

# Inspection report for Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centre

Local authority	Northumberland County Council
Inspection number	367745
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Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Gillian Physick
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY242183 Sure Start Locality day care provision

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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners, including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare, health, education and children's social care. The inspection team also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centre serves central Northumberland. The vast majority of the population come from the top 2% of the most deprived wards in the country. The reach population of the centre is just over 1500. Recent figures show that over 31% of households are lone parents with dependent children. The estimated weekly income is significantly lower than the Northumberland average. The percentage of children aged nought to four living in households dependent on workless benefits is over 27%. The majority of local families are of White British heritage, with small pockets of minority ethnic populations. The most significant of these groups is the Traveller community, which has a permanent official site at Hartford Bridge. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average, as is the proportion of children aged under four who are living in households where no-one is working. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than those 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.

The centre operates as a 'one-stop-shop' model providing the full core offer. It opened in 2002 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery is the responsibility of Northumberland County Council. The centre hosts a full-time day care provision for children from birth to school age and this is managed by the local authority. The locality manager, employed by Action for Children, manages four further children's centres in the area. Governance arrangements transferred to an advisory board in 2010 when Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centres merged into one single centre.

## 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

Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centre is outstanding in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community. 'I can't thank the centre enough for the support I have been given. I have my family back and can now plan for the future.' This is how one parent described the impact Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centre has had on her life. This excellent centre sits at the heart of the community and has worked relentlessly to achieve an exceptional level of trust, acceptance and respect amongst local families. The unfaltering dedication and commitment of all centre staff has ensured that outcomes for many people living within this locality have greatly improved, often in the face of the most challenging circumstances. Multi-agency partnerships are outstanding and provide the foundation stone from which to deliver individualised, integrated support, which is responsive to the diverse needs of the local community.

The centre has a strong and dynamic leadership team. All have a clear, shared vision to make a real lasting difference to this community. A rigorous cycle of monitoring and evaluation ensures that the management team improve the quality and impact of the services and activities the centre provides. This demonstrates an exemplary capacity for improvement, which is greatly enhanced by the depth of the centre's data analysis. The centre has worked hard to achieve an impressive 92% registration rate. The very detailed information collected during this first visit ensures services can be specifically targeted. Data show that attendance at the centre's many activities is generally high, with a large majority of these families living in the most

deprived wards in the reach area. However, the centre is aware that more could be done to improve participation rates even further.

The centre has a genuinely inclusive ethos and challenging targets have been set to support the most vulnerable families through highly effective multi-agency working and well-targeted outreach provision. As a result, gaps in both achievement and engagement for target groups of families are narrowing significantly. Fathers, young parents and those from workless households are particularly well supported and motivated. The positive impact of this work is reflected in the increasing number of young parents and carers who have gone back into education and/or training, including becoming peer educators themselves. As a result, equality is promoted sensitively, with robust systems in place to identify and tackle any forms of discrimination. The conspicuous impact of exemplary partnership working which promotes children's and families' emotional well-being, is also evident across the work of the centre. For example, a 'Mums r Us' group was recently developed to target mums who feel low, thereby reducing the risk of them developing postnatal depression. Parents and carers from this course spoke fondly of the lasting friendships they had made and the confidence they had gained. As a result, they have gone on to try other courses and activities within the centre.

Safeguarding is given the utmost priority, with highly effective, robust policies and procedures to ensure the safety and protection of both families and staff. All staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of child protection policies and procedures and are adept at identifying vital signs, referring quickly and appropriately when necessary. Parents and carers are also very clear as to the responsibilities of the children's centre in relation to child protection. This along with exemplary partnerships ensures a seamless and coordinated approach to safeguarding children.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Build upon existing excellent partnerships, provision and local intelligence to improve participation even rates further.

