

# Inspection report for St Helen Auckland Children's Centre

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| Local authority     | Durham             |
| Inspection number   | 404446             |
| Inspection dates    | 17–18 October 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | Jane Hughes        |

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|-----------------------------|---|
| Centre leader               | Sue Burbage   |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable  |
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|---|--|
| Linked school if applicable                     | St Helen Auckland Community PS<br>URN 114104 |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Not Applicable                               |

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the hub manager, the local authority, centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners. These included the headteacher of the co-located primary school, the community drug service, health, EMTAS, portage staff, early years staff, childminders, domestic abuse service partnership, adult learning and social workers. They visited a range of provision delivered at the centre and also at an outreach centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

St Helen Auckland is a phase one children's centre co-located on the site of St Helen Auckland Primary School. It was designated in February 2006. The centre provides multi-purpose rooms, a sensory room, a health room for private consultations, a training/meeting room, crèche facilities and information and communication technology equipment for parent training sessions.

The centre serves an area where 34% of the population live in the top 10% most deprived areas nationally. Throughout the reach area, there are significant variations which illustrate a far greater social and economic mix than was the case when the centre was built. For example, 12% of the community live in the top 70% least deprived areas nationally. Of the 774 children under five years of age, 69% are registered at the centre of which 267 come from areas in the top 30% of deprivation. There is a local authority Traveller site within the centre's reach area. Just over 23% of children live in households dependent on workless benefits. Of those families in employment, just over 37% receive Working Tax Credit. The centre is supported by a qualified teacher. Almost all families are of White British heritage. Most children enter early years provision with skills lower than those usually expected for their age, particularly their communication and language and physical skills.

The local authority underwent a significant restructure in 2011. The children's centre is now part of the One Point Service which manages the centre. The service provides integrated services for children and young people from birth to 19 years. Families can access an integrated team of health visitors, midwives and family workers 'under one roof'. An administrative team is also based at the centre. The centre is governed by the local authority and is part of a hub-and-spoke model of provision comprising three children's centres. It is managed by a hub manager who is based at the Bishop Auckland One Point Hub, one mile from the centre. A local advisory board, which covers all three children's centres in the locality, is currently re-establishing.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

St Helen Auckland Children's Centre delivers a range of satisfactory and improving services to children and families within its reach. Its key strengths lie in the strong care, guidance, support and safeguarding procedures that staff apply to all the centre's work. In turn, these lead to children and adult users developing a clear understanding of how to stay safe as they go about their daily lives. Registrations and the engagement of users in centre activities continue to increase. Approximately two-thirds of users from the most deprived areas locally, the key target groups, are now using the centre. The centre's accomplishments so far show it has sufficient capacity to improve outcomes and provision for users in the reach area.

Most families who engage with centre services develop a satisfactory understanding of how to keep healthy. They learn more about nutrition and how physical activity benefits them and their children. However, breastfeeding rates are too low for those who start breastfeeding and those who sustain breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks.

Children progress well in the skills they acquire due to a range of good quality activities for young children who attend the centre with their parents and the well-established links with local primary schools. Parents enjoy the time they spend involved in centre and outreach

activities but there are too few opportunities for them to develop economic stability through adult learning and training programmes or to develop skills through volunteering.

Relationships are strong and supportive. Adults agree that the welcoming environment helps them to relax at the centre and enjoy the activities on offer. New management structures, introduced through the One Point service, are now firmly established. Long-serving staff have always worked alongside other services in order to best address the various needs of the locality. This philosophy of integrated service provision is at the heart of the new service. However, the restructure has meant that the advisory board had to be reconstituted. The new board has met a few times but it does not include parents and consequently, they are not yet making a contribution to the governance of the centre. Similarly, users' views are not feeding through sufficiently to influence its strategic direction.

