

Inspection report for Sunderland Children's Centre Washington (Wessington)

Local authority	Sunderland
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY331982 Wessington Primary school Day care

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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.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

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

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre plus representatives from childcare, parents and carers, volunteers, members of the advisory board, the local authority, and a number of professionals including health, education, family and community involvement workers.

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

Information about the centre

Wessington Children's Centre is located in the centre of Washington, to the west of Sunderland. It is a less disadvantaged area than Sunderland overall but still with a significant amount of deprivation. It is one of three centres in the Washington cluster under the leadership of the children's centre area coordinator. The centres share the same local advisory board and the same leadership and management team which are based at Rainbow Family Centre. Governance is through Sunderland local authority.

The centre provides the full core offer of services, working closely with Wessington Primary School and its day-care nursery which share the same building. A core locality team of staff is employed by the cluster and work alongside commissioned staff. Health visiting, midwifery, paediatrics, pregnancy smoking cessation and early years mental health services are commissioned from local health trusts while child and family support services are from social care service. Community involvement and essential services, toy library and home safety, are provided by two local voluntary organisations.

The vast majority of families are White British. Rates of home owner occupation are higher than those for Sunderland as a whole while the percentage of children living in workless households and families who are dependent on benefits are lower than the city average. Children's skills and abilities on entering day-care provision vary but for a significant number these are lower than would be expected for their age.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

A key strength of Wessington Children's Centre is a highly effective team that is determined to make a difference for children and their families. Although they work across a whole cluster of children's centres, staff know their locality very well and understand what makes it unique. The whole team, including staff from commissioned services, work very well together and provide completely integrated support for families. Parents appreciate this and comments like, 'I always find staff friendly and welcoming', 'brilliant, a very friendly atmosphere', and, 'this is my second home', were repeated throughout the inspection.

Since the current manager came into post, the focus has been to encourage the most disadvantaged families to use centre services. Time has been spent developing a shared understanding of priorities across the team and challenging targets have been set. The impact of this work is now being seen and data show a noticeable improvement in the number of disadvantaged families accessing centre services. Excellent relationships with health visitors mean registration rates are now high and data show over 80% of targeted families use the centre. This has been achieved by thorough checking that families are registered, combined with repeated invitations to visit the centre. A flexible approach also allows for initial work to take place in the home so that there is a familiar face and support available when families arrive at the centre for the first time. Some sessions like 'Baby Days' and 'Stay and Play' are designed to give staff time to get to know families and make them feel welcome in the centre. Outstanding partnership work involving health, social care teams, centre staff and volunteers strengthens this work. This partnership work also contributes to the exceptional care, guidance and support families receive. At all levels,

whether responding quickly to a crisis situation or advising about weaning at 'Baby Days', families receive individualised and appropriate support which meets their needs.

Safeguarding and keeping children safe are both outstanding. All staff including volunteers are very well trained in and have a very good understanding of child protection procedures. Children show by their confidence how secure they feel in the centre. Parents report that they feel safe in the centre. Integrated working is very strong and systems to protect and support vulnerable children are very well embedded. Parents receive excellent support to keep their children safe in the home and this is confirmed by a significant reduction in the number of accidents to children under five years old, resulting in a visit to hospital accident and emergency services.

Children and their parents and carers enjoy visiting the centre and engage in a range of activities. Programmes have been carefully designed to encourage parents to progress from one activity onto a range of other activities. Fathers are welcomed and are comfortable using centre services. An increasing number of vulnerable families visit the centre and use other services within the cluster such as the toy library which is located at another centre. Families from minority ethnic groups are also now more likely to use services as a result of sensitive encouragement. Adult groups such as family learning are popular. Although training that will lead to qualifications and improve employment opportunities is available in the cluster, comparatively few parents from Wessington have accessed these opportunities.

Recent building work has reconfigured the indoor area creating a new entrance and making significantly more space available to the centre. The new entrance gives the centre a stronger identity and presence on the site. There are now crèche facilities available, a sensory room and a reading room which is well stocked with books and puppets. There is also an area for outdoor play but as yet this has not been developed for use. Staff and families are pleased with the work and excited about the possibilities offered to improve services, particularly now that a crèche can be offered to parents who attend classes.

The centre manager and his senior team regularly analyse data and challenge themselves to improve further. In this, they are well supported by a committed and active advisory board and the local authority. Expectations, particularly of themselves, are high and they are determined to improve further, especially given the momentum the new building work has created. This, combined with a good understanding of their strengths and areas to develop gives the centre a good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of parents accessing training that will directly improve their employment prospects.
- Develop the outdoor space to enable children to benefit from outdoors activities.

