

Inspection report for Deckham Children's Centre

Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	383664
Inspection dates	24–25 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Elizabeth Srogi HMI

Centre governance	Gateshead Local Authority
Centre leader	Cathy Taylor
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Elgin Centre Elgin Road Carr Hill Deckham NE9 5PA
Telephone number	0191 433 6300
Fax number	0191 433 6329
Email address	cathytaylor@gateshead.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY267563 Deckham Children's Centre Nursery
	EY340899 Route 26 Community Project

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.

Published: September 2011

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre managers, staff members, advisory board members, partner agencies, volunteers, users and local authority officers linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Deckham Children's Centre was originally developed as part of the Sure Start local programme. It is a phase one centre which provides the full core offer and was designated in February 2006. The centre is one of four centres in the neighbourhood area identified as Central Area; the centres are overall managed by the Under 11's Lead and share administrative resources. The Children's Centre Area Manager for Deckham has recently changed and the current manager has been in post for two weeks. Governance is provided by Gateshead Local Authority and there is an advisory board in place.

The centre covers the reach area of the Deckham Ward and serves a population that includes 627 children under the age of five years of which 563 live in a 30% disadvantaged super output area. As at September 2010, the unemployment rate in the reach area was 9.1%. In May 2008, 39.9% of children were living in workless households and in 2007, 13.3% of families were eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.

The population of the area is mainly of White British heritage with an increasing number of Eastern European families.

The children's centre shares the Elgin Centre premises with the Route 26 Community project which includes a community café and there is a registered day nursery and a voluntary Childcare Register facility on site. These childcare facilities are subject to their own inspections and the reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those expected for their age. The centre has links with the nearby Carr Hill Community Primary School.

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

Deckham Children's Centre offers good services and support to those who access its provision. The Under 11's lead has overall management of the centre and provides clear leadership, management and direction to everyone involved with the centre. The strong team commitment of all staff in the centre to working to improve the lives of families in the reach area is evident in all the centre does. A particular strength of this centre is its partnership working; the children's centre shares the Elgin Centre premises with a day nursery and Route 26 Community Project. It is evident that the community views these as one unit where they access services and activities to meet their needs.

Overall outcomes for children and families are good. Activities and services provided are mostly of good quality and improve the lives of the families who use the centre. The activities provided by centre staff and most partners successfully help families to improve their health, stay safe, achieve educationally and personally and contribute to the running of the centre. However, there is some variance in the quality of services commissioned by the centre for children, such as in the crèche provision, and evidence to show the take-up and long term impact of adult education is limited.

The centre has a robust approach to safeguarding, all required checks are in place for staff and volunteers and documentation shows that partners using the centre are suitably cleared to have unsupervised access to children and vulnerable adults. Staff's knowledge of what would raise concerns to them and the subsequent action they would need to take is thorough. Centre staff work well together and with partners to ensure that families are

provided with cohesive and accessible services to meet their needs. The centre has a strong commitment to inclusion; equality of opportunity and appreciation of diversity are seen as central and vital in all activities and services provided by centre staff.

Staff know the area and its needs well. Much of this comes from local knowledge, experience and good communication with partners, data are also available. However, although the centre has identified clear areas for development based on robust evidence and has action plans in place that are understood by staff, they lack clear and easily understood measurable targets, measures and timescales. In addition, although there is a wide selection of data available that is used to aid evaluation and planning, it is not always easily accessible and does not always show how the centre is meeting the needs of the reach area, particularly over time.

