

Inspection report for Boldon Nursery Children's Centre

Local authority	South Tyneside
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Boldon Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY339443

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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 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 centre management and staff, representatives of the local authority, health services and other partner organisations, members of the advisory board and parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Boldon Nursery Children's Centre is located in Boldon Colliery in South Tyneside and serves the communities of Boldon and Cleadon. Although the centre's reach area includes some of the 10% most deprived areas in the country, it also covers some areas of high affluence; 30% of local families have no one working in the household and 7.5% of them are eligible to claim the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills average for their age. The majority of local families are of White British background, although 3% belong to minority ethnic communities.

The centre shares premises with Boldon Nursery School, which includes childcare provision. It was purpose-built as an extension to the school and there are common reception and outdoor play areas, along with well-equipped rooms for group activities, meetings and clinics.

Boldon Nursery Children's Centre is one of four centres which make up a local cluster. The centre opened in 2006. It is a Phase 2 centre and provides the full core offer, including health and adult learning. Management was recently transferred from the nursery governors to the local authority and there is a cluster advisory board in place which includes parent representation.

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

Boldon Nursery Children's Centre provides a good service to the families of the area. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to ensuring the best outcomes for all users. They know the area well and accurately identify where to deploy resources. They are flexible and creative in their approach and work at maximum capacity. The entire team, from management to reception staff, is focused on improving outcomes for the children and families it serves, which means that the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

The centre provides outstanding levels of support to local families. All users are made to feel welcome by the reception staff. Parents comment on how they are greeted by name, even after long absences. They are impressed by the willingness of staff to assist them with any queries and to contact other professionals on their behalf and say that they feel confident that they can ask for help in any situation. The outreach staff work hard to reach all sections of the community and sometimes open the centre at weekends to run community events. As a result, parents are fulsome in their praise of the centre, which they describe as 'a lifeline' on which 'the whole community depends'.

Although the centre serves a culturally, socially and economically diverse area, families from all communities get on well together. Parents feel that the staff 'respect you' and 'don't judge you'. Fathers and male carers are welcomed and the only man in one group commented that he 'didn't feel out of place, not even for one minute'. There is strong support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and one parent related how staff had undertaken special training to be able to support her son.

The premises have been designed to blur the boundary between the nursery and the children's centre. This close integration results in effective joint working. The centre is able to place children in need of support in the nursery's childcare provision and nursery staff can discuss any concerns about a child or family with the centre's outreach workers.

The local NHS Foundation Trust provides health services from the centre and health visitors and the health and lifestyle adviser work closely with centre staff. Childhood obesity figures

for the reach area are low and continue to fall and the rate of mothers sustaining breastfeeding is rising. However, the Foundation Trust does not provide sufficiently detailed data to identify the centre's contribution to these trends, nor does it release local data on childhood immunisation and teenage pregnancy rates.

Parents are regularly consulted through evaluations of events, surveys and the Parent Network, which makes suggestions for activities and programmes. However, although parents from other centres in the cluster are represented on the cluster advisory board, the centre has been unable to involve any of its parents at this level of governance.

The centre works well to keep children safe. There are robust child protection procedures in place and all staff are familiar with them. Parents say that they feel safe in the centre as a result of both the physical security, which includes electronic locks on key doors throughout the building, and the rigorously enforced signing-in procedure.

The centre works closely with two community groups who support parents back into training and employment. Outreach workers also refer users directly to the Family Works team at Jobcentre Plus. The centre is aware that an increasing number of families have been helped in this way, but Jobcentre Plus does not monitor this data and is unable to track the progress of these parents. The centre is therefore unable to determine how successful these schemes are.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The NHS Foundation Trust should share data with the children's centre to allow it to monitor more effectively its impact on health targets.
- The children's centre should explore ways of reinstating ESOL courses.
- The children's centre should support local parents to take an active part in the cluster advisory board.
- Jobcentre Plus should monitor the progression of users referred from the children's centre and share this data with the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre works well to promote healthy lifestyles for parents and children. A 'Stop Smoking' adviser holds weekly clinics in the centre and staff use the 'Seven Steps Out' programme to encourage parents to stop smoking around their children. Healthy eating is encouraged by example; healthy snacks are available and children are served a healthy lunch. Parents commented that their children now choose fruit as a snack and that 'you want to try cooking more' as a result of children's centre sessions.

Staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to identify families who require additional support. The centre's vulnerable families coordinator works effectively with other agencies such as social care and health which ensures that outcomes for families and children, including those with child protection plans and with disabilities, are good.

The nursery has seen a yearly rise in the achievement of children entering the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the current entry class have now reached the average expected for their age. The proportion of pupils achieving at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased from 35.1% to 60.8%, and the gap between the highest and the lowest achieving pupils has reduced from 24.2 to 17.6 in the last year.

Provision for adult learning is satisfactory. Parents can attend a range of general interest courses which lead on to literacy and numeracy classes and then skills for employment. These classes are targeted at the families most likely to benefit from them. The community entrepreneurs also offer courses to help users with employability skills. However, the numbers of parents accessing these programmes are low and it is unclear how many have progressed into employment or further education. There is good parental involvement in the choice of activities and their suggestions are taken into account via surveys and the Parent Network. They are encouraged to take the initiative when appropriate. For example, when a popular craft course finished, parents were supported to organise their own group, which now produces and sells goods to raise funds for the centre.

A significant strength of the centre is its range of parenting programmes. These are facilitated by an outreach worker, who completes a detailed lesson plan before the session and evaluates it afterwards. Parents contribute their own evaluations through sticky notes. Appropriate activities are offered to promote child development and parents are offered advice and encouragement and have an opportunity to discuss any concerns with the outreach worker in an informal setting.

Parents from different communities develop friendships and their babies learn to get on well with one another. Many parents commented on how accessing activities at the centre has helped develop their child's confidence and social skills. They value these sessions not only as a social occasion; 'It gives you a purpose to get up and out of the house,' one remarked; but also because they can learn from one another. For example, one mother said that she would not have had the confidence to wean her baby so quickly without tips from the others in the group. Parents have now bought books to share with their children because they have enjoyed them in the group. As a result of these programmes, children make good progress which is monitored through detailed records which are shared with parents.

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	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	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.	3

How good is the provision?

2

The children's centre has a clear understanding of its reach area and the needs of its users and accurately identifies target groups. Unfortunately, staff sickness led to a marked reduction of outreach activity last year. As a result, only a minority of members of some of these target groups were reached. However, with the resumption of full outreach working, numbers have begun to increase.

In an effort to work with members of hard-to-engage groups, staff employ some innovative techniques. For example, one outreach worker has started to offer dance classes at a youth club which is popular with teenage mothers. The community organiser who runs the Fathers' Group visits social clubs and other venues where local men meet to distribute literature and talk to fathers.

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families is outstanding. The outreach workers have gained the confidence of parents and are the first point of contact for informal medical advice, parenting tips and guidance on benefits or employment opportunities. The centre has a full programme of activities to promote child development and parenting skills and as these are also run by the outreach workers, they have many opportunities to monitor the progress of children and to unobtrusively provide support and guidance.

By inviting parents to evaluate each session, staff ensure that they offer activities that their users want for their children. In fact, the demand for some sessions, particularly the peer-support parenting groups, exceeds the capacity of the outreach workers, who also carry a full caseload of referrals and family support as well as making home visits. The centre is therefore considering running shorter courses, with parents offered individual support if they still require it afterwards.

Although some programmes are targeted at particular groups, the centre also runs popular programmes which are open to the whole community, including summer fun days and outings. These attract families who may not visit the centre otherwise and give the centre the opportunity to make contact with them and offer further services. In some cases, support is indirect, for example, by organising a summer event on the nearby seafront, the centre encouraged parents who lacked confidence to move outside their local area to use public transport and to widen their family's horizons.

There is strong support for vulnerable groups. Where necessary, the outreach worker will even collect parents from home, accompany them to the centre and stay with them throughout the activity until they gain sufficient confidence to attend on their own. Parents tell of how centre staff have given up their breaks and stayed late to help. One parent put it simply: 'There is always someone there to talk to when I come in crying.'

Families say that the centre has helped them through referral to appropriate professionals and through direct intervention. One mother related that she had had no sleep for six months, but once the outreach worker became involved, her baby was sleeping through the night within a week. Another said simply, 'I wouldn't have been here if not for them.'

Staff are unashamedly passionate about their work and talk sincerely about 'putting the child and their family at the centre of everything we do.' The fierce loyalty that families feel towards the centre is evidence of the success of this approach. They say that the staff 'go out of their way to help' and that 'they think of you – they're not just here to do a job.'

