

# Inspection report for Riverside Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	South Tyneside
<b>Inspection number</b>	384068
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20 – 21 December 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	June Cramman

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Laygate Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	EY332276 Riverside

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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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with managers, staff members, advisory board members, parents, partners 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

Riverside Children's Centre is located within the Chichester area of South Shields. Its reach covers the Riverside, Rekendyke and West Shields areas. The reach population of the centre is 675 children aged from birth to four. Recent figures show that 212 households are lone parents with dependent children. Estimated weekly income is lower than the South Tyneside average and the percentage of children under four years old living in households dependent on workless benefits is 33%. The majority of local families is of White British heritage with a relatively large group of families from Bengali heritage and very low numbers from other minority ethnic communities. The proportion of children attending schools in the area that are known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. 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 is low.

Riverside Children's Centre is linked to Laygate Primary School 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 Shields/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. A new advisory board led by South Tyneside Council was established in September 2011, taking over from the board previously led by the linked school.

## 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
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2
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## Main findings

‘We always receive a friendly welcome from staff who have a genuine interest in our well-being’ is how one parent described her experience of Riverside Children’s Centre. The centre’s overall effectiveness in meeting the needs of the community is good. It has been at the heart of the community for a number of years and provides good support to children and families. The centre has a number of strengths including the recent re-organisation of support for vulnerable families that is now more effectively using the expertise of a range of partners to give more timely and effective help. The centre gives a high priority to all aspects of safeguarding, safer recruitment and child protection. Such arrangements are of good quality and fully meet statutory requirements. Staff work diligently to ensure that outcomes for children in relation to learning and development are 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 well over the past three years.

The range and quality of services from pre-birth activities to work with the linked school is good and parents play a large part in deciding the types of activities to be developed. Parents enjoy the popular weaning sessions and baby massage and are highly positive about how much they benefit. However, the centre is aware that more needs to be done to increase the numbers of mothers breastfeeding and to reduce obesity as well as measure the impact of smoking cessation activities. While partnerships have improved well through the joint case reviews and support packages, other partnerships, such as those with Jobcentre Plus and Adult and community learning are not having so much impact. This has resulted in there being

too few regular opportunities for parents and carers to gain the skills, confidence and nationally recognised qualifications to help improve their economic well-being.

The quality of activities at the centre is good. Parents report positively on their increased confidence and competence after attending weaning sessions or baby massage. They are bonding well with their children and understand much more about their child's development. One-to-one sessions with outreach workers and healthcare workers are clearly appreciated. Parents demonstrate a good understanding of safety issues both at home and in the centre. Children enjoy the fun activities in the centre and are learning to play together well. Mum's were very happy with their children's development and talked about how they continue activities in the home. The staff team is very focussed on increasing the number of families who access the centre and has been highly successful in achieving this aim. Most families in the reach area use the centre. Of those families with more extensive needs, the centre has been very successful in reaching them and getting them to access services, particularly in the last six months. Parents participate well in a range of evaluations and surveys that encourage them to contribute to the development of the centre's activities. A parent network group is also highly active in shaping provision and one member of this group regularly attends the new Advisory Board.

The new management team is working well to improve the centre's provision. The change in direction led by the local authority is having a marked impact in focussing services on the needs of the whole family. The new leadership model followed is having a very positive impact in better developing internal and external partnerships to support vulnerable families at earlier stages. This is reducing the numbers of families on the child protection register whilst giving much improved support to those that remain on it. Management of equality and diversity and safeguarding are both good. Staff have a clear view of the reach area and are well aware of the target groups. They have worked well with the minority ethnic community in the area and have set up effective groups both in the centre and in the linked school. They established highly appreciated support groups for grandparents and 'kinship carers' as they were aware that many children in the reach area depended on carers other than parents. This detailed and accurate analysis of need demonstrates the leadership team's ability to undertake a range of rigorous activities and link the outcome to on-going development planning. Consequently the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

