

# Inspection report for McNay Street Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	367839
Inspection dates	27 - 28 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Rachael Flesher HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Deborah Archer
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY265751 Kids and Co at Northwood

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.

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## 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents and carers, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, the advisory board and the local authority.

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

## Information about the centre

McNay Street Children's Centre is a stand-alone children's centre situated to the north of Darlington. The centre also provides outreach services from nearby Redhall Community Centre. It serves a community living in the 5% to 30% most deprived areas in the country, with half of the families living in the 10% most deprived areas in the country. Families face issues of high unemployment, worklessness, low-income households, lone-parent households, poor housing, social deprivation, drug and alcohol misuse, crime, domestic violence and low levels of skills. A high number of families claim jobseekers allowance and benefits. The large majority of families in the centre reach area are White British. The majority of families from minority-ethnic groups living in Darlington reside in the centre's reach area and make up 10% of the community. These include families from the Polish and Bengali communities, many of whom speak English as an additional language.

The full day care element of the provision is provided at the nearby Kids and Co at Northwood, situated at Northwood Primary School. Children enter the early years' provision with skills that are much lower than those typically expected for their age, particularly in relation to speech and language, problem solving, reasoning, and numeracy and personal, social and emotional development.

McNay Street Children's Centre has its own advisory board and parents group and is governed by Darlington Borough Council. The local authority has recently been restructured and at the time of inspection a new centre leader had been in post for three weeks.

## 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

Outcomes, quality of provision and leadership and management are all good. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is also good, leading to good overall effectiveness. The centre gives high priority to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and other users, and robust, effective arrangements exist to ensure their safety and health. Equality and diversity are actively promoted and the centre fulfils its statutory duties well. The centre and its partners have developed extremely positive relationships with the community it serves. Diversity is celebrated and the centre has successfully engaged many families from the minority-ethnic groups it serves. Those who speak English as an additional language are supported to ensure effective communications and they have good access to training to develop their English language skills.

Partnerships and information sharing systems with a range of key partner professionals and parents and carers are extremely strong in many respects. Users, many of whom are from the most vulnerable families, are systematically and routinely engaged in the governance and decision-making of the centre including a highly successful and extremely proactive parents group. This contributes significantly to securing the welfare of children and high levels of user satisfaction. These partnerships also ensure the delivery of a cohesive range of provision and services that generally meet the needs of users and the wider community very well. However, despite the best efforts of the centre, Job Centre Plus is not currently working closely enough with the centre in providing a service to further promote the economic stability and independence, including accessing training and employment, of parents and carers. Users' views are meaningfully sought and actively used to shape services and to ensure they are correctly matched to the needs of the community. All families within the reach area are registered with the centre. A good number of these are

engaged and accessing services and are very often the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach from the centre's key target groups, and their attendance is very good. The care, guidance and personalised support families receive, particularly in times of crisis, is exceptional, promoting the well-being of families across all outcomes. As a result the centre provides excellent value for money.

Partners and those working at the centre have confidence in the centre leader to provide effective leadership. Self-evaluation is well embedded amongst centre staff and partners, which ensures that all those involved have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, and the needs of the community. Plans for the future are also well targeted to secure continuous improvement. However, the centre's use of all available data and local intelligence to demonstrate its achievements and set future measurable targets for improvement is not fully established. Morale is high and belief in the centre's success runs through all levels, demonstrated by one partner who stated 'The children's centre is an amazing facility and a valuable asset to the families.'

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve systems to further demonstrate the impact of the children's centres services and activities on outcomes for children and families by:
  - fully utilising available data and local intelligence to provide a clear analysis of the centre's current and ongoing achievements and areas for development
  - setting robust measurable targets which are clearly understood and embedded by all staff to ensure the centre can be held fully accountable.
- Develop partnership working with Job Centre Plus to improve parents and carers economic stability and independence, including access to training and employment.

## **How good are outcomes for users?**

2
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Outcomes for users are good, with one parent summarising this very well by stating, 'On a scale of one to 10 the difference this children's centre has made to me is 10; absolutely, honestly, without a doubt.'

Children are effectively safeguarded. Very good partnership working is having a positive impact on outcomes for children subject to Common Assessment Framework processes, looked after children and children subject to a child protection plan. It is reducing the number of those needing child protection plans, and preventing situations from reaching crisis point, due to the early intervention and support provided. Users feel safe and very welcome in the centre and have good relationships with the staff, stating, 'We trust them.' and 'It's nice to know somewhere safe to bring children, especially when on a budget.' Children play and work in ways that are safe for themselves and those around them. Their

behaviour is excellent. Through the services provided, children, parents and carers are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their family safe. All professionals involved with a family are vigilant to any issues that may prevent children and their families staying safe in their homes and ensure precautions are put in place to help prevent any accidents and incidents occurring.