Overall, the good leadership and management, effective partnership working and the clear impact that the centre is having on children and families along with an appreciation of the future needs of the area, clearly indicate that the centre's capacity to improve is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Refine the centre's action plans so that they more clearly identify targets, measures and timescales.
- Improve the accessibility of the data available to the centre so that it can be more clearly seen how it has influenced the action plans and how the centre is meeting the needs of the reach area over time.
- Monitor the quality of commissioned childcare services and encourage and monitor adults' access to adult education and the long term impact of this work.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre provides a wide range of activities which are developed well in partnership with local authority colleagues, other agencies and professionals. Healthy lifestyles and healthy eating are promoted effectively throughout the centre and early referral and intervention ensure that families who may be more vulnerable than others are appropriately supported. Within children's centre activities healthy snacks and drinks are provided and promoted. Additionally, the centre has worked in conjunction with the Route 26 Community Project to include healthy foods onto the community café menu and into the snack machines available in the overall premises. The promotion of healthy lifestyles is also well supported through initiatives such as HENRY (Health, Exercise and Nutrition in the Really Young). Breastfeeding is encouraged in the centre and evidence based on general practitioner figures, although not reach area specific, indicates some improvement in the numbers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding. The breastfeeding support group 'Bosom Buddies' is currently not held in the Deckham Centre but is held in other nearby children's centres. Parents are actively encouraged to attend this group and there has been some limited take-up. Smoking is an

identified health issue in the reach area and as a result of the centre's initiatives, 34 centre users in a four-month period have signed up to the Gateshead Smokefree Tobacco Alliance Seven Steps programme to provide a smoke free home for their children.

The centre is effective in ensuring that parents and children keep themselves safe and free from harm and children's safety is improving. Parents highlight how safe they feel in the centre, how they know that the centre will always put them and their children's safety first, how centre staff help those that are eligible to access safety equipment through the Whoops Scheme and how first-aid training is available to them.

There are many activities where parents and children play, have fun and learn together. For example, parents and children enjoy attending 'Deckham Dragonflies', 'Busy Bees', 'Twins or more', and 'Dad and me'. Feedback to inspectors from dad's group participants very much emphasises how attending the group with their children has improved relationships and helped them to 'enjoy' being a dad. The range of good information and advice on all aspects of child development, including access to parenting courses in conjunction with the Parenting and Family Team, is helping parents to understand their child's development and how they can help them progress in their learning; parents highlight how courses have helped them be better parents. The centre is actively involved in the two-year-old pilot programme which is being used as a catalyst to engage with groups whose circumstances have made them hard to reach. The centre works closely with local schools to ensure children are effectively supported in their transition to school and indeed in Carr Hill Primary School's last Ofsted report it was highlighted how close working with the children's centre enables families to access unbroken support from early years. Following evaluation of transition sessions provided by the children's centre this year they have amended their input to a single session on 'Preparing your child for Early Years' which complements the transition work that individual schools do themselves. This not only addresses the worries, concerns and anxieties of parents but also helps them consider their next stages and aspirations now their children are going into Early Years Foundation Stage provision. At the most recent session provided, 23 parents from this reach area attended.

Children's behaviour in the centre is good. Parents are encouraged to express their views about the centre services and activities through regular evaluation of activities, the suggestions box and the relaxed open door policy of the centre. Although parents are not currently on the advisory board, those users spoken to are certain that they have a strong voice in the centre and do influence how the centre is run and what services and activities are provided. A recent example is where a parent had consulted with other parents and had asked for a homework club, this is being addressed in conjunction with adult learning and is to start in September.

The centre encourages users to develop economic stability. The centre provides advice, guidance, support and signposting for users to access training and thereby improve their readiness for work. Some parents highlighted how they have gained qualifications such as level 1 and 2 in numeracy and literacy, although the evidence to show how many have taken up training and how this has impacted on their quality of life is limited. However, some success stories were highlighted to inspectors. Some users have gone further in

accessing training and employment; at least one parent is now at university and users have gained the confidence, experience and qualifications to enable them to be active volunteers in the centre. For example, by leading sessions on baby massage and setting up groups, such as the 'Polskie Smyki' which is a fun stay and play group for Polish parents and their children. The centre has good links with Jobcentre Plus and an interactive kiosk is available to users, not only of the children's centre but the whole Elgin Centre. Crèche facilities are provided to support parents; however, there are limited systems in place to monitor the ongoing quality of these commissioned services to ensure they provide a high standard of care and education to children.