Staff are managed well, with regular supervisions and close monitoring of their case loads. Outreach workers are recording the individual outcomes of visits and are using partners well to give a package of support, although collation of positive interventions is not fully in place. Self-evaluation arrangements are well-established and effective, but the rapid changes in the provision within the last six months have meant that many actions or targets in action plans are irrelevant to the current provision. The action planning process is helping to bridge this gap but medium- and long-term action planning based on meaningful targets is as yet under-developed.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve families' take up of more healthy lifestyles, including increasing breastfeeding rates and reducing the level of obesity within the community.
- Extend partnership working with Adult and Community Learning or other training providers and Jobcentre Plus to enable more parents and carers to gain skills, confidence and nationally recognised qualifications that will help them improve their economic stability.
- Develop the use of management information, self-evaluation and action planning to:
  - set challenging targets to improve the engagement of the wider community
  - more closely monitor and record outcomes for all aspects of their work.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2
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'I have to give 50% of the credit to the centre for helping me to bring up my child' said one parent at Riverside Children's Centre. The centre plays a large part in many parents' lives in the area and has a significant effect on the children, many of whom are from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds.

The centre has developed a range of services aimed at promoting families' understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles. Parents speak enthusiastically about the popular weaning sessions and the good advice they receive on healthy eating and budgeting skills related to buying and cooking fresh food. Parents and children are benefitting from a good range of services like the breastfeeding support group and its related peer support group, baby massage activities and baby buggy exercises. In addition, the centre is developing a range of promotional activities aimed at helping parents to stop smoking. One grandmother was very proud to report that as a result of the help she was receiving she had not had a cigarette for over a month. Centre managers have been very active in changing working practices to approach supporting families in a much more holistic way, with particular emphasis on including health workers. This has resulted in much improved access to health services for families. However, while the centre is working hard to educate families on health issues and have slightly increased breastfeeding rates, these still remain well under national averages. In addition, obesity rates in the last year have risen. While the centre is to be congratulated on the work started on smoking cessation, there remains much to be done to monitor progress with this issue.

Children and families are safeguarded well in the centre. Managers have been proactive in ensuring that children subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are very well supported. A much improved partnership with the Referral and Assessment Unit has ensured that the Vulnerable

Family's co-ordinator 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. In the period since these new working practices were adopted the numbers of families being supported went up from three to 24. This, combined with an improved working partnership with the authority's family support team, facilitates effective multi-agency working, ensuring better outcomes for all concerned. Security within the building is excellent and this is underpinned by effective risk assessments. Centre staff use new birth visits to offer practical advice about potential dangers in the home and inform parents how to minimise these. In addition, centre staff take every opportunity to reinforce safety both on an individual basis and in organised activities. A small number of parents, and sometimes children, attend first aid courses.

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 well over the past three years. Outcomes for children attending both the daycare provision and that of the linked school were judged good. The Early Years Foundation Stage Coordinator gives regular staff training and support in how to track children's progress. The outreach workers are developing monitoring systems to track positive developments both with the parents and the children more closely, although the results of these are not yet being fully collated. Staff are currently being trained in the use of the 'Solihull approach' and are starting to apply this well with families. Parents attending adult literacy and numeracy courses are much more confident in supporting their children.

Parents participate well in the development of activities in the centre. They complete evaluations for every activity and staff use these to make good adjustments to provision. One parent told us: 'I always feel my views and my family's needs are important at Riverside.' Throughout the year parents complete surveys to assess any gaps in provision and this is used well to improve provision. For instance, in the summer survey 15% of parents revealed they were not fully aware of which person to approach should they wish to make a complaint. Staff are taking action now to close this gap. The centre has a very active parent network all of whom are recruited from families familiar with a variety of disadvantages. One of the parents has been active in attending the new advisory board as a parent representative.

The centre can demonstrate some success in relation to supporting parents and carers to improve their economic well-being. A minority of parents has benefitted well from some very good entrepreneurship programmes, including one that gives good advice on managing fuel poverty issues. A satisfactory range of courses, such as childcare courses as well as programmes in literacy and numeracy have enabled a number of parents and carers, including some lone parents and grandparents, to gain nationally recognised qualifications. Success rates on these courses are good. The centre has been working in partnership with both Jobcentre Plus and Adult and Community Learning for some years, although the regularity and range of this provision is not so well developed. Although the Adult and Community Learning provider shares information on the success rates of the courses, none of the partners

sufficiently tracks or monitors the positive destinations of parents such as going into paid or voluntary work.

