

Inspection report for Walkergate Children's Centre

Local authority	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Inspection number	384198
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Walkergate Early Years Centre 108432
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Millers Dene Day Care and Out of School Club EY416133

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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out in November 2010 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 the centre leader, other senior leaders and staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the partnership board, parents and carers and service users.

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

Information about the centre

Walkergate Children's Centre developed from an Early Excellence Centre and was first designated in April 2006.

The centre is situated in a purpose-built and recently-extended building which includes a nursery school and private daycare setting. It provides services from this single main site and a number of satellite locations within the community. It provides the full core offer and a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, drop-in health support, adult courses and workshops. The centre's full day-care provision is provided by a private contractor and has not yet been inspected by Ofsted.

The centre serves a population from a broad range of economic and social backgrounds. A very large proportion of families within the area served by the centre, are of White British heritage with a small and growing number of families from China, Poland and Somalia.

A large majority of families live in areas with high levels of deprivation. The number of families attending schools in the area that are known to be entitled to free school meals is high, as is the proportion of children aged under four years who are living in households where no-one is working. Most children enter early education with a range of skills higher than expected for their age

The local authority manages the centre. It has a partnership board which has responsibility for the local cluster of children’s centres and is made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Walkergate Children’s Centre meets the needs of its users extremely well. A very large majority of families in the Walkergate area is registered with the centre. Attendance rates at the centre and its many other early years services in the community are very high. It offers outstanding support to families and young children. The staff team understands thoroughly the needs of each individual and makes it their highest priority to use this information skilfully and sensitively to improve outcomes.

The centre has a warm and inviting atmosphere, and all users and visitors are welcomed and made comfortable by the very focused team of staff. All professionals, who are connected with Walkergate Children’s Centre, share the view that it is a centre of excellence, where users are empowered to make important decisions and changes which have significant, lasting benefits for their whole family and the wider community. The centre is a hive of purposeful activity, which attracts families because of its long-established and very positive reputation in the community for making real differences to people’s lives.

The centre rigorously collects and analyses evaluation materials from users and partner organisations. The local authority provides the centre with very detailed and valuable data. The centre's staff listen carefully to people's views and make changes whenever needed. The centre's approach to quality improvement is dynamic and progressive. The centre shares a parents' forum with other centres in the area. It recognises the benefits of developing a separate parents' forum for Walkergate parents to help provide a more formal structure to represent parents' and users' views. Parental representation on the partnership board is low and the centre is working to address this through its development plan.

The impact of the centre's work is recorded diligently and accurate analysis of both data and personal views is used very well to establish the centre's effectiveness. This analysis reveals that the quality of life for centre users and the community is improving significantly across almost all measures of success. The centre has exceeded the measurable targets set for it by the local authority. The interest of each user is placed at the heart of everything it does.

The centre leader is a very effective manager, supported well by senior colleagues, the staff team and fellow professionals. The staff team is motivational, experienced and well-trained. They have a very good understanding of the needs of the local community and are positive role models because of their outstanding work.

Almost all activities at the centre involve users having fun and enjoyment. Each activity is thoroughly well-planned to include elements relating to all aspects of the Every Child Matters outcomes. A very high priority is given to the promotion and development of communication skills, and there is early intervention with additional support where the need is identified.

The wider community supports the work of the centre and benefits from attendance at family open days, volunteering schemes and holiday clubs. The centre successfully supports parents to become mentors for new parents as part of its valuable long-term strategy to promote sustainable benefits, improved outcomes and greater social cohesion. Partnership arrangements are very strong and very effective. The local health partners use their expertise to ensure all services are thoroughly integrated and very well-coordinated. Users benefit from having a number of choices from a very broad range of courses and programmes to both stimulate further interest in child development and parenting and also to increase their employability. A significant number of parents completes courses and receives certificates and accredited qualifications. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), literacy and numeracy courses are as popular as gardening, first-aid and cookery.

Equality and diversity are promoted very effectively. Safeguarding arrangements are particularly thorough and are used very well to ensure users and staff remain and feel safe at the centre, at home and when out in the community.

Walkergate Children's Centre has an outstanding capacity to improve. The whole staff and leadership team are self-critical and constantly search for ways to do things better. There is

a very sharp focus on performance to ensure families with the highest needs receive high-quality support.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Provide more opportunities for parents and carers to make a positive contribution to decision-making at the centre by establishing a Walkergate Children's Centre parents' forum and recruiting more parents to join the partnership board.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Walkergate Children's Centre liaises very effectively to offer an outstanding range of integrated services. Very effective collaborative work with health visitors enables users to receive immediate, expert advice on many issues including breastfeeding and weaning. This has resulted in a 5% increase in breastfeeding. Very effective working with many partner organisations ensures obesity is reduced. In the last 12 months the obesity rate has been reduced by 10 percentage points and is one of the lowest in the city. Children make excellent progress because the centre works very effectively with speech and language experts helping parents and carers to increase their awareness of the importance of listening and talking during critical periods of their children's development. One parent said: 'I feel much more confident as a parent now that I understand how learning and playing are linked to development'.

