

Inspection report for Primrose Children's Centre

Local authority	South Tyneside
Inspection number	383712
Inspection dates	3 - 4 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre leader	Julie Campbell
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY305963 Primrose Children's Centre

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.

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

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector. The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents, members of the Advisory Board and a number of partners, including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health, education and children's social care professionals and representatives from Adult and Community Learning, Northern Learning Trust and Jobcentre Plus. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Primrose Children's Centre is located within the Primrose estate. Its reach covers the Luke's Lane, Hill Park and Fellgate areas. The reach population of the centre is 685 children aged nought to four years of age. Recent figures show that just over 22% of households are lone parents with dependent children. Estimated weekly income is significantly lower than the South Tyneside average and the percentage of children aged nought to four living in households dependent on workless benefits is 30%. The majority of local families are of White British heritage with small pockets of minority ethnic populations. The proportion of children attending schools in the area that are known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average, as is the proportion of children aged under four years of age who are living in households where no-one is working. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.

Primrose Children’s Centre is part of Primrose village which consists of three core organisations; the children’s centre, Valley View Primary School and Primrose Community Centre. The children’s centre became part of the village in 2005 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. In July 2011 the local authority restructured staffing across their children’s centres. The centres were formed into three cluster areas each with an Access to Services for Children and Childcare Coordinator (ASCCC), responsible for day-to-day management and provision of service delivery, and a Reaching Families Coordinator (RFC) who is responsible for the delivery of outreach services and family support. These roles cover four centres within the Jarrow/Hebburn cluster including Bede, South Tyneside Early Excellence centre and Jarrow children’s centres. The centre hosts a full time day care provision for children from birth to school age as well as a crèche. An advisory board was established in 2010.

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

2

Main findings

'I have gained so much more confidence in myself and am able to take positive steps forward with my life,' is how one parent described her experience of Primrose Children’s Centre. This well-established centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families. There are a number of strengths including the impact of recent actions to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families and the care, guidance and support provided to them. The centre rightly gives a high priority to all aspects of safeguarding, safer recruitment and child protection. As a result, this area of the children’s centre's work is of good quality and fully meets statutory requirements. The combined actions taken to improve outcomes for children in relation to learning and development are good. The proportion of children achieving at expected levels has improved at a greater rate than that for South Tyneside as a whole and is now above the authority average at 56.9%. However, the centre is aware that more needs to be done to increase the proportion of mothers breastfeeding and to reduce obesity and the incidence of smoking especially during pregnancy.

Effective partnership working is improving outcomes for some families who are facing challenging circumstances. This joint working has helped to reduce the number of children placed on the child protection register and was identified as a significant contributory factor to an authority wide reduction in the number of children entering the care system over the summer months. However, other partnerships, such as those with Jobcentre Plus and Adult and Community Learning are less well developed. This has an impact on the provision of learning and development opportunities and the numbers of local parents and carers who have the opportunity to gain the skills, confidence and qualifications that will enable them to improve their economic stability.

Whilst provision in the centre is satisfactory overall, the quality of activities delivered by the centre is good. A visit to 'Busy Babies' provided compelling evidence of young children and their parents and carers bonding well, and children developing their play and communication skills as they explored the feel of paint on their hands. Mums were clearly delighted to observe their children having fun and talked about how they had extended this play into their own homes, for example, making 'gloop'. The staff team which includes outreach and development workers are clearly focused on increasing the number of families who access the centre. However, leaders are aware that more needs to be done to make sure families from the wider community access all the services available through the centre. They are also aware that whilst there are opportunities for parents to evaluate their experiences in group activities, there is less scope for them to contribute meaningfully to the governance of the centre.