## How good are outcomes for users?

1
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Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centre has effected genuine lasting change through improving outcomes for the vast majority of its local parents, carers and children. 'The centre has given me more than anything I could have wished for, my quality of life has improved so much,' stated one parent, while many others commented on how very differently their life would have turned out if it had not been for the help and support of centre staff.

Local attitudes to breastfeeding are positively changing. This is due to the commitment and tireless dedication of front line staff including midwives, health visitors, family and peer support workers. The excellent support provided by the

'Breast is Best' support group, assisted by peer support volunteers and infant feeding nurses, contributes to a significant improvement in the numbers of new mums who continue to breastfeed their babies. Support to encourage families to lead healthier lifestyles is excellent. A close working partnership between centre staff and health professionals, combined with a wide range of relevant programmes has resulted in a significant reduction in the incidence of obesity amongst reception-aged children. A local focus on the promotion of dental health initiatives has also resulted in a significant increase in families registering with a dentist. Targeted intervention work with a small group of children who showed reluctance to clean their teeth proved highly successful. The establishment of a number of thriving 'stay and play' type sessions has alleviated the sense of isolation felt by a number of mums in the locality. These provide a much needed place to meet other parents and carers, as well as the opportunity to share experiences. A visit to a baby massage session provided compelling evidence of babies and their parents and carers bonding well.

There is an ongoing commitment to the promotion of issues around child safety. Accident prevention training and one-to-one support offered through the centre's family support team has resulted in an increase in the number of parents and carers requesting safety equipment for their homes. Effective protocols exist between the centre and the local accident and emergency department. This ensures that family support workers remain proactive in targeting parents and carers who may need support to develop a better understanding of safety issues. Managers have noticed that parents and carers now have the confidence not only to ask for help, but to recognise their need for it, increasingly before they reach a point of crisis. Exemplary multi-agency support ensures that children subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework processes are extremely well supported. A wide range of highly effective parenting courses, including 'Mellow parenting' have had a profound impact. The work of the centre in this area is exemplary and has at times facilitated the return of children to their families following a period in care.

The centre continues to embrace the ethos of the 'Every Child a Talker' project and this work has had a significant impact on the achievement of children. The language development worker has spent time with nursery staff promoting the application of best practice in the development of all children's communication skills. This has secured accelerated progress in this key area. The enthusiasm and dedication of the Early Years Foundation Stage team and consultants ensure the provision of outstanding education and learning experiences for all children. Consequently, the achievement gap is narrowing and the impact upon the behaviour and social skills for all the children is extremely positive. Through a detailed analysis of local Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data, the team has ensured the provision of additional high quality provision to further improve the achievements of children in specific communities. Local headteachers testified to the positive impact of this close working relationship particularly in terms of raising the aspirations of parents and carers locally.

An overwhelming number of parents and carers spoken to, including teenage mums

and dads commented on how their confidence has improved as a result of their participation in the activities offered by the centre. There is a genuine commitment to ensuring the voice of the community is heard within the centre and that this influences the ongoing development of services. The many well-established parents and carers groups have worked successfully to raise funds for the centre, enabling the purchase of additional equipment. They have also facilitated the provision of a wealth of memorable opportunities for parents, carers and children including trips to Flamingo Land and visits to local attractions. The importance the centre places on working with parents and carers is reflected in their 100% positive satisfaction return.

The centre has helped many parents and carers return to learning, training and employment, thereby providing economic stability and independence. The excellent work of the information advice and guidance team, in partnership with local training providers, has enabled a large majority of parents and carers to access a plethora of accredited training opportunities. Some, having undertaken the centre's 'softer' informal training opportunities, felt empowered to pursue formal qualifications. One parent talked enthusiastically about her completion of the Arts Award, whilst another told us how his experience with the centre had inspired him to pursue a career in social work. Participation in centre activities has also empowered parents and carers to set up their own network of support groups, several of which have gone on to become constituted groups in their own right.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>1</b>

## How good is the provision?

**1**

Everyone involved in the centre has an in-depth understanding of the issues and challenges facing the community. This ensures that the provision of very well targeted support, enabling families to make the best of those opportunities available. The expertise and breadth of knowledge demonstrated by every staff member within

the centre is impressive. This is reflected in the high quality support and guidance received by families. One parent described how proactive the family support team had been. 'If they hadn't visited me in my home, I would never have bothered coming into the centre.' Another explained how the coordination of support she experienced enabled her to take steps to return to employment.