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>2</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?**

<b>2</b>
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Provision offered by the centre is of good quality and is contributing well to improved outcomes for children and parents who attend the centre. Most families from the reach area attend the centre.

The centre has transformed working practices in the past six months in relation to targeting the more vulnerable in the community with a good rate of success, improving the rate of recruiting these families by around 25% in this period. It has also secured the registrations of all children on child protection plans. Assessment of individual cases is robust with families referred to the centre receiving good quality, multi-agency support in a timely way. Outreach provision is good and improving. Children's centre staff are also developing effective exit strategies with partners to ensure that more parents are able to build their confidence and parenting skills, to become independent at a pace that was appropriate to them. The range of provision from pre-birth to school is good and gives good challenge to families. However, although some parents benefit well from the adult training offered, the centre is not yet giving enough opportunities for adults to take up training or access employment.

Good working from the daycare provision and the linked school is ensuring that 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. The centre provides a good range of provision from pre-birth through to work with the linked school. Activities stimulate and engage both parents and children. They are well-organised and recorded so that staff and parents can reflect on the children's progress. Staff have a good and improving knowledge of the needs of families in the reach area and are using this well to support and develop them.



However, the centre does not yet fully evaluate and collate information to really understand the provision and develop it more fully.

The quality of care, guidance and support for families is good. The multi-agency approach is highly effective in meeting the, often complex, needs of families. In one case outreach workers resolved several problems for the family, getting them into secure housing, intervening with other professionals to get the correct benefits in place, enabling the parents to access language classes and getting the children into appropriate daycare provision. The centre now carries out good joint casework reviews so that the needs of the most vulnerable, those subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) are met well. Parents are very positive about the effect this support has on them with one saying: 'it's taken the pressure off and it's somewhere I can go and don't feel judged'. Staff are working effectively to target vulnerable families at an early stage to give good quality interventions. Staff give good advice and guidance to parents and involve partners well to give as wide a range of guidance possible. However, in working with parents in the centre there is limited access to qualified careers information, advice and guidance staff.

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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</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?**

**2**

The governance and day-to-day management of the centre is good. The restructure of staffing, together with the radical change in direction by the new local authority board to target vulnerable families better has resulted in an enthused staff team that has a clear sense of purpose. While staffing has been cut in real terms, the effectiveness of the team is much improved. Joint working with other departments in the council, in the National Health Service and voluntary sector is significantly improved and is having a demonstrably positive effect in reaching and supporting the people of the area. The new management group has led an innovative and highly-effective initiative to develop this improvement. Information-sharing between departments and providers is much improved, although still more is to be developed.

Performance management of outreach workers has improved significantly and is now good. Managers meet with workers on an individual basis regularly to give support and advice regarding the management of individual caseloads. This is beginning to be recorded centrally, although not all positive interventions are fully collated. Self-evaluation processes are well-established and understood. Staff and user views are

included well; however, the provision has changed significantly in the last six months requiring an updated self-assessment review. A new group is helping to fill this gap with some very dynamic actions arising to effect good changes. However, medium- and longer-term planning based on realistic targets is less well developed.

Resources are deployed well at the centre. Outcomes are good and the revised arrangements for working with both internal and external partners are highly effective in improving cost-effectiveness of services. Consequently the centre provides good value for money.

The centre promotes inclusion of all children and their families across the area very well. Staff understand the needs of the area well and targeting of vulnerable groups such as those from ethnic minority communities is good. The centre works well with community elders and has created bespoke provision both at the centre and in the school in response to their needs. In addition, staff have created effective groups that support grandparents or 'kinship' carers', of whom there are many in the reach area. Promotion of equality and diversity around the centre is good. Parents comment on the welcoming atmosphere and the respect they are all accorded.

