

# Inspection report for Bensham Sure Start Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Gateshead
<b>Inspection number</b>	383634
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 September 2011
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	St Chad's Out of School Care EY240122

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 the centre managers, staff members, advisory board members, partner agencies, parents and carers, volunteers 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

Bensham Children's Centre is phase one centre, designated in 2007. It provides the full core offer of services. 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 supported by the building administration manager and the children's centre area manager. The children's centre area manager for Bensham has recently changed and the current manager has been in post for six weeks. Governance is provided by Gateshead local authority and there is a shared advisory board in place.

The centre covers the Bensham and Saltwell areas of Gateshead and serves a 30% super output area of disadvantage. The population includes 966 children under the age of five years. As at September 2010, the employment rate in the reach area was 8.5%. In May 2008, 26.4% of children were living in workless households and in 2007, 13.7% of families were eligible for the childcare element of working tax credit.

The population of the area is ethnically diverse and has the largest population of minority ethnic groups in the local authority. It is also home to the majority of asylum seekers in Gateshead and this leads to a transient population as people gain residency in the country. There is a significant amount of accommodation provided by private landlords in the area.

The children's centre shares a building with Brighton Avenue Primary School and has links with St Chad's Out of School Care. Both are subject to their own inspections and the reports can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

Bensham Children's Centre is a warm and welcoming centre that provides effective support for the families who use its services. Outcomes for families are satisfactory overall. The centre provides many activities and strategies, including signposting to services to improve families' lifestyles and economic stability, to contribute to them being healthy and to help them enjoy and achieve. However, the uptake of services overall is relatively low in relation to the numbers in the reach area. The centre management acknowledge this is an issue and there are plans in place to improve the work of the centre in meeting individual need and to encourage more engagement with the centre. However, these plans which are specifically targeted at the families in the area who are most in need lack clear, measurable targets to monitor the improvements made. Also the available data used to support the plans lack clarity and breadth and, in some instances, specific relevance to the centre. Some data are not sufficiently current. Nonetheless, some aspects of the centre's work are good.

Arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are effective and have a high priority. Centre staff are clear and confident of action they would take if they have concerns. Equality and diversity are promoted strongly by all staff involved in the centre and there are effective systems in place to ensure all who use the centre are valued and can contribute to its work. Parents and carers told inspectors that they feel safe in the centre and value the services provided. The care, guidance and support given to families who are using the centre and the commitment to working with partner agencies to provide families with cohesive services are strengths of the

centre. Comments made by parents and carers support this view and include, 'the staff are second to none and always go the extra mile for everyone.' This typifies the comments made to inspectors. Even so, the centre's overall effectiveness at this point is satisfactory as the centre is not being used at this time to the extent expected for a phase one centre.

The centre uses evaluation to a satisfactory level. Leaders use a local authority evaluation tool to reflect on the services provided and how they are meeting the overall needs of those who use them. However, the lessons learnt are not clearly linked back to the centre's record of self-evaluation to make it a living document to influence its work. The quality of activities seen is good and parents and carers and children were seen to be enjoying their learning together. Even so, individual children's and adults' achievements are not sufficiently tracked and recorded to show how the centre is improving outcomes for them. Case studies show that outreach work is clearly improving the lives of families who access targeted services.

The local authority as a whole is undergoing change as they deal with budget cuts. Although the staff are aware of the pending re-alignment of their work, they continue to be very positive, have an eagerness about the work they do and are fully committed to improving the lives of the families in their area. This, along with the plans in place to improve such areas as engagement with families and managers who are supportive, enthusiastic and who have high expectations of themselves and their staff, supports the satisfactory judgement for the centre's capacity to improve.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the level of engagement of children and families from across the reach area, including those from hard-to-reach groups.
- Develop robust systems for measuring and evaluating the impact of provision on outcomes for individual children and parents and carers in both the short and long term.
- Ensure that sufficient, up-to-date and centre specific data is available to monitor the impact of the centre and to contribute to the centre's action plans.
- Improve the centre's action plans by ensuring that targets are clear and measurable to ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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The centre does not use data sufficiently well to contribute to the evaluation of outcomes for families in the reach area. This makes it difficult to provide clear

evidence of improvement in outcomes and engagement of families including those in hard-to-reach groups. However, through direct observations of activities, scrutiny of case studies and evidence files, and discussions with staff, partners and parents and carers, there is enough evidence to support the judgement that outcomes are at least satisfactory.

