

Inspection report for Skerne Park Children's Centre

Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	384158
Inspection dates	5 - 6 July 2012
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Linked school if applicable	Skerne Park Primary School 132206
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Coleridge Centre (Parkside Childcare) EY330167

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.

Report Published: July 2012

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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the local authority, centre staff, advisory board members, health professionals, voluntary and statutory partner organisations, one local headteacher and parents. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation

Information about the centre

Skerne Park Children's Centre operates from a purpose built building known as the Coleridge Centre. It is co-located in one building with Skerne Park Primary School, Family Learning Team and Parkside Childcare. It is a phase one centre, offering all elements of the core purpose including integrated childcare, health services, family support, outreach services and links to Jobcentre services. The centre serves a community living in the top five 30% most deprived areas in the country. The majority of the families come from the Park East and Park West wards and are predominantly of White British heritage, with 3.4% from minority ethnic groups.

Of the 64% of families registered with the centre from the reach area, 203 are fathers. The centre has 490 children under the age of five years registered. Of these, 48% live in a house headed by a lone parent and 2.8% are from minority ethnic groups. The unemployment rate in Park East is 7.9% and the ward has the third highest rate of worklessness in Darlington with 18% of residents in receipt of benefits. On entry to early years provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age.

The service has undergone a period of change with the setting up of integrated teams. Skerne Park now shares a management team with Mount Pleasant Children's Centre. The team includes a 0-19 Area Coordinator who oversees the day-to-day operational management of the centre and a Whole Family Care Coordinator, from the County Durham

and Darlington Foundation Trust. There is a Children's Centre Development Manager who oversees quality and development across all centres in the Borough.

The centre's advisory board is made up of representatives from various professional partnerships and five parents. The governance of the centre is provided by Darlington Borough Council. Early years education and childcare provision, which includes after-school and holiday care, is provided by Parkside Childcare, under the management of Skerne Park Community Enterprise Association, and is delivered on the same site as the centre.

The linked provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The school was last inspected in July 2010 and the childcare was last inspected in January 2012. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Due to the holistic nature of the services it provides, the centre has won the high regard of users and its partners. As the local school headteacher stated, 'The whole philosophy of the centre is lovely, I have never seen parents engaged so well.' Users appreciate the safe and welcoming environment and efficient staff. Users have access to a wide range of provision, including childcare provision, access to the health team, adult learning and advice and guidance.

The good take-up rates of health services and activities are leading to improved outcomes. The social and economic well-being of many families, and in particular those who experience isolation is very greatly improved because of their engagement with the centre's services. Users demonstrate much improved parenting skills, knowledge of healthy eating and lifestyles and positive relationships. The centre is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles. Health outcomes, including rates for sustained breastfeeding, are improving and are good overall. Children make good progress in their communication skills. However, the formal system for monitoring and tracking children's progress is currently underdeveloped.

Users benefit from an extensive range of services carefully personalised to meet individual's needs. There are many opportunities for parents, grandparents and children to play, learn and develop new skills together. The level and quality of care, guidance and support provided by the centre and its partners is excellent, and makes a positive difference to the lives of the vast majority of families and users.

Managers and the advisory board demonstrate a clear vision and a very strong commitment to supporting and making a difference to the lives of families in the reach communities. Self-evaluation is robust and accurate. The use of data informs target setting and the planning of services. However, managers recognise that the collation of data still remains an area for further development, particularly, in relation to monitoring health outcomes more effectively. Similarly the staff are committed to further increasing participation from all the hard-to-reach target groups, including the Gypsy Roma Travellers, so that more can benefit from using the centre's services.

Adult users are encouraged to become involved in a voluntary capacity and in the governance of the centre. Multi-agency collaboration is excellent. There is a strong ethos of working together across all the partner agencies that make a direct contribution to improving the lives of families. Users value highly and benefit from the centre's resources, facilities and accommodation which are of excellent quality.

Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Meeting the needs of the hard-to-reach groups, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, is a key priority for the centre. With its rigorous systems and procedures, and the highly secure building, the centre's promotion of safeguarding is excellent. The effective 'Team Around the Child' model ensures the safety of all children with one-to-one early intervention where relevant.

The capacity for sustained improvement is good due to the centre's impact on improving outcomes, increased registrations of new families, quality of provision and effective leadership and management.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase participation rates of the hard-to-reach target groups, including the Gypsy Roma Travellers, even further so that more families benefit from using the centre's services.
- Develop further the systems for monitoring and tracking children's progress and development whilst accessing services to show the impact of the centre on children's achievements.
- Improve the collation and analysis of data in relation to health outcomes, to provide an accurate picture of the progress made by users.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and improving health outcomes for all its users. Users have good access to a wide range of health services and are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. Health visitors based at the centre work in partnership with the centre staff and midwife to ensure families with circumstances that make them vulnerable are swiftly identified and targeted.