The centre's safeguarding of families is good. Policies and procedures are comprehensive, covering both children and vulnerable adults. This is very necessary given the complex needs of the families in the reach area. Staff are well trained and experienced in safeguarding and fully understand what they need to do to protect families.

Partnership working is highly effective and much improved with the changes in working practices in the last six months. Arrangements to support vulnerable families are good and result in packages of support at an early stage to prevent children going into care. Wider partnerships such as Adult and Community Learning, Jobcentre Plus and Citizen's Advice are long-standing but have not had as significant an effect on families as other arrangements.

The extent to which the centre encourages users to engage in the development of the services is good. Parents participate well in the parent-user group and a member of this group represents them on the new advisory board. Parents are encouraged well to give opinions through evaluations of provision to regular surveys. Staff listen to these opinions very well and make appropriate adaptations to provision. Staff are also very adept at listening to and observing children, recording their concerns and making improvements.

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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</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>2</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 range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The findings from the most recent inspection of Riverside day care were taken into consideration when coming to judgements for this inspection as were those for the linked school, Laygate Primary.

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### **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Riverside Children's Centre on 20-21 December 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection we visited activities, looked at the centre's documentation and talked with a range of children and adults including parents, staff, managers, advisory board members and partners. We were very pleased to speak with many of you either in specific meetings or as you participated in the centre's activities. You made your views known to us and we have used them to help us make our judgements. Some of the good things that the centre is doing include the support provided to ensure both your safety and that of your children as well as the activities that promote enjoyment and achievement for children. We also found that children and parents were developing very positive relationships and that families were being listened to by staff well and their views are being used to develop further courses and activities.

The range of activities for children is good from pre-birth activities to work with Laygate Primary School. Some of you told us how much you enjoyed the baby

massage sessions and the weaning activities and how much your older children benefit from the fun activities in the centre. You also told us how you use the ideas you get from these activities to continue with playtime in your homes. Parents told us that you appreciate the time the staff give you both individually and in groups and that you are using your new knowledge and skills with all of your children. The centre works well with wider services such as health and social workers. This ensures that families who are experiencing challenge in their lives are well supported. You also told us that you have improved safety in the home using the advice given to you by outreach workers. You have also told us that you appreciate the activities and support led by workers in the centre who are focussing on healthier lifestyles. However, despite these activities and promotions, there are still too few mums taking up breastfeeding and too many children who are overweight.

Crucially, you tell us that you feel safe and welcomed into the centre and that you have great confidence and trust in the staff. You appreciate the home visits that give one-to-one support and advice as well as the support from staff to make the transition to participating in the activities in the centre. Many people in the area benefit from the centre's activities and staff are working hard to reach the few remaining families who are not yet coming into the centre.

We found that managers and staff are doing a good job in managing the centre. They are enthusiastic and committed to you and are determined to improve provision further for your benefit. Many of you contribute well to the planning of future activities through surveys and 'chats' in the parents' room. Some of you are part of the very effective parent network group. One parent also now attends the Advisory Board. We know that you feel the centre listens to you and that you are receiving services you have asked for. We also know that some of you have participated in courses and have successfully gained nationally recognised qualifications. Whilst we celebrate these achievements we would like to see more parents benefitting from them. The centre is looking to work more closely with Adult and Community Learning and Jobcentre Plus to make sure in the future that more of you have access to these opportunities. We hope you will take up this offer and make the most of the chances they give you to develop.

Riverside has recently undergone a significant restructure to staffing and provision which has had a massive impact on the way it gives services. We know you are aware of these changes as staff consulted with you as each step progressed. One of the major changes has been the local authority now taking a lead on how provision will be developed. This has led to a very welcome change of focus to dealing with whole families rather than simply looking at what can be done for an individual child. The centre is now working really well with other services to ensure that those families who are experiencing challenge in their lives are supported well. 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. The team is using information much better to give sound activities and provision to the right people at the times that will best help them. However, some of this information is not always brought together as well as it could be to make future planning more effective. We

have asked the centre to address this issue so that future improvements are always based on sound information and better planned.

Thank you to everyone who took 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).