The centre is effective in ensuring parents and carers and children keep themselves safe. Parents and carers report they feel secure in the centre and that lessons learnt in centre activities and courses have helped them improve their children's safety. All staff model safe practices at all times and the centre is a very safe and welcoming place due to the vigilance of all adults and the completion of comprehensive risk assessments for all areas and activities. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used well. Allocation systems ensure children and families referred to the centre for targeted input access suitable support and services in good time to meet their needs. The centre provides successful activities, such as 'Little Movers', 'Busy Bees' and is involved in such services as nutrition programmes for young children to support the authority's obesity strategy. These enable those parents and carers and children who do use the centre to improve their health and well-being. Mothers at the 'Bosom Buddies' group which is run in the centre by health professionals are positive of the support they receive. They identify how in some instances it has helped them to continue breastfeeding despite a number of problems. Smoking cessation is encouraged by the centre and they have successfully worked with the Gateshead Tobacco Alliance to obtain 114 pledges from families to participate in the 'Seven Steps Out' programme to keep homes smoke free for children.

Activities provided for parents and carers and children to play and learn together are well planned using the Early Years Foundation Stage learning and development requirements and are evaluated. Children and their parents and carers were seen to be having lots of fun learning together and parents and carers are provided with very useful information on how to continue children's learning at home. Across the reach area, the proportion of children achieving 78 points in Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores is increasing and the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is improving. However, although centre staff provide good support and observe children during activities, the centre does not sufficiently track individual children's progress within centre activities and through to the end of Reception Year, so is unable to demonstrate its contribution to this improvement. The centre is actively involved in the two-year-old pilot project. Staff from the centre have carried out joint visits with teachers from the linked school to offer support to parents, carers and children starting school. They also use this as an opportunity to promote the work of the children's centre and what it has to offer. Children behave well and develop positive relationships with their peers and adults. Parents and carers are not currently represented on the advisory board and the centre managers and staff are currently working to redress this. However, parents and carers are confident their voices are heard in the centre. They are able to express their views, they know that they will be listened to and that what they say has an impact on how the centre is run.

The centre works closely with other provision in the area to provide parents and carers with advice, guidance and support and signposting to access training to improve their knowledge and skills and their readiness for work. Some parents and carers 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 are evident. For example, a volunteer who is now looking for paid work confirmed how being involved with the centre had given her confidence to gain qualifications at Level 2 and 3 to become a teaching assistant. The centre has good links with organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and Next Steps, an adult careers advice service. A formal referral service between the centre and Next Steps and a system for providing feedback relating to the take-up of services and outcomes is just establishing. It is a tool to improve the monitoring of outcomes for adults.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</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 children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

**How good is the provision?**

**3**

Very effective outreach work and the varied selection of quality activities provided for families who use the centre ensure that provision is matched well to their needs. Staff effectively assess the needs of users and where appropriate use CAF and the 'team around the family' processes very well to ensure individual needs are met. Case studies show that appropriate and timely provision and support make a discernable difference to some families. The number of referrals for targeted work is increasing and centre staff are currently working with 44 families. Of these, 33% are lone parents, 62% are unemployed, 48% are ethnic minority families and 14% are teenage parents. Ongoing assessment of children accessing activities at the centre is insufficiently thorough because a robust system for regularly recording progress about their learning and development is not in place. The varied range of services, opportunities and activities, although based on local knowledge and linked to

authority plans and targets, are used by too few families from the reach area including those from hard-to-reach groups.

A weekly drop-in 'weigh, stay and play' session is provided in the centre by the health visitor and nursery nurse from the health team, and sessions on topics, such as weaning and toilet training, are provided as and when required.