The newly-established senior management team are resolute in their determination to improve the impact of the centre's work across the wider community. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is clearly evidenced in the already improved range of activities that families, and particularly the most vulnerable, can now access. Managers are aware though that more needs to be done to ensure that all needs are met and recognise that the centre's promotion of equality and diversity is currently only satisfactory. Through knowing the community well and having a good understanding of the strengths and gaps in service provision, leaders are aware that support for specific target groups, including fathers, families from workless households and teenage parents needs to improve. Consequently, clear action plans have been developed to address this, the implementation of which has already had a significant impact on ensuring the safety and well-being of some of the area's more vulnerable families. This detailed and accurate analysis of need demonstrates the leadership team's ability to conduct a range of rigorous monitoring activities and link the outcome to ongoing development planning. As a result, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good. That said, the management team are aware that this level of sophisticated monitoring and evaluation is yet to be consistently applied throughout the centre's activities. As a result, the use of management information in some areas is not yet sufficiently robust to enable the setting of sufficiently challenging targets, particularly in relation to increased engagement and the securing of improvement across some key outcome areas.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop the use of management information and self-evaluation to:
 - set challenging targets to improve the engagement of the wider community, particularly fathers, those in workless households and teenage parents
 - enhance the delivery of targeted services improving outcomes in relation to increasing breastfeeding rates, decreasing obesity and the number of parents smoking during pregnancy and after.

- Further develop work around participation to ensure parents and carers are empowered to contribute to the governance of the centre, including through meaningful representation on the advisory board.

- Extend partnership working with Adult and Community Learning and Jobcentre Plus to enable more parents and carers to gain the skills, confidence qualifications that will enable them to improve their economic stability.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Primrose Children's Centre has effected some genuine change, improving outcomes for some of its local parents and children. 'It has made me really think about what I choose to feed my kids and how I can improve this' stated one parent, whilst others commented on how very differently their life would have turned out if it had not been for the help and support of centre staff.

The centre has developed a range of services aimed at promoting local families understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles. Evaluations by parents and carers who attended the popular weaning sessions, reported how these have given them a better understanding of healthy eating. One parent spoke enthusiastically about how she now buys lots more fruit and vegetables for her children and realises how much cheaper weaning is when you make your own rather than buying jars. This, combined with effective partnerships with 'Health Lifestyle' coordinators and access to fun physical activity sessions such as 'Buggy Pump' is beginning to change local attitudes to adopting more healthy lifestyles. Whilst obesity rates amongst reception children in the reach area remain below the South Tyneside average, this year saw an increase in this figure. The appointment of a dedicated development worker is ensuring a renewed focus on improving breastfeeding rates and reducing the incidence of mothers' smoking during pregnancy. Whilst clear pathways for support have been identified, smoking rates in particular remain much higher than that found as an authority, with 37% of mothers smoking at during pregnancy and after the birth.

Children and families are well safeguarded in the centre. Security within the building is excellent and this is underpinned by effective risk assessments carried out both by staff and those using the venue to deliver courses from outside agencies. Centre staff use new birth visits to offer practical advice about potential dangers in the home and inform parents of how to minimise these. In addition good use is made of centre activities, such as stay and play groups to reinforce a range of safety messages. The centre has been proactive in ensuring that children subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are well supported. An improved partnership with the Referral and Assessment Unit has ensured that the Vulnerable Family's coordinator attends weekly allocations meetings. This has had a significant impact on the number of families currently accessing outreach support, ensuring that outreach workers are able to target the most vulnerable families in their community. This combined with an improved working partnership with the authority's family support team facilitates effective multi-agency working, ensuring improved outcomes particularly for those children on child protection plans.

The extent to which children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, enjoy and achieve is good. The gap between the lowest 20% of children achieving expected levels in key early learning goals and that for all children in South Tyneside has narrowed considerably over the past year. Work is also underway to track the individual achievements of those children who have attended the children's centre, with some encouraging results. The Early Years Foundation Stage Coordinator has empowered staff with the knowledge of how to consistently apply good practice in the implementation of systems to track children's progress and effectively identify next steps. Case studies and discussions with parents also highlight the positive impact that parenting skills courses, such as the Solihull approach, are having on theirs' and their children's personal development and well-being. One parent told us that without the support of the centre she would have 'crashed and burned.'