The centre has successfully established very strong partnership working with a number of different health professionals and a good range of child and family health services, often closely targeted to the families' needs, are delivered from the centre. These are well matched to the needs of the reach area and are well used by the community, including expectant parents, ensuring they are supported through early intervention. As a result healthy outcomes are good and improving for many families, including the most vulnerable. For example, there is a high uptake of immunisation, good uptake of breastfeeding, and, due to the centre's concerted effort to lower obesity levels, families are developing healthier lifestyles. As one parent stated, 'This is my third baby and my third time at this group and it has really helped me to continue breastfeeding.' Another parent stated, 'Before the course I struggled to get my child to eat fruit and vegetables. He actually likes eating different fruit and vegetables now and knows their names.' Parenting courses are also having a significant impact on the emotional health and well-being of users. One parent stated, 'We learn to be better parents.'

Children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress from their starting points in developing their skills for the future and are well prepared for school. Strong transition arrangements and partnership working are in place to ensure consistency and the continuity of care, learning and development of children. The Early Years Foundation Stage is securely embedded across all provision. The centre ensures a strong focus on the areas of development identified where children are achieving less well. As a result a good proportion of children achieve 78 points in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. However, despite these efforts, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is only narrowing slowly. There is a wide range of opportunities for parents and carers to play, have fun and learn together. They are supported well by skilled professionals promoting children's development and parents' and carers' parenting skills.

The centre very effectively seeks the views of users and the wider community and this enables them to make an excellent contribution to the development of community cohesion and service delivery. This includes using questionnaires and evaluating every activity and service with users. A strongly established, highly dedicated and influential parents' group ensures users are engaged in the governance and decision making of the centre and in shaping services. These parents and carers are empowered to lead on, and deliver, services, such as the highly valued holiday activity-programme, which are closely based on the users' needs. The centre plays a significant role in the life of the community where strong relationships and friendships develop and families treat each other with respect. Parents and carers stated that the centre, '...feels like a second home', 'I feel welcome.' 'I have made friends' and 'The centre is at the heart of the community.'

Parents and carers have access to a range of services to help them improve their economic stability and independence, including access to training and employment, for example, through adult and family learning, the Family Information Service, Morrisons' Trust and the Mobile Advice Cooperative. This has provided many parents and carers with access to information regarding benefits and tax credits resulting in many more families being financially better off. Other parents and carers have been supported back into work and training, with some setting up their own businesses. One parent stated, 'I could not leave the house, now I volunteer here and work in school at lunchtimes.' However, despite the best efforts of the children's centre, Job Centre Plus is not providing its much needed services through the centre in order to improve the economic well-being of more families in the reach area.

*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>2</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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</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>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

Staff are skilled at identifying the needs of families and swiftly and sensitively intervening to ensure they receive the personalised support they need to improve their outcomes. The centre works very well in partnerships with other services to ensure assessments, such as those carried out under the Common Assessment Framework process and for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are robust, well informed and lead to early intervention.

All partners take an active role in promoting high quality, integrated provision which is responsive to local needs. Provision is based on good analysis of need using meaningful consultation and evaluation processes. This ensures the range of services and activities, including outreach services, meet the needs of users, including key target groups, well. As a result participation and attendance rates are excellent and users are representative of the full community that the centre serves. As one partner stated, 'Parents vote with their feet. This children's centre is always busy no matter what time you come.'

Provision to help children and adults learn and develop is good. The good Early Years Foundation Stage provision enables children to learn and develop across all areas of learning through quality activities and resources that interest and engage them. The centre has good evidence of how it has enabled users to take on roles and responsibilities and develop their skills for the future. Some users are supported to improve their educational and personal development and to progress to further employment, education and training. There is a high uptake of training and activities with the provision of a crèche, valued by users, enabling very good attendance. Users also have the opportunity to join the ever-expanding volunteers programme. The parents group has been supported to plan and deliver services for the community in the school holidays, when services are often needed most, by securing funding so there is no financial cost to the centre or the users. All users enjoy learning, achieve well and their achievements are meaningfully celebrated.

The quality of care provided is outstanding for young children, parents and carers and other users. The environment is warm and inviting. Staff and partners at all levels are friendly and extremely welcoming and the centre places great importance on encouraging the community to access the centre and services. For example, they are invited to drop in and bring their children to the centre, to utilise the resources, such as accessing the outdoor play area, at their leisure, to promote their ongoing development and good outcomes. This is particularly valuable to the many families who live in rented accommodation and do not have access to safe outdoor play spaces. Centre staff provide highly effective personalised support for families in crisis, offering exceptional levels of care and guidance across a wide remit. As one parent stated, 'No question is stupid, they take time to listen, they understand. If they can't help you they know who can.'

*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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</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?**

**2**

Governance and accountability arrangements, as well as clear roles and responsibilities at all levels of leadership and management, are established and understood by all. The local authority closely monitors the performance of the centre and its representatives ask challenging questions of leaders to improve provision and outcomes. Staff are effectively deployed. Good professional supervision and management arrangements are in place to monitor the performance of staff and ensure ongoing professional development. Staff

development and training is effective and appropriate in order to meet the current and future needs of children and families in the reach area. The centre staff and partners are committed to bringing about sustainable improvement. The good quality services and activities have been consistently maintained throughout the local authority restructuring process, including during the change in centre leadership, due to the positive and effective management of the centre by the leaders. Staff state they are very well supported in their roles and receive strong leadership and direction. The centre leader has a positive 'can do' attitude and this inspires staff to work hard for the children and families. As a result staff are passionate and motivated and morale is high.