Services are accessible to all users and very well-attended. Healthy lifestyles are promoted very well at the centre in sessions such as Debbie Doodles and swimming. Parents receive highly-effective encouragement and guidance from the centre staff which helps them make important decisions about immunisations, exercise and diet. The centre has fully accessible and very popular outside nature areas for growing flowers, play and exploration.

Targeting of services for users who are particularly vulnerable or who have high and complex needs is precise and very effective. The Common Assessment Framework is very well understood by the staff. Evidence shows there are sustained improvements in the engagement with young parents, reduction in teenage conception rates and fewer accidents in the home. This has resulted in significant improvements to the quality of life for all users and particularly so for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and for children with disabilities.

Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. They learn to manage and take risks safely through play and interaction. The centre is a particularly safe place and users feel secure during their time there. They consider security arrangements to be excellent. Many parents improve their parenting skills and have confidence to share any concerns with staff. The centre welcomes students on placement, whose additional

perspective adds further value for families. Evidence from evaluation shows significant and sustained improvement of outcomes for children on child protection plans and those looked after by the local authority.

Children are very well-prepared for school because they make outstanding progress from their starting points in developing skills that will help them in the future. Transition is supported well and Early Years Foundation Stage profiles are high by comparison with elsewhere in the region. Almost all users make significant progress in learning new ways of doing things at home which have huge benefits for the whole family.

Parents make excellent progress in adult education classes which enables them to make positive and significant improvements to their lives. This learning has greatly increased their skills and confidence and encouraged many to volunteer at the centre and to continue with further learning. Parents, children and carers benefit greatly from the extensive range of courses on offer at the centre and these help them to support their children, acquire new skills, find paid work and develop their confidence and self-esteem.

Children demonstrate very positive behaviour and develop positive relationships. The area partnership board has strong representation from the centre but too few parents are involved at this level. Users are very well-supported to express their views about how the centre is managed but formal structures to do this are not sufficiently established. The centre recognises this and is currently working to recruit and support more parents to become members of the partnership board.

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	1
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	1
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	1
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.	1

How good is the provision?

The centre has very well-integrated services which are highly-effective in ensuring that arrangements to help children learn and develop are outstanding. There are highly-personalised approaches to targeting courses to ensure users achieve and become more successful. Programmes and services are coordinated very well so that parents and carers can access them at a time that suits them best. The centre has very high expectations of all users and provides a comprehensive range of services which match the changing needs of the community. The centre is very successful in engaging users, particularly those whose needs are greatest. They ensure programmes are available for users with additional needs or disabilities. One parent told inspectors: 'The Debbie Doodles session is fantastic fun. It gives you energy and enthusiasm; a real boost and good start to the day'.

Robust assessment procedures enable the centre to meet users' welfare, health and social needs very well using high-quality and well-targeted services. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation take account of users' comments about the services to ensure that, where needs are not being met, they are changed to meet requirements.

The centre and its partners work very effectively to ensure assessments of the challenges faced by families or individuals are precise and well-informed. The centre keeps very detailed case records which helps them personalise support and measure the impact and value of the separate courses and programmes completed. In their feedback to the centre, users are clear that provision is making a real difference to their lives.

The centre delivers services from its main building and through several other venues across the community. The centre and its staff have a significant impact on the improvement of Early Years services throughout the community. They share their expertise and provide very strong support to help other providers develop and improve. Participation rates are high and evaluations are very positive.

Outreach work is very well-organised and there is valuable work undertaken to support families in their own homes. The outreach team is very effective at identifying and engaging families in need of support. It is extremely well-regarded by those who use the centre because of its determination to recognise and understand users' needs. Empowerment and a culture of respect are common themes across all of the services offered by the centre. One parent said: 'I was in a very depressed state when the outreach worker visited me at home. She helped me sort out the worst of my problems and then introduced me to the centre which I really enjoy. It keeps me going'.

The quality of care for all centre users is excellent. The staff team and their partners provide personalised support which is very effective. All users at the centre are made to feel special and this promotes well-being, fosters achievement and supports the development of individuals and families. Staff are trusted and users have confidence in their professionalism and the outstanding support they give.