A number of parents we spoke with commented on how their confidence as parents has improved as a result of their participation in some activities offered by the centre. A visit to 'Friday Fun' provided evidence of children and their parents and carers bonding well, with opportunities provided for mums to share concerns and tips about dealing with issues, such as feeding or sleep patterns. Most parents feel that they have a voice within the centre through opportunities to evaluate activities. Whilst the 'Parents Network' is in the process of being re-established, there is currently limited opportunity for parents to engage meaningfully in the governance of the centre and to participate in key decision making at this level.

The centre can demonstrate some success in relation to supporting parents and carers to improve their economic well-being. A satisfactory range of courses, such as 'Time to Talk and 'Confidence Building,' as well as basic skills courses, such as literacy and numeracy have enabled a small number of parents and carers, including some lone parents, to gain accreditations. Whilst partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and Adult and Community Learning

are established, these are less well developed. As a result, not enough use is being made of the good facilities available within the centre in order to provide training that would better suit the identified needs and interests of the centre's users.

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	3
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 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	3
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.	3

How good is the provision?

3

Whilst all provision offered by the centre is of good quality and contributing to improved outcomes for children and parents who attend the centre, a significant minority, including some of the centre's target families, are not yet accessing this provision. A significant amount of work has been undertaken in the past six months in relation to targeting some of the more vulnerable in the community with some success. For example, the centre has now secured the registrations of all children on child protection plans.

Assessment of individual cases is secure with families referred to the centre receiving timely, good quality, multi-agency support as necessary. The role of the children's centre in the establishment of effective exit strategies is also improving ensuring that more parents are able to build their confidence and parenting skills, supporting them to independence at a pace that is appropriate to them. However, the use of assessment to ensure that activities are appropriate to the needs of the whole community is less well developed. In addition, some services within the area are yet to fully recognise the good activities and support that the centre is able to provide.

Good provision from childcare providers and schools is ensuring achievements and aspirations of children are raised. Parents say that they feel empowered and comment on the real difference the centre has made to their own confidence. One parent at a 'stay and play' session confidently recognised and recorded the fact that her child was sitting unaided for the first time. This afforded a clear demonstration of parents' increased

ability to both recognise and celebrate the key achievements of their children. Indeed the celebration of achievements is an integral part of the culture of this welcoming centre. However, the individualisation of support to promote achievement is less well developed for adults accessing the centre.

Good care, guidance and support together with improving multi-agency working are ensuring that families are accessing the right support. As a result, sensitive, individualised and tailored support is provided to registered families, with parents reporting that they feel supported by the centre. This is particularly demonstrated through the shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Effective working partnerships have been established between relevant external agencies including portage, Aiming High and the speech and language therapy team, ensuring the provision of appropriate support and advice. Staff demonstrate a wide breadth of knowledge on a range of topics including smoking cessation, safety and infant feeding. This combined with the availability of good quality literature ensures that families have access to good quality information and advice.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The local authority has recently implemented a significant restructure across all its children centre provision. As a result, the new senior leadership team, advisory board and key partners now have a clear, renewed focus on improvement. All staff are supported through regular supervision and the implementation of personal development plans which ensure a coordinated approach to training and continuous professional development. Staff have also begun to contribute to the centre's self-evaluation process and have an improved understanding of their role in relation to effecting future planning and improved outcomes for families. All staff have an in depth knowledge of policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding children and are confident to follow these as required. Effective financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support. Staff are well deployed and outreach to target groups in the locality is having an improved impact. This combined with an adequate take-up of services by local families ensures satisfactory value for money.

The centre's management team have made a noticeable commitment to developing systems for monitoring and evaluation. Delivery plans are based on a sound analysis of need and reflect an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. This includes a commitment to improving the engagement of key target groups. However, whilst plans have clear success criteria, these are sometimes too generic and contain few quantitative targets. As a result, ongoing evaluation and monitoring is not consistently rigorous enough to ensure that sufficiently challenging targets are set, particularly in relation to the development of targeted services to improve breastfeeding rates and to decrease obesity and the incidence of smoking in mothers throughout and after pregnancy.