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

The centre has a clear and focussed approach to the management of its work with good partnership working with a wide range of agencies to effectively meet the needs of families within the reach area. The local authority provides clear guidance and continued close working arrangements with the nursery school allow for good transitional arrangements for local children. The advisory board is active in its work and contributes well to supporting and working with the centre management.

Staff are well aware of management arrangements and outreach workers receive regular supervision sessions. Families causing concern are discussed at weekly multi-agency meetings and the appropriate agencies are allocated the case. More urgent concerns, however, are discussed with other professionals at any time and the good working relationships with partners such as health and housing help to ensure that results can often be rapidly achieved.

There is a robust child protection policy in place and all staff, including those working for partner agencies, are familiar with it and know how to report any concerns. All staff have

had enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks and the information has been recorded in the single central register. They have received child protection training appropriate to their job roles and outreach staff have also received appropriate training in identifying and responding to domestic violence.

Centre management and staff have a good knowledge of their reach area and this has enabled them to accurately identify where improvements in their services are needed. The centre development plan effectively identifies a number of priority targets and sets out realistic timescales for achieving them. One of the key strengths of the centre is the way in which it works hard to bring together members of diverse ethnic and socio-economic communities. Friendships are formed between parents and children from different backgrounds. As one parent stated, 'It brings the community together.'

The centre supports children with disabilities and their families well through the identification and involvement of appropriate professionals via the Common Assessment Framework process and through funded placements in the childcare provision. Parents are clear that the involvement of the children's centre has made a real difference for their children. A parent of a child with serious disabilities commented, 'The centre has helped make him the amazing little boy he is today.'

The centre has timetabled sessions to ensure that the maximum use is made of its resources. For example, outreach workers spend an entire morning running groups for parents to allow them to make home visits in the afternoon. When low numbers attended parallel groups run by the centre and partner agencies, it was agreed that only one agency would provide the group. Because the premises are shared with the nursery school, all rooms and outside spaces are used at optimal capacity and the shared reception area minimises the need for staff duplication. The result is that 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 in setting 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	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	2
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

The findings from the inspection of Bolden Nursery School that was taking place at the same time as the children's centre inspection were taken into consideration.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Boldon Nursery Children's Centre on 22 - 23 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our inspection, we spoke to many of you as well as to the centre management and staff and some of the other professionals who work in the centre. Please accept our thanks for your help and cooperation.

You spoke very highly of the children's centre and its staff and told us how you feel that the centre has made a real difference to your lives and the lives of your children. We know that the centre has helped many of you through difficult times and that you and your children have made new friendships as a result of centre activities. Your support for the centre and your feelings of gratitude to everyone in it, from outreach workers to reception staff, came across clearly.

We were impressed by how well the children's centre and the nursery work together; in fact, many of you do not make a distinction between them. The nursery is certain that the experiences you and your children have had in the centre have helped your children's development, so that they achieve far better results when they enter nursery. In return, the centre has made use of the nursery's facilities to offer you childcare places when you or your child need support and you told us how helpful this has been.

The centre has also helped many of you to lead healthier lives, whether by introducing you to healthier eating, by helping you feed your children better or by supporting you to give up smoking. We know that the NHS Foundation Trust which supplies you with health services

has figures to show the difference that the children's centre has made, but they do not pass that information on to the centre. We have recommended that they make their figures available to the centre.

The centre offers a range of courses to help you develop your skills and some of you have attended these. One very successful course was for people learning English and some of them went on to get jobs or study at university. Unfortunately, this course has been stopped due to lack of funds. We have recommended to the centre that they try to find a way of running the course again.

We know that the centre listens to your suggestions about activities and groups. It asks you to evaluate every session and carries out regular surveys. Some of you are also members of the Parent Network. However, we were told that no parents from this centre are on the Cluster Advisory Board which is responsible for the running of the four centres in this area. We hope that some of you will take the opportunity to join the board and we have recommended to the centre that they give you whatever help you need to do it.

The community entrepreneurs have told us that they have helped some of you to find jobs or to go on training courses. The outreach workers, too, have made some of you appointments with the Family Works team. We have discovered that Jobcentre Plus does not know how many parents from this centre have actually gone into employment or training so the centre cannot tell how successful it has been. We have recommended to Jobcentre Plus that they keep records that will allow them to give the centre this information.

Once again, many thanks for your help during the inspection. It was a pleasure meeting you all and we wish you every success in the future.

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