How good are outcomes for families?

High quality integrated working is leading to good outcomes for families including the most vulnerable. Support is tailored to meet the needs of the community and staff work well together to promote positive outcomes for families. 'Busy Bodies' and other groups led by the play and learning team promote the importance of physical activity which, in turn, supports the work of the health team in promoting healthy lifestyles. The result is that the proportion of overweight and obese children in the locality is now below the national average. The outstanding safety promotion work is led by a voluntary agency but messages about the importance of home safety are reinforced in all groups. Keeping children safe is seen as a shared responsibility and this results in systems and procedures which work exceptionally well.

The Common Assessment Framework is fully embedded and reinforces all targeted work with families. Weekly meetings of a multi-agency team ensure that the support needed to keep children safe and help them thrive is put into place quickly. Regular review meetings ensure that needs continue to be met. Information is shared by social care teams regarding children with child protection plans and they are given good support and incentives to use the children's centre. Increasing numbers of vulnerable children are attending groups. The team is working hard to improve this further. Outreach work takes place in the nearby women's refuge since few women there are ready to access services in the centre.

A concerted effort has been made by staff to increase the number of mothers who breastfeed their babies. Good quality support has led to an increase in the number who initiate breastfeeding. However, the number who are still feeding their babies after six to eight weeks remains comparatively low. Targeting of support during the first week after birth has been implemented with the aim of increasing the percentage of mothers who sustain breastfeeding rates. All mothers who are smoking at the ante-natal stage are now referred to smoking cessation.

Children behave very well in the centre and their enjoyment of groups is evident. The play and learning team ensure all activities have a focus. Observations are used to track progress of both individual children and the group itself. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data for the reach area are analysed well and activities in the centre designed to narrow the achievement gap. Work continues to promote children's literacy skills with an emphasis now on writing.

Adults are encouraged to take up training opportunities and improve their qualifications. However, most parents do not yet feel sufficiently confident to participate in training that leads to qualifications but enjoy the less formal courses. Case studies show good examples of volunteers being encouraged to access training and then subsequently progressing into employment. Volunteers are used well to support parents in the centre.

Although there is not a formal parents' group in the centre, parents are widely consulted and their views are valued. For example, one parent asked for baby changing facilities to be

more private and adjustments were made. Comments books are used for all group activities and displayed in all rooms. Annual stakeholder days also give parents an opportunity to contribute to planning for the cluster.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

Both universal and targeted services are in place to meet the core offer. Outreach services, personal invitations and telephone calls are used effectively to target those families who do not use the centre, alerting them to what services and activities are available for them. A flexible approach ensures that needs are met. For example, 'Stay and Play' sessions are now run after the school day at the request of parents. They value the friendly and welcoming approach of the team. As one parent commented, 'I didn't know help without judgement or criticism was out there.'

Very good relationships with the school promote an integrated approach to play and learning. This enabled a birth to school approach to 'Every Child a Talker' and the impact of this is seen in improved Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes. Provision is well resourced and the new sensory and reading rooms have added to this. Day-care staff bring children to group activities at the centre. The gap in provision has been the lack of outdoor play facilities; however, as a consequence of improvements to the building, the centre is now in a position to develop an outdoor play area. Provision is adapted to offer what parents and carers will use. For example, an outreach toy library service at Wessington had very little take-up but by reshaping the service to incentivise use and remove costs, many local parents are now regular users, although it is based in another centre.

Every effort is made to engage with different groups. Social networking is proving successful and responsive in engaging young parents in centre activities. Several young mums are

members of a lively young parents' group. A fathers' group at a neighbouring centre includes many fathers from the Wessington locality. Translation services are available and all families welcomed, although one of the points in the development plan is to engage more with Eastern European families in the area. Currently the data related to different target groups are believed to be less reliable than that linked to the 20% most disadvantaged areas. It is hoped that a new system for registering new groups will allow for more targeted work. The team is aware that within comparatively affluent areas there is an increasing amount of rented housing and is ensuring that the focus on the most disadvantaged areas does not mean some vulnerable families living in seemingly affluent areas are missed.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The needs of families are viewed individually. A strong universal offer which includes a wide range of health services, high quality play and learning opportunities and signposting to Jobcentre Plus, is complemented by equally good and very effective targeted support for those in need. Case studies show crisis support to be effective, irrespective of what methods are used to contact centre staff. Family workers are not based at Wessington but come immediately if needed. High levels of staffing in groups give time for relationships to be built and this often leads to low level interventions and support at an early stage.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Excellent partnerships underpin the work of the centre. Comparatively few staff are employed directly with most services being commissioned. These commissioned services are closely monitored to ensure contractual expectations are met. Structures for staff management and involvement are both secure and consistent. The advisory board members know the area well and are determined that it will receive high quality services. Both the board and the local authority are supportive of centre management and help in scrutinising data and planning for improvement.

