users' needs and use the Common Assessment Framework as appropriate.

The centre uses an 'activity planner' to plan activities that promote good quality learning and development. Learning outcomes are identified for each activity to ensure that learning is purposeful and explicitly linked to centre priorities, Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes and Every Child Matters outcomes. Evaluations carried out before and after activities demonstrate clearly the learning that has occurred. Users can identify the learning and progress they have individually achieved as a result of participating in activities and courses. As a result, many users feel confident to go on to further courses or find employment. Good links with the local college and a local learning centre are also used to provide courses that help users develop their educational potential and also become more employable.

'The centre provided a lifeline for me', is a comment typical of many users. The quality of care, support and guidance provided at the centre is outstanding. Personal testimony from users is impressive and demonstrates the success of the centre in providing care and support to users at the right time. One parent said that 'You feel you can off- load here and can trust the staff.' A partner working with the centre commented on the strength of staff in remaining objective whilst providing appropriate support to families who may be experiencing major challenges in their lives. Staff have a good understanding of professional boundaries and know when to refer and signpost users to other agencies. Users also benefit from the excellent range of information and personal guidance that is available at the centre from experts, such as solicitors, who help users with legal advice and careers advisers who attend the 'One Stop Shop'. This is a designated time each week when representatives from a range of organisations attend the centre to offer useful advice and guidance to users.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is managed by two highly competent managers who bring a wide range of skills and experience to their roles. The managers lead a strong, enthusiastic staff team who are all highly committed to improving outcomes for the families in the reach area. The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The centre receives good support from managers and officers from the local authority. They also receive good quality data in relation to most national indicators. Good support to analyse and use data is provided by a local authority officer who visits the centre on a regular basis. The advisory board is also effective in providing direction, support and challenge to the centre.

Communication is good within the centre and with partners. As a result, information and local knowledge and intelligence are effectively shared between the centre and its partners. This information is then used to tailor provision to meet the needs of users and the wider community. Service delivery is well informed by the local authority's strategic plans and by the centre's own good quality business and service delivery plans. Accountability and reporting arrangements are robust and the performance management cycle is an effective process which identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Systematic monitoring of budgets by the local authority also ensures clear accountability and transparency in relation to financial management.

The service is priority driven and there are clear objectives in place to respond to the needs of the community. Activities and sessions are planned to ensure objectives and targets to improve outcomes are clearly linked and are transparent. Staff know their local community very well and use the local intelligence and data to constantly monitor provision and performance. They understand the challenges they face in dealing with social issues, such as worklessness and domestic violence, which statistics show are more of a problem in the reach area than in other parts of Kirklees. The centre is making a good response in implementing early intervention strategies to improve outcomes for families.

'We couldn't function without the centre' was the view expressed by one partner who works with the centre to deliver health services. Other partners commented highly

about the positive impact of their integrated work with the centre. The centre's work with partners is outstanding. Staff have secured the commitment of an extensive range of partners from the voluntary, statutory and private sectors and partner organisations include a solicitor's practice, careers advisory service, the local college, schools, Jobcentre Plus and social care teams. Partners attend the 'One Stop Shop' service to provide support and advice for users and are also well represented on the advisory board.

There is a strong culture of continuous improvement at the centre, which is promoted by the local authority but also well embedded in provision at the centre. All activities and services are systematically evaluated and impact analyses carried out to monitor quality. Pre- and post-evaluations are carried out to measure the impact of activities and services. User engagement is good and a 'You said, We did' folder reflects how well the centre has responded to suggestions from users. Staff regularly evaluate activities to identify areas for improvement and make appropriate changes.

Staffing, accommodation and other physical resources are very well used. The management of change in relation to the merger of the two centres that previously operated as separate and distinct centres has been successful. Practical strategies, such as administrators for each centre swapping locations for part of the week, are helping to promote the previously separately run centres as one service. Value for money is good as a result of effective use of staffing and other resources and constant monitoring of service delivery. User satisfaction rates are very high and demonstrate the success of the centre in providing appropriate services.

The centre offers a welcoming environment to all members of the local community. Diversity is celebrated and participation rates by different groups are regularly monitored and action taken to promote inclusion of all families. A successful 'International Newsome Day' was held to promote services to families who speak English as an additional language. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents and carers benefit from the specialist advice and guidance they receive from partner organisations, and from participating in activities that are targeted at families with specific needs. One parent who had accessed this advice and guidance said, 'My child went with his dad on the Forest Days activities and we discovered that he really loved being outdoors. We went as a family on some outdoor activities organised by the centre and learnt about new places to take our children without having to pay.'

The incidence of domestic violence, crime and the number of children on child protection plans is high in the reach area. The centre has therefore made safeguarding a priority and this is reflected in the centre's work with partners. Statutory requirements are well met and safeguarding in relation to recruitment practice of staff and volunteers is a rigorous process. Safeguarding training is regular and appropriate to staff and volunteer's individual roles. Case studies demonstrate that early intervention is helping to reduce the risks of harm to children. However, the long term impact of the centre's work in relation to safeguarding and reducing the number of children on child protection plans has yet to be analysed.

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	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	2

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

An inspection of Hillside Primary School was carried out at the same time as the Children's Centre inspection. This report is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Newsome and Lowerhouses Children's Centre on 5-6 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection process we met with many of you at both Newsome and Lowerhouses and we share your view that the centre offers a good service to families. We appreciate your honesty in telling us about some of the personal problems staff at the centre have helped you to overcome. We think the care and support offered at the centre is a real strength of the centre's work. We also like the fact that in the display areas, there are numerous leaflets and brochures and notices around that let you know what's happening at the centre but also let you know where you can go if you need specialist help or support.

We were able to meet many of you who are involved in the Family Forum and the advisory board. You told us how much you feel valued by the centre staff and that you also feel 'listened to'. We felt very welcome at the centre and we know from talking with many of you that you also feel that the centre is not only welcoming but also a safe place for you and your children. Safeguarding is a top priority for staff and we know that they work hard to make sure families feel safe and are protected from harm. We know that many of you have benefited from attending parenting courses or from getting help to improve your parenting skills and this is something we have asked the managers to continue to develop to make sure that you receive the best possible training in parenting.

As well as talking to you during our visit, we were also able to meet representatives from many of the partner organisations that work with staff at the centre. We think the way the centre is able to work well with so many different organisations to provide services and support for families is another key strength.

Centre staff are very good at encouraging families to use the centre and we have asked them to continue to look at how they can ensure more families living in parts of the community that are not close to either the Lowerhouses or the Newsome centre, can also benefit from the centre's services.

Thank you again for giving up your time to talk to us and we wish you and your families all the best and every success for the future.

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