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Walkergate Children's Centre has highly-effective governance and accountability arrangements which are highly-visible, very well-established and understood. Particularly effective support is provided by the headteacher of the co-located school, the local authority lead officer and the area advisor. Strategic planning strongly reflects local and regional targets and priorities and is heavily influenced by a determination to ensure everyone succeeds. The centre and its users work collectively to govern, manage and evaluate the services it delivers.

The centre manager is viewed by her staff and the partner organisations she works with as a determined and inspirational leader who pays very close attention to improving outcomes for users. She makes sure everyone knows how well they are doing and what is to be done to improve. Very close attention is paid to sustaining the outstanding partnerships and making sure that quality assurance and improvement initiatives remain effective.

All staff and volunteers receive very high-quality training and support in their work. Appraisals are particularly effective. The centre is performing exceptionally well and is making very good progress towards exceeding the majority of targets set for it by the local authority. Use of data to target vulnerable groups is effective and highly-developed. The centre leaders, partners and the whole staff team hold great ambition for users. Self-evaluation is used to drive the work of the centre forward. There is rigorous monitoring, searching analysis and self-challenge. Outcomes for almost all users of the centre are particularly high. The centre fulfils all of its statutory duties and provides excellent value for money.

Safeguarding procedures are robust. Local authority procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed closely. The centre works in partnership effectively with a range of agencies to protect children and adults who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. Strong partnership working with the local fire and rescue service has given many families practical help to make their homes safer. In addition, staff provide good advice and access to expert help for those experiencing domestic violence. All staff have been subject to a

Criminal Records Bureau check, have very good levels of awareness and are trained well in child-protection procedures.

Everyone is made to feel very welcome at the centre. Equality and the inclusion of all children and their families are promoted very effectively and discrimination tackled rigorously. All children from a minority ethnic heritage who live in the area are registered and attend activities at the centre. Users with high levels of need are targeted very effectively and become the focus of very well-coordinated support to meet their needs by removing barriers and helping to establish the foundations for change and improvement. The gap between the lowest 20% of children's Early Years Foundation Stage scores and the rest is being narrowed successfully. In the Walkergate area the achievement gap is 26%, which is significantly better than both the regional and national rates of 36% and 33% respectively.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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.	1

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

The outcome of the last Ofsted inspection of Walkergate Early Years Centre dated November 2010 for was taken into account in the provision and outcomes judgement.

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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 Walkergate Children's Centre on 22-23 September 2011. We judged the centre to be outstanding.

The children's centre provides an excellent range of services that help children and families in the Walkergate area. Throughout the inspection, children, families and other users were very enthusiastic in telling us how the centre had helped them. We were particularly impressed by the case studies that showed the difference that the centre is making. We really enjoyed speaking to you about the ways that things you do at the centre have changed some of ways you do things at home.

We found the centre to have many strengths, including the opportunities for so many of you to get involved in training and interesting courses, and the actions taken to support you and your children's safety and well-being. The centre is working very closely with many organisations such as schools and health and social care professionals to improve the range of services that are available to you. Parents have given us good examples of how the centre has helped them.

The sensory room and the Debbie Doodles sessions are particularly impressive initiatives that show us how busy some of you are. We also saw how effectively you are helping to run the centre, both as volunteers and through the partnership board. However, we agree with the centre that more could be done to encourage more parents to join the partnership board. We have also asked the centre to organise its own parents' forum, which will give you even better opportunities to help make decisions about how the centre should be run.

Children make very good progress because there is a wide range of activities. This helps them to be ready for their move to school. The centre staff make sure they check whether you have enjoyed any courses or sessions in the centre and they respond by making changes based on your comments. We saw that many of you are able to take advantage of courses that are leading to increased knowledge, skills and qualifications. We saw good opportunities for those of you who want support to get a job.

The centre offers an increasing range of programmes and activities, including those aimed at improving the health of people in your local communities. It is very good at helping new mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies. It tells them about the help available on breastfeeding from parents who have successfully breastfed their own children and know the good things and the concerns from experience.

The centre is also very effective at helping you to encourage your children to develop speech and language. It also helps many people to make better choices about diet and exercise which has had a major impact on improving lifestyles.

Some parents explained just how important the centre is in their family's lives. They told us that staff listen to them and help them to get the right help and support. The support is provided quickly and professionals and others work closely together to support families and children. This includes teenage mothers and parents of children with disabilities.

The parents and carers we spoke to describe the centre as providing a safe and welcoming environment; they are confident that their children will be secure and well cared for and the inspectors agree. The centre leader has very robust procedures in place to make sure that staff and volunteers are suitable and well-trained to work with your children.

The centre has shown that it is very successful and has made big improvements to the lives of many people. The centre staff do whatever they can to make sure that families enjoy themselves and benefit from the courses and groups.

We wish you every success for the future.

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