Wessington is an inclusive centre. The building itself is easily accessible. Children with disabilities are supported thoughtfully. Portage services for children with additional needs are made available in homes but a sensory room is available for families to use and they are also actively encouraged to participate in group activities at the centre. Vulnerable families are also encouraged to attend groups with their children and to use the toy library regularly. Some are also able to access funded places for two-year-olds in the day-care nursery.

Positive images to reflect diversity are displayed around the building and in the resources used for play and learning.

All required safeguarding policies are in place and reviewed annually. Safer recruitment practices including Criminal Record Bureau checks are used rigorously and recorded thoroughly. The building is safe and secure and risk assessments are detailed. All visitors are welcomed but their identities are carefully checked and are made aware of safety procedures. Excellent multi-agency working helps to ensure that early intervention leads to appropriate support before crisis situations are reached.

Centre services have to some extent been limited by space in the building in which the centre is housed, but purposeful leadership has ensured a strong focus on the needs of the community. Parents are encouraged to use centre services or, if these are not available at Wessington, they are helped to access them elsewhere in the area. Parents respond well to this approach and satisfaction rates at the centre are very high with most parents saying they would recommend the centre to others. Parents have a wide range of opportunities to express their views about the centre and as one said, 'We often get asked for our opinions, staff remember the children.'

Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. It is an ongoing process involving all members of staff and is inclusive of parents and children. Ambitious targets are set and reviewed regularly. Staffing resources are used skilfully to support the needs of the locality and other resources are deployed effectively. Outcomes, including participation from target groups are good and the centre provides good value for money.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

No other information was used to inform judgements made during this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sunderland Children's Centre Washington (Wessington) centre on 14–15 September 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection we observed activities and talked to some of you and the professionals who work in the centre. We also looked at action plans and documents including your comments books from various groups and the 'pink pig' books which show what has been happening in these groups.

Everyone we spoke to was very enthusiastic about the centre and the people who work there impressed both inspectors with their enthusiasm for what they are doing. We were told many times how welcome you feel. The leadership team enjoy its work and is determined to make a difference. It is always trying to improve things for you and showed us several changes that have been made to try and make things better for you. Some of these changes like running the 'Stay and Play' sessions later in the day have been suggested by you.

Your centre is doing a number of things very well. We were very impressed with how hard staff try to ensure that everyone in the area is coming to the centre. Health visitors make sure all new parents know about it and encourage you to use it. If you are not coming they will send invitations to events through the post or telephone you. If you wish, someone will visit you at home so that there is a familiar face when you come into a group for the first time.

You all agreed that you felt very safe there and this is because everyone who works in the centre is very aware of what they need to do to protect you and your children. They give very good support to those of you who need extra help or are at a point in your life when you need help urgently. Staff try hard to help you make your homes as safe as possible for your children and fewer of you need to take your children to hospital accident and emergency services as a result of this.

You told us that you enjoy coming to the centre and bringing your children to the activities that are put on. Activities during the school holidays and special events are things you particularly value. Centre staff think hard about how to encourage you to branch out and try new activities, for example, putting a group on in the sensory room at the same time as 'Baby Days'. They also run classes for you, as well as those for your children. You enjoy coming to the parenting ones including family learning but few of you attend classes leading to further qualifications. We have asked the centre to think about ways of increasing the numbers of you attending these classes.

We saw how much you enjoy activities and how well your children behave. There are lots of activities and advice to help you and your family be healthy. We were impressed at how enthusiastic the 'Bosom Buddies' are about trying to encourage you to breastfeed your babies. We also heard about and met some other volunteers who help to make the centre what it is.

Until recently, space in the centre has been limited. This has not stopped staff from running as many activities as they could. They have also been very good at letting you know what is happening in other Washington children's centres and encouraging you to go to them. Many of you go elsewhere to use the toy library or to join in the dads' group. Building work has just been completed to give the centre more space. This means that a crèche will be able to run alongside training activities and that an outside play area can now be developed for your children to use.

We saw how hard everyone works and how much things have improved as the centre has developed. We are sure that it will continue to do so. Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful and hope you will continue to value your centre as highly as you do now.

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