The health of users is improving. For example, the rate of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has steadily increased over the last year with 61.3% of mothers sustaining breastfeeding currently. Mothers receive excellent advice and support for breastfeeding and weaning. Similarly, of the 48 users supported for smoking cessation, including pregnant women, 22 have successfully stopped smoking. Babies' health is promoted very well through ante-natal and post-natal services. The centre offers a good range of physical activities for both children and adults, including popular groups such as, 'Busy Feet', 'Baby Boppers' and events such as the 'Mini Olympics', 'Sports Day' and 'Mud Day' to promote positive behaviour and reduce obesity. Parents are aware of the good focus on healthy eating; as one stated, 'Fresh fruit and water is everywhere.'

Children enjoy the activities at the centre. They engage well and have lots of fun in the extremely well-resourced indoor and outdoor environment. Sessions are well planned to ensure all areas of learning are promoted. The current figure of 57.4% reflects an increase in the proportion of children achieving 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales, with at least six points in each of the scales for personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. Similarly, the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest is narrowing. However, systems for monitoring and tracking the impact of the centre's provision on children's achievements whilst accessing services are not yet fully developed. The 'transition group' is very effective in introducing parents and children to new learning environments. As one father commented, 'Transition was great for my children.'

The centre provides an extremely safe and highly secure environment for its users. All activities are risk assessed. Robust policies and procedures ensure the on-going safety of staff and families. The needs of families and children with circumstances that make them vulnerable are assessed speedily and appropriate service identified. This early intervention has led to a positive impact on those children subject to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process, looked-after children and those subject to a child protection plan.

Staff are skilful in engaging, recruiting and supporting users as volunteers and as parent representatives on the parent forum and on the advisory board. Five of the parents have become active members of the advisory board where they engage with partners in making important decisions about the service offered.

Adult users report a high level of enjoyment and achievement. The centre is a popular place. One user said, 'I would love to be here at the centre everyday'. As well as gaining in confidence, developing positive relationships and enhancing personal self-esteem, the majority of adult users are currently following routes to gaining qualification and or employment and make good use of the adult and community learning opportunities provided at the centre. One happy father described the benefits gained in taking part in centre activities. 'The practical parenting classes are very useful. I learnt first aid, had mentoring and now I am a better dad.'

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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a seamless package of universal and targeted support and services for all users from 0-19 years old. Participation rates have improved overall in the recent months by 30%. Staff aim to target more families in the reach area and in particular to work with the Gypsy Roma Traveller families who are currently not as well engaged with the centre's services. Accommodation is extremely well utilised by a broad range of partners

Users benefit from the wide range of purposeful learning opportunities aimed at improving their lives. The parenting programmes, for example, help parents to build their self-esteem, develop parenting skills, share ideas and resolve family problems. The centre is particularly successful in engaging, supporting and meeting the needs of young parents. One of the centre's success stories is the 'Saturday Dad's Group', with up to 25 fathers attending. One father stated, 'It's really good fun, we can all play together, bond and spend quality time catching up relating with other dads'. Similarly, the broad range of enjoyable children's activities makes a strong and effective contribution to improving the communication skills of children who attend the centre.

Users' views and case studies reflect the excellent support and guidance which is well tailored to individual needs and the tremendous difference it has made to lives. The engagement of isolated families, supported by the centre's outreach services is excellent.

The free crèche facility, enables users, including many fathers, to take part in adult learning and parenting courses. Similarly, the provision for disabled children and those with special educational needs is targeted effectively to ensure they receive the support they require.

Many users are improving their economic stability and independence because of the good advice and guidance they receive on financial concerns, benefits and tax credits provided through the 'Mobile Advice Co-operative'. Links with Jobcentre services provide users with advice on careers and routes into employment.

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

Leaders manage resources well. Effective teamwork between senior managers and staff ensures that morale is high despite recent changes, including staff taking on new roles and responsibilities. Staff are well motivated, skilled and ambitious to improve further. Performance management and staff supervision systems are robust, with a strong focus on developing the skills of all staff. Governance is good with the local authority providing a clear strategic lead for the centre. The advisory board and the local authority are highly proactive and provide good support and guidance in relation to the development of services. The representation of five active parents on the advisory board and the extent to which their voices shape provision is a considerable strength.