The centre promotes the inclusion of all children and their families across the locality. The centre has effective systems in place to evaluate the engagement of specific target groups of families. As a result, it can demonstrate some clear improvement in the uptake of services where actions have been targeted to promote this. The centre recognises that there is scope to develop the use of this management information further in order to set more challenging targets that secures the improved engagement of families from the wider community, particularly fathers, those in workless households and teenage parents.

Partnerships are developing more effectively because of the strong commitment of the centre's new management team to harness the energies of local partners in their quest to reach out and support all families in the area. However, there are some agencies that still do not recognise the good activities and support the centre can provide. Parents' views are sometimes used to inform developments in the centre. For example, the future location of the Dad's Saturday group. There is clear evidence that the centre is taking action to increase their involvement and that of the wider community, most noticeably through the promotion of the 'Parents Network.' However, their ability to contribute meaningfully to the governance of the centre is limited, particularly in relation to participation on the advisory board.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
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.	3

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

Primrose Children's Centre hosts a full-time day care provision for children aged birth to school age. Six local primary schools, Valley View, Bede Burn, Fellgate, Jarrow Cross, St Joseph's and St Mathew's, with Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children over three years, are also part of the centre's remit. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections has been taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Primrose Children's Centre on 3 -4 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and centre staff. Following this work, we have judged that the centre provides satisfactory and improving support to you and your families. Some of the good things that the centre is doing include the support provided to ensure both your safety and that of your children. Activities and actions taken to promote healthy lifestyles, particularly in relation to weaning, are also good as well as the quality of care, guidance and support offered by the staff who work with you.

We found that the centre works well with other services, such as health and social workers. This ensures that those families who are experiencing challenge in their lives are well supported. You also told us that you have improved safety in your homes as a result of the advice and support given by the outreach workers. The children's centre offers a number of activities to help people in your community lead healthier lifestyles and many of you have appreciated the support of the Health Lifestyle coordinators and participated in the popular 'Buggy Pump' sessions. However, there are still too few mums choosing to breastfeed their babies. We know outreach workers are committed to passing on information about the dangers of smoking in pregnancy and that some of you have found sessions to help pregnant and new mums stop smoking helpful. However, the number of people in your

community who smoke is higher than the authority average and this is another key issue that we have asked the centre to address.

Most importantly, you tell us that you 'feel safe at the centre,' and can 'trust the staff'. You particularly appreciate home visits and the opportunity to go with someone to a group until you build your confidence and make new friends. We found that the centre was good at helping people in their lives when they most need it. Once families are known to the centre we found that different people and organisations worked well together to provide support. However, whilst many in your community have registered with the centre, there are some people who do not currently participate in the good quality activities offered. We have asked the staff at the children's centre to continue developing ways to encourage more families to use the groups and activities they provide so they all can benefit if they wish from the support available.

We found that those people in charge of the children's centre are doing a satisfactory but improving job. Managers, together with staff are determined to improve provision ensuring it meets your needs more effectively. The centre has access to lots of detailed information to help them plan future activities and we know they listen to you because you enjoy attending activities they provide. Whilst several of you have undertaken courses, the take up rates for training and adult education programmes remains low. The centre is looking to work more closely with Jobcentre Plus and Adult and Community Learning to make sure more of you can access these opportunities. We hope you will find this interesting and choose to take part.

The centre has recently undergone lots of changes particularly in relation to the way it is managed. The ability of the centre's management team to understand how well the centre is doing in improving the lives of you and your family is improving. This is because the centre is in the process of developing effective systems to monitor and evaluate its impact. We know the centre is good at asking you to tell them how you have found all the activities and services that you attend through questionnaires and evaluations. Some of you have also stated an interest in joining the re-established 'Parents Network'. The centre continues to look at ways in which it can increase the involvement and influence you, as parents, have in its work, particularly in relation to your ability to participate in the work of the Advisory Board. We hope that this is something in which you might be interested in becoming involved.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak 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.