The local authority lead and centre leaders work regularly alongside centre staff and this partnership is working well. However, the local authority, the advisory board and all centre partners do not currently make the best possible use of data to ensure that targets are ambitious, measurable and specific. The centre pays due regard to the promotion of equality and celebration of diversity.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Develop further the work with health professionals to increase the numbers of mothers who initiate and sustain breastfeeding.
- Provide more opportunities for families to develop their economic stability and independence by offering more adult learning, training and volunteering opportunities.
- In conjunction with the local authority, the advisory board and all centre partners, use data more effectively to ensure that targets are ambitious, measurable and specific.
- Re-establish the strategic overview of the advisory board and ensure that it includes meaningful contributions from parents and adequate representation of users' views to impact on how the centre develops its services.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

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| <b>3</b> |
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The rising take-up of services offered at the centre and throughout the reach area is helping families to lead healthier lifestyles. The weaning group provides imaginative guidance for parents and one-to-one support is provided by family support workers for the hard-to-engage families. Healthy snacks are offered during all activities and children and parents show a willingness to try new foods. Young parents enjoy learning more about healthy options such as salt-free soup and cereal cakes. Obesity levels in young children have followed a downward trend in recent years, although this halted last year. Staff provide a great deal of information on nutritious meals but this is increasingly contradicted by the upsurge in fast food outlets in the newly opened local retail parks. The centre is 'UNICEF breastfeeding friendly' and holds regular support group meetings. Some mothers who have

successfully breastfed their babies have trained as breastfeeding peer supporters. Nonetheless, the percentage of new mothers across the reach area who initiate breastfeeding and then sustain breastfeeding for six-to-eight weeks is too low at 62% and 18% respectively when compared with national averages of 74% and 47% respectively. Increasing the uptake of breastfeeding remains a priority for the centre. Parents and children thoroughly enjoy using the sensory rooms, as they provide valuable opportunities for one-to-one time between parent and child in a highly supportive environment. 'Baby Massage' sessions help parents to grow in confidence and improve attachment and bonding with their babies. The positive impact of sessions on weight management, smoking cessation and confidence building is increasing.

Families say they feel safe at the centre. Literature relating specifically to safety in the home is given to those families identified as most in need. Outreach workers are successful in building strong relationships with parents so that they feel secure about asking for help or advice. Good interventions, including one-to-one support are readily offered by staff. Family support workers are always keen to develop provision wherever possible. For example, they participate in a pre-birth assessment plan, along with a multi-agency team. This child protection initiative supports babies and families pre-and-post birth. It helps to avoid babies and parents being separated after the birth due to safeguarding concerns. Parents speak enthusiastically about the centre, saying, 'My confidence has developed and I believe in myself as a good parent.'

Children enjoy and achieve well. From below expected starting points, 62% of children within the reach area achieved national average scores by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2012. These results build on a five-year upward trend. In local primary schools, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores continues to narrow.

Children behave well throughout the centre. They share resources well and clearly relish the time they spend in this well-resourced centre. Parents are encouraged to offer feedback at the end of sessions and courses and this is invariably positive. Their comments about timings and possible new courses are taken into consideration. However, their views do not currently influence the strategic direction of the centre, as there are no parent representatives on the advisory board.

Despite the withdrawal of Jobcentre Plus from the centre, parents have daily access to a range of information on local employment opportunities. They are signposted to local organisations where they can access help. However, there are too few opportunities for adults to raise their employability skills and to secure greater economic stability through attendance on bespoke courses. Local cuts within further education and the adult learning and skills service mean that adult learning courses have been curtailed. Those who have benefited from training and courses reported positively on how the centre has helped them to seek training for new skills. For example, a user who is enrolled on a teaching assistant course said, 'Without the support from the centre, I wouldn't be the happy person that I am now and think positively about my future.'

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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| <b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>          | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.</b> | <b>3</b> |

## How good is the provision?

**3**

Centre staff have a clear view of the main user groups throughout its reach. They work well with partners across all service areas to identify those most in need of support. Data show a rise in registrations to about 75% of the reach area. Outreach services meet the needs of the community, and staff are aware of groups such as Traveller families who may be harder to engage and not benefit from the centre services. For example, a play bus now regularly visits the Traveller site and engages 12 families and their children in a range of enjoyable play sessions. Specific activities are arranged to attract fathers to the centre and numbers are increasing slowly. Concerted efforts to engage more users mean that the centre's resources are now enjoyed by 25% more parents and children than five years ago. Established partnership work, particularly with speech and language therapists, enables children's skills to improve when they attend early years settings. Disabled children access specific groups serviced by qualified professionals and grow in confidence when using facilities such as the intriguing sensory room. Assessment and tracking of children's skills are secure and this aids a seamless transition to their next learning environment.