The provision of high quality learning experiences is raising both the achievements and aspirations of local parents and carers and children. The nursery has exemplary systems to track the progress and achievements of children providing an excellent picture of each child's individual learning journey. This aids their smooth transition into school. By tracking a number of children through to the end of their Reception Year the centre has been able to demonstrate the very real impact of its work. Results showed that 77% of children who had accessed provision at the centre achieved expected or better outcomes in their Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results. Training to improve basic literacy and numeracy skills has also enabled many parents and carers to better support their child's learning at home. This has had a particularly marked impact on the confidence and aspirations of parents and carers and was particularly commented upon by headteachers.

Combined actions to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are excellent. This has enabled individualised packages of support to be put in place at the earliest opportunity. The sensitivity with which practitioners engage with parents and carers ensures that they are increasingly empowered to make informed decisions, alongside professionals, regarding the packages of care put in place for their children. The centre's adherence to an ethos of prevention and early intervention has ensured the number of referrals into the speech and language team has reduced significantly.

An excellent range of services and activities are designed and delivered through the centre. For example, the centre has put together a package of workshops for parents and carers to attend following the birth of new baby. This 'baby bundle' includes sessions on baby massage, weaning and accident prevention. Home visits from the family support workers have been hugely successful in engaging harder to reach families, identifying need and supporting them to access a range of services. The level of personal support received by families has been greatly appreciated and this has been key to the centre's success in securing such an impressive registration rate. However, the centre is aware that there is scope to further improve participation rates in some of its activities.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>

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

**1**

The senior management team and advisory board are relentless in their drive for improvement. They are able to draw upon their substantial knowledge and understanding of the local community to identify future priorities. Governance of the centre is also very focussed with a clear vision for what the centre is intending to achieve. This combined with robust data and excellent local intelligence has ensured the provision of high quality and coherent delivery and improvement plans. Key to the centre's success has been its ethos of 'working with' rather than 'doing to' its community. This is reflected in the good and improving participation rates in the activities it provides. The views of users are routinely collected through evaluations of individual activities and interventions. These rigorous procedures ensure that all staff and partners continually improve their practice.

Hugely knowledgeable about the specific needs and challenges of their community, the senior management team are focused on raising the expectations and aspirations of all local families. As a team they encompass a wide range of skills and professional expertise which complements the work of the centre. This has proved invaluable in relation to setting appropriate yet challenging targets. The management of the 'child development grant' has been particularly innovative. Through close working with social care colleagues the centre ensured it effectively targeted specific hard to reach groups, ensuring over 80 families benefitted from high quality training and activities. This is reflective of the centre's ongoing success in engaging many of its harder to reach groups. Detailed data on participation rates clearly show that the centre continues to reach its most vulnerable families narrowing the achievement gap for those who are most disadvantaged. This is further facilitated through highly effective protocols and partnerships with relevant organisations including the women's refuge, teenage pregnancy service, housing and the Traveller service. Equality and diversity is extremely well promoted and is totally committed to inclusive practice. This is especially evident in the work with children with disabilities and those with other significant barriers to participation.

The enthusiasm of all staff and partners within the centre permeates every aspect of its work. Without exception, everyone demonstrates high levels of dedication and commitment as well as a determination to effect sustainable improved outcomes for the community. Staff are extremely motivated and committed in all aspects of their professional development. The eclectic mix of skills, qualifications and knowledge that exist amongst the centre's team is invaluable. Individual strengths are recognised and used to develop services further. For example, the family support manager's social work background has been a key factor in relation to the centre's success in this key area. There are many excellent examples of how agencies have



worked together in order to effect swift early intervention and support for families experiencing difficulties and challenges. Excellent procedures are in place to ensure that all individuals working with children are suitable to do so.