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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides good quality services, which are helping to improve the outcomes for families attending the centre and for those who receive more targeted work in their own homes through outreach work.

The centre uses the Common Assessment Framework and the 'team around the family' processes very well. The centre staff's effective and enthusiastic participation in the Referral and Allocations Meetings ensures assessment of individual cases is robust and that the most suitable intervention, tailored to the specific needs of the individual children and families including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, can be assured. Close working with family support and social services enables the centre's parent outreach workers to provide effective support to families in accordance with the Gateshead thresholds for family support. Case studies clearly show how the timely intervention and work with families, particularly as a result of outreach work, has improved the outcomes for children and families and has improved their life chances. This is further supported by parents and carers, including young mums, who testify to the timeliness and quality of individual support provided for them and of how the work of the centre has helped them to be better parents.

Over the last year centre staff have provided outreach work for 50 families, of which 24 are still open cases. The centre receives referrals from a range of sources including health visitors and self-referral.

Health Visitor clinics are held regularly in the centre and Centre Information Assistants are available to provide advice and guidance on what the centre can offer to parents attending the clinics to further encourage parents to access the helpful activities and services available. There is also a wide range of useful information displayed around the centre ranging from details of adult learning available to services for those experiencing domestic violence. The centre's action plans, including those relating to teenage parent engagement and the non-engagement of families, are having an impact on the number of new users accessing services. New birth data information is also used to monitor access to the centre's services; centre staff make further contact with those who do register with the centre but do not access centre activities or where they do not register, particularly in respect of those living in the postcodes that have been identified as hard to reach. As a result, there has been some success in getting more families to use the centre's services.

Learning, development and enjoyment are promoted well. The children's centre has a designated qualified teacher from Carr Hill Primary School who works to a schedule agreed in 'a letter of agreement' to support centre staff provide activities that reflect the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. All activities provided by the centre are informed by an activity proposal and an impact evaluation form and all have documented planning detailing the activities planned, the resources required, the links to the Early Years Foundation Stage and evaluation of the activity. Participation rates at sessions are generally good and many are increasing in number; this is because the centre is making sure the activities provided meet the needs and interests of individuals. Achievement is celebrated in the centre; work done by children, parents and carers is displayed.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The arrangements for the leadership and management of the centre are clear and are well understood by staff. The senior management team, advisory board and partners have a determined focus on improvement and roles and responsibilities are clearly understood. There are clear links between the centre's plans and those at strategic level and therefore the centre's priorities link effectively to those of the wider area. Senior leaders represent the local authority on a range of local strategic partnerships and in this way actively promote the work of the children's centres. The advisory board which is shared with three other centres has clear terms of reference in place and those members spoken to by inspectors are very committed to the work of the centre and how it contributes to improving the lives of the families in the reach area. They are clear that their role includes not only supporting but challenging the work of the centre and they are actively involved in the centre's self-evaluation processes. The local authority has changed the way it carries out the annual conversation to further improve their commitment to ensuring quality services. This is now done by a local authority led panel which includes partner representatives and is effective in providing robust challenges to the centre.

The centre shares staff, management, policies and procedures with the other centres in the local authority and particularly with those who make up the central area. Staff encourage users to access services and activities across the area and work with the other centres and with Route 26 Community project within the Elgin Centre to avoid duplication and therefore maximise the variety of services and activities that are available to children and families. This represents good value for money. The centre makes use of the local authority impact tool, data and evaluations by parents, children and staff to evaluate and plan services. Centre management and staff have clearly identified their target areas for development and have documented plans in place to address these, however, the plans, although clearly known and owned by staff, do not sufficiently show SMART targets and timescales to measure their success. Much data are available to centre management but they are not always easily accessible. This impedes the centre from using data as a matter of course to ensure they inform planning and evaluate the way in which the centre is meeting the needs of those in the reach area over time.