Staff, leaders and partners routinely reflect on their practice and provision to secure continuous improvement. Users' views are thoroughly sought and used to contribute to good self-evaluation and in shaping services. Self-evaluation provides the centre with a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development and is used to inform planning. The centre's development plan sets out priorities and targets, how this will be achieved and by when. However, data and local intelligence is not fully utilised, and the targets are not always measurable, in order to ensure that the centre can demonstrate clearly the impact it is having on the outcomes of children and their families.

Safer recruitment procedures are followed and all relevant checks are made to ensure that all staff are suitable and safe to work with children. All staff receive appropriate, good quality child protection training and are confident in their role to safeguard children. Risks are thoroughly assessed and minimised.

An extremely wide range of partners sit on the well-established advisory board and partners are committed to partnership working. The advisory board and parents group challenge the centre leaders and hold them accountable. They share their ideas and the views of the community and are influential in shaping services and activities to ensure these are matched to needs and therefore sustainable. This significantly contributes to the outstanding satisfaction and engagement of all groups of users. Having a wide range of partner professionals based at the centre has significantly contributed to the strong partnership working and information-sharing systems in place. However, the work with Job Centre Plus is less well established. Overall the fully integrated approach to service delivery has had a significant impact on the outcomes of users.

The inclusion of all children and families, including children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is promoted very effectively and the centre is breaking down barriers to access and developing community cohesion. This has resulted in the centre successfully engaging with many of its most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, through targeted support. For example, the excellent engagement of fathers and male carers through the ever expanding Dads group, the Bengali community and the Polish community.

The centre uses and manages its available resources exceptionally well to meet the needs of users and the wider community. Staff skills, knowledge and expertise, resources and services are all fully utilised. User engagement and participation is excellent and the environment and services are of high quality. Leaders have a firm handle on the finances,



funding streams are accessed, and volunteers are used to develop the provision, thereby providing 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>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</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>2</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**

None.

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 1231231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected McNay Street Sure Start Children's Centre on 27 and 28 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection. Like you, we found your children's centre to be very welcoming and friendly, providing a warm and inviting environment. You told us you feel safe and very welcome in the centre and have good relationships with the staff, stating, 'We trust them.' and 'It's nice to know somewhere safe to bring children, especially when on a budget.' High priority is given to safeguarding your children. Staff are skilled and knowledgeable in making sure your children are safe and protected. The staff at your centre work very well together with its partner services, sharing information and resources to make sure you and your families get the right support when you need it.

Your centre is helping families in your community to achieve good outcomes. As one parent told us, 'On a scale of one to 10 the difference this children's centre has made to me is 10;,, absolutely, honestly, without a doubt.' There is a high uptake of immunisation, good uptake of breastfeeding, and, due to the centre's concerted effort to lower obesity levels, families are developing healthier lifestyles. As one parent stated, 'This is my third baby and my third time at this group and it has really helped me to continue breastfeeding.' Another parent stated, 'Before the course I struggled to get my child to eat fruit and vegetables. He actually likes eating different fruit and vegetables now and knows their names.' Parenting courses are also having a significant impact on the emotional health and well-being of users. One parent stated, 'We learn to be better parents.' You and your children are achieving well and making good progress.

Your centre provides highly effective personalised support for families in crisis, offering exceptional levels of care and guidance across a wide remit. As one parent stated, 'No question is stupid, they take time to listen, they understand. If they can't help you they know who can.'

Great importance is placed on seeking your views and encouraging your contributions. Your parents group, who represent your families living in your community, is a particular strength in ensuring the services and activities provided are what your community needs and wants.

The centre meets these needs well. You have access to a good range of services provided by a number of partners who work exceptionally well together to support families. The services and activities are extremely well used by the whole community. More significantly, a large number of the most vulnerable families are accessing services and activities. Your centre makes excellent use of its resources, making sure you fully benefit from all it has to offer, and provides excellent value for money.

You have good support to help you manage your finances and access the right benefits in order to support your families. Your centre also supports many of you into training and employment. As one parent told us, 'I could not leave the house, now I volunteer here and work in school at lunchtimes.' However, despite the best efforts of the centre, Job Centre Plus is not currently working closely with your centre to provide its much needed services to families living in your area. Your centre has been asked to improve this.

Your centre strives to be better and is always looking for ways to improve to ensure it is having the biggest impact on improving outcomes for you and your families. However, the targets it sets itself are not always easily measurable to ensure the centre can fully demonstrate the true impact of its provision. We have asked your centre to improve this. Your children's centre has a good capacity to improve further the outcomes for families living in your community and to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest. It does so with great determination and dedication. We wish you all the very best for the future.

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