Resources are used and managed effectively to meet the needs of families and children in the community. The advisory board and locality manager works closely with the local authority, ensuring budget allocations are aligned to ongoing priorities and remain responsive to the changing priorities and needs within the local community. Staff are extremely well deployed and utilised ensuring excellent value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>1</b>

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

Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centre hosts a full-time day care provision for children aged birth to school age. Five local primary schools, Bedlington Station, Stead Lane, Bedlington West End, Whitley Memorial, Cambois, Choppington, Guidepost Mowbray and Guidepost Ringway, with Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children over three years, are also part of the centre's remit. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections has been taken into account when writing about Early Years Foundation Stage provision and outcomes for children in this 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centre on 14-15 July 2011. We visited activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with you and professionals. Following this work, we have judged the centre as providing outstanding support to you and your family.

The children's centre provides a wealth of excellent activities, which are aimed at helping families improve their lives. Your views strongly support this as you tell us that you are happy with the activities you use because they have helped you in lots of different ways. For example, some of you have received excellent support as young mums, whilst others have found the opportunities to undertake parenting courses, such as 'Mellow Parenting' to be 'invaluable' and 'life changing.' Activities and provision for children before they start school has improved greatly and many of your children are making outstanding progress as a result, especially in regard to making friends and developing speaking, listening and reading skills. Many of you have also taken advantage of the many training opportunities available, particularly the recently introduced Arts Award. Many of you told us that you would like to do other courses offered through the centre and we wish you every success with this.

We found that the children's centre offers lots of high quality programmes and activities aimed at improving the health of people in your local community. In particular it has done really well in reducing the number of overweight children, as well as helping people to live healthier lifestyles by quitting smoking and through the provision of activities to encourage healthy eating. The centre has also been particularly successful in increasing the number of new mums who choose to breastfeed their babies; we were impressed by the progress made so far. The centre continues to take action to improve this for the benefit of you and your family.

Most importantly, you tell us that you 'feel safe at the centre,' and can 'trust the staff to help you when you most need it'. You particularly appreciate the advice and help of the family support workers and have welcomed home visits and the opportunity to go with someone to a group until you build your confidence and make new friends. We found that the centre was doing an excellent job of helping you at times in your life when you most need it. We found that action was taken quickly and that different people and organisations worked exceptionally well as a team to support both children and families.

The centre is working extremely well with other partners, such as health visitors, midwives and social care teams. You tell us that it is good to go to the many support groups and clinics and welcome the opportunity to talk to the health visitor or the family support worker in a relaxed, informal environment. A lot of parents and carers, especially those who are bringing up children on their own, told us that they felt really happy on the days when they have an activity to go to and have found the friendships made through the centre to have been 'long lasting'. There is exemplary support for children with disabilities and parents and carers are encouraged to take an active role in meetings with professionals, ensuring they are involved in making important decisions about their children's future.

We found that those people in charge of the children's centre are doing an outstanding job. Managers, together with partners and other staff have worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a real, genuine and lasting difference to the area in which you live. We know that everyone who works with Bedlington and Choppington Children's Centre shares this view. The centre has access to lots of detailed information to help them plan future activities and we know they listen to you because you enjoy attending activities they provide. However, we have asked the centre to build upon this further and encourage even more of you to regularly participate in what the centre has to offer.

The centre has spent a lot of time ensuring that you are involved in making decisions about its direction and the different services it provides. We know that you feel genuinely respected and listened to as a result. We were particularly impressed by the tireless work and dedication of the various parent and carer network groups and heard first hand about some of the fantastic memories this group has helped to create. We hope that you continue to have great success in this aspect of your work.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you good luck for the future.

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