Financial management strategies are robust and both management and staff are aware of what the centre budget can be used for and where they can potentially access additional funding to meet user's needs. The performance management of staff is strong and arrangements for appraisal and individual supervision are thorough and are used to access training and support staff development.

Safeguarding is a strength of the centre. The procedures for vetting staff are robust and relevant training is up to date and is appropriate to role. Effective consideration is given to the suitability of training and this year, centre staff have had joint training to further ensure a cohesive centre approach in meeting the needs of users. The policies and procedures for safeguarding are well known among staff and they are confident in their ability to put them into practice. Volunteers are also suitably cleared to work in the centre, are provided with training and are knowledgeable about potential concerns and what action they would take. The centre is an active member of the national scheme, Leisure Watch, and centre staff are

trained to be vigilant, challenge suspicious behaviour and obtain advice and help where it is needed.

Partnerships play a significant part in the successful running of this centre. Much emphasis is put on the Elgin Centre as a whole, in which the children's centre plays a crucial role, to be a successful community resource in which services are seamlessly provided for users. The centre has many active and successful partnerships in place including with the library service, local police, health, schools, family support team, home group and childminders; they share information appropriately, have open and constructive dialogue and diligently work together to meet the needs of local families. Centre management and staff work enthusiastically and consistently to promote the work of the centre at every opportunity. They eagerly participate in wider community events such as the 'Carnival on the Hill' which significantly contributes to community cohesion and encourages the wider community to embrace and become involved in the centre's work.

Inclusion is at the heart of all the work carried out by the centre. There is clear evidence from case studies and feedback given to inspectors by users and staff that all parents and children, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences are valued and are welcomed into the centre. Information displayed promotes equality and diversity and translation and interpreter services are available to the centre and its users. The centre is fully accessible to those with disabilities. Although the centre housed on the first floor it has lift access and frequently uses the main Elgin Centre rooms on the ground floor to further enable users to access activities easily.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

The findings from the recent inspections of Deckham Children's Centre Nursery and Carr Hill Community Primary School were reviewed as part of this 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 the Deckham Children's Centre on 24–25 August 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at a range of documentation, and talked to a number of children and adults including parents, staff, local authority representatives, volunteers and partnership workers. We were very pleased to speak to some of you and to listen to your views. You made your views clear to us and we have used them to help us make our judgements.

We are pleased to say that the children's centre is working hard to support you and your families in the Deckham area. Parents spoken to praised the centre for the support it has given them and highlighted examples of where the very good care, guidance and support given to them had improved their families' lives. You told us how your lives have improved and how problems have been resolved following your attendance at the centre or as a result of the home visits you have had. The centre is working hard to ensure more people can access the services of the centre and they are using action plans to help them do this. However, the plans' targets and timescales are not as clear as they could be, so we have asked the centre to look at these to make sure they show how they are going to improve the numbers coming to the centre and by when. The centre also uses a great deal of information and data to plan the services it offers but these are not always easily accessible for them to use so we have asked them to make them easier to obtain.

A strength of the centre is the way that staff work in partnership with other agencies to make a difference to children's and family lives and the life of the community as a whole not only by the services and activities provide in the centre but in the way the children's centre enthusiastically joins in the organisation of such events as 'Carnival on the Hill'. More people are taking part in the centre's activities such as in the 'Dad and Me' and 'Busy Bees' groups as a result of the determined work of the centre to ensure the groups, training and activities provided are what you want and need. The centre does provide crèche facilities to enable you to take part in sessions to help you develop as individuals and as parents. However, the

monitoring of the quality of the crèche by the children's centre is limited and we have asked the centre management to improve this.

You told us how safe you feel in the centre, that you know you will be well looked after by centre staff and that the centre staff will always help with any problems you have. You also told us that you feel very much that you are listened to in the centre and that your views are valued and are used to develop the activities offered to you. The centre is very keen to develop your involvement in the management of the centre and to have parents involved with the advisory board; we would encourage you to volunteer to be part of this.

Please accept our thanks for taking the time to talk to us. We are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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