With its good and improving outcomes and universal and targeted provision, the centre provides good value for money. Overall data are used well to shape services and set targets. However, leaders recognise the need to improve the collation and analysis of data for all the health outcomes, so that a more accurate picture of progress is readily available. The centre's effectiveness in monitoring its services is well demonstrated by the robust self-evaluation practices and systems it has in place. Feedback from the parents' forum and course evaluations clearly show that users are extremely happy with the services provided by the centre and with the quality of the environment within the centre.

The wide ranging and outstanding partnerships enable successful joint-up services which support and benefit families with circumstances that make them vulnerable. For example, excellent working relationships between the social care team, early intervention team and the centre's 'Family Team' have resulted in an extremely cohesive package of support for families. All partners regard the centre very highly.

Users appreciate the centre's vast range of stimulating indoor and outdoor resources. The building is spacious, modern and extremely well-equipped to provide family learning courses and activities for users. All staff, including the reception staff, are highly praised by users and partners alike. Vibrant wall displays incorporating positive images and educational information on many topics provide useful facts for parents.

Robust safeguarding policies and procedures inform practice, are clearly understood and followed by all the staff and partners and are extremely well embedded across the centre. Safe recruitment procedures are stringently followed and checks are made to ensure that all staff are suitable and safe to work with children. All staff receive child protection training and are extremely confident in their role to safeguard children. Senior leaders are highly effective in ensuring children and families are safe and conduct a rigorous risk assessment of the environment. Safeguarding practice and protocols for making referrals, sharing relevant information with partners and helping families in times of crisis are excellent.

Inclusion, narrowing the achievement gap and meeting the needs of the hard-to-engage groups, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, are effectively addressed. The centre's work in the engagement of families that are isolated, such as those new to the country, is a good example of meeting needs when families need it most. One grateful user, isolated by language barriers, culture and the lack of family support, described the multi-faceted nature of the support she received, in Hindi to the bi-lingual inspector, 'I receive very good support, with making appointments and phone calls, immigration matters, reading of letters as I can't speak English.' As one parent pointed out, 'Nobody is made to feel left out or threatened. All parents are treated equally'.

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 secures 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	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1

The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.

2

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Skerne Park Children's Centre on 5 July 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

All of you, including the young parents and dads, to whom we spoke, told us how much you liked using the centre. You have gained new knowledge and developed new skills, including parenting skills and healthy lifestyles. Parenting courses, in particular, have helped you to learn about improving family relationships and how to support your children's learning and manage difficult behaviour.

The centre provides you with wonderful opportunities to form new friendships and this helps the mothers among you and lone parents to feel less isolated. Similarly your children have made good progress in their learning. As a result of using the childcare facilities and the support received from the 'Transition Team', your children are well prepared for entry into school. The wide range of activities the centre offers you are very well matched to your needs. They are run by highly skilled and dedicated centre and partnership staff, some of whom also visit you at home.

We are delighted to learn that several of you have become volunteers and members of the parents' forum or the advisory board and make good contributions to the life of the centre. Five of you, for example, actively contribute to the governance of the centre as members of the advisory board.

Many of you benefit from excellent support, care and guidance from the centre and its partners. We can see how you benefit from the excellent partnerships that the centre has in place to support you and your families, in particular with having childcare, health, school and adult learning teams all in the same building. With the on-site 'Health Team' the centre has helped many of you, for instance with breast feeding, ante-natal and post-natal matters.

Similarly, the adult learning provision has helped some of you to develop your numeracy, literacy and volunteering skills which help to improve your employability skills. The free crèche facility enables many of you to attend adult learning and parenting courses. Some of you also have been supported on budgeting matters, self-empowerment and how to deal with domestic abuse or simply in reading a letter or making a telephone call.

Your centre is led by a good team of managers and staff. They are supported well by the advisory board and the centre's many partners. They are highly skilled and work extremely well together. All are keen to support you and meet your needs. The centre staff value your opinions very much and use feedback from course and activity evaluations very well to plan future services. We are really pleased that the centre is a safe place for you and your children and that it has excellent safeguarding measures in place, including for those families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. Many of you commented on how secure the centre building was and how safe you feel.

We are very glad that you and your families benefit from the superb resources and accommodation that the centre provides. Most of you commented on the 'wonderful' centre with its 'fantastic' staff, including in the reception area and the excellent resources your children use in the crèche and the nursery.

We have asked the centre to do more to increase the number of families using the centre in your communities, such as the Gypsy Roma Travellers, so that more can benefit from its services. We have requested that the centre improves its systems for tracking children's achievements and the collection of data and information relating to health outcomes. This will help to provide a more accurate picture of progress and the impact of the centre's work on outcomes.

We would like to thank all of you who contributed ideas, came to speak with us and told us how much you love using the centre and appreciate the work of the staff.

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