Local childminders access centre activities and centre staff link with the Family Information Service to direct parents looking for childcare to those minders in the area who have vacancies. The centre information assistant ensures that informative displays and a wide range of leaflets are displayed throughout the centre to ensure that users have easy access to information, such as dental services, benefit information and sexual health services. Children's centre activities and services are advertised and promoted by partner agencies and are advertised in such places as local shops and libraries. Creche facilities are provided to enable parents and carers to take part in courses. Transport can be provided where circumstances need it.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**3**

The arrangements for the leadership and management of the centre are clear and are well understood by staff. The senior leadership team, advisory board and partners are keen to improve the work of the centre in engaging more families, including those from hard-to-reach groups. However, although the centre's plans and priorities are based on local knowledge and link to strategic plans, they are not sufficiently informed by measurable data about the make up of the area. Success criteria are not precise enough to be measurable to demonstrate that the centre's performance is improving over time. Current take up of services is relatively low and, therefore, outcomes for families in the area are no better than satisfactory. Members of the advisory board spoken to during the inspection are clear of its terms of reference and purpose. They support and challenge the centre. Centre management are striving to involve parents and carers as members of the advisory board but at this time there is not a parent representative on the board. Despite this, parental views are clearly obtained and influence the services and activities provided. Financial management arrangements are robust. The performance management of staff is strong. Clear arrangements for appraisal and supervision of staff are in place



and are used to identify training needs and support staff development.

The centre shares staff, resources and management with the other three children's centres in the Central Area and makes good use of liaison with other agencies to see that the work of the centre is not duplicated. Despite this, the centre provides no better than satisfactory value for money as the number of families, including those from target groups, accessing the centre is low. The centre has many active and successful partnerships in place. For example, the centre works openly and meaningfully with the St Chads Community project and Neighbourhood Management to meet identified need and they enthusiastically participate in such ventures as the community festival and the 'Bensham and Saltwell Alive' initiative to promote health and well-being and community cohesion. The centre is also working with the Windmill Hills Development, a new venture to support faith groups, minority ethnic families as well as the wider community. Plans are in place to share information and data to improve engagement and the services provided.

There are robust safeguarding policies and procedures in place to ensure staff, volunteers and partner agency staff are suitable to work with families who access centre services. Equality and diversity are given priority in the centre and case studies and feedback from users, staff and partners highlight how all children and families, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences are valued and how services are tailored to meet individual need. Parents' and carers' views support this and, as one parent who has come into the area from abroad said, 'the children's centre has helped me and my child to feel part of the community.'

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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

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

The findings from the most recent inspections of Brighton Avenue Primary School, St Chad's Out of School Care and local childminders were reviewed as part of this inspection.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bensham Children's Centre on 27-28 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at a range of documentation, and talked with a number of children and adults including parents and carers, staff, local authority representatives, volunteers and partnership workers. We were very pleased to speak with 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. You were very keen to tell us how the centre has helped you and your children to improve your lives.

Many of you told us how friendly, helpful and welcoming the staff are and how they will always 'go that extra mile for you'. You told us that you feel safe and secure in the centre and know that the staff will help you not only over time but will act quickly when you have urgent problems. We would agree with you that the quality of care, guidance and support that you experience is good and that you are helped to stay and feel safe both in the centre and in your own homes. However, the numbers using the centre are quite low and we have asked the centre to ensure more families use the centre so they too can enjoy the activities and services you do. The centre is already working to do this but their plans need to be more specific on how they will measure their success. You can play a part in this by telling all your friends and neighbours about the centre. You told us how you are confident that your views are listened to and that your opinions are used to decide on the activities and services provided. The centre is very keen to develop your involvement in the management of the centre and to have parents and carers involved with the advisory board. We would encourage you to volunteer to be part of this.

The centre is there to give you easy access to education, care and family services to improve your well-being and that of your children. The centre has not been checking well enough to make sure that what they are providing for you is really making a difference to you and your children's lives. We have asked the leadership team to make sure it does this better in future. We also found that your children's progress and development are not being recorded well enough so that the centre knows it is helping your individual children to develop.

It was a pleasure to meet some of you during the inspection. We hope that you, your children and many more parents and carers and children will continue to enjoy the services and activities provided by the centre. Thank you for speaking with us.

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