There are some opportunities for purposeful learning among families. For instance, some adults gain nationally recognised qualifications in childcare and counselling. However, there are not currently enough opportunities for families. Good care, guidance and support provide well-tailored personal support by centre staff for families, particularly for those whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who are harder to reach. This ensures that there is always first-hand support for families in times of crisis and also in everyday life. Parents are very appreciative of this provision. Parents confirm that the centre effectively targets those most in need. There are some striking examples of how the centre has provided a lifeline for families in need. One parent accessing family support said, 'I cannot

thank them enough for all their help and support.' Another who participated in a behaviour management course commented, 'I now feel in control and, finally, I feel like the parent.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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

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

**3**

The relatively new management team provides a clear structure. Performance management is linked to improvement planning and local needs. Staff are regularly supervised under the new system. They are well supported by the leadership and management team and report that they feel able to pursue professional development opportunities to help improve their practice.

Self-evaluation is largely accurate, informs planning, and includes contributions from some, but not all, of the centre's partners. However, data are not always used effectively enough to ensure that all targets set by the local authority are sufficiently challenging, specific or easily measured. The new governance arrangements, satisfactory and improving outcomes, developing provision and secure leadership and management demonstrate that the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Appropriate attention is given to the promotion of equality and diversity. Inclusion of more target families is a key priority for the centre and latest data clearly show a rise in user engagement, particularly among target groups. Outreach work identifies families and individuals whose circumstances make them vulnerable and provides high quality support. The centre offers each child a personalised programme based on individual need that incorporates all aspects of health and well-being. Parents of disabled children value the support on offer and feel fully included. One parent explained, 'It is nice to be able to meet other parents with similar issues.' The centre celebrates various events such as Chinese New Year that reflect cultural and religious diversity and this helps the largely White British community to develop an awareness of other cultures.

Staff encourage users to evaluate informally the activities they enjoy. The advisory board does not have parents or users as members and so they do not contribute fully to the development of the centre's work and help shape services.

Safeguarding is given high priority. Staff receive regular training and feel confident to identify and deal with issues such as child protection and domestic abuse. Records regarding the recruitment and vetting of staff, including those for Criminal Records Bureau checks,



meet statutory requirements. Staff are familiar with all policies and procedures and risk assessments are detailed and cover all centre activities. The building and outside environment are immaculate, secure and well maintained. Staff liaise with several different agencies to ensure that they provide as much guidance and support as possible to users, particularly those in target groups and with disabled children. Effective links help staff provide early intervention and support for domestic violence and also encourage users to seek help for emotional issues. Valuable links with the community drug service enables people in the reach area to attend support sessions at the centre.

Integrated service delivery is at the heart of the centre. Consequently, the centre is eager to build on partnerships to meet its core purpose. Staff are always keen to work alongside colleagues from other agencies such as health, in order to provide worthwhile experiences and opportunities for users. Similarly, the effective partnership working with childminders and other early years' providers helps children to make good progress from their starting points in their learning and development.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

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| <b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>                          | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>                    | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>      | <b>3</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>3</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>3</b> |

## **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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the St Helen Auckland Children's Centre on 17 and 18 October 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for making us so welcome at your centre. We enjoyed meeting some of you during sessions and also over lunch. Particularly warm thanks to those of you who made a special trip to the centre to talk to us about your experiences. We considered your views when we made our final judgements about the impact of the centre's work.

The very clear message that you gave us, both verbally and also in the evaluations you complete about centre activities is how much you value the centre and the support the staff provide for you. It is evident that the centre is one of the first places you turn to in times of crisis. Many of you have individual stories to tell about how the guidance and support provided by the centre have helped you to get through difficult times and to approach new experiences with greater confidence. We were privileged to hear some uplifting stories. Thank you for sharing them with us.

Like you, we found the centre to be a place of safety and support. All the staff provide consistently good care and guidance to all users, regardless of background or individual need. You are certain that whether your needs are emotional, financial or physical, you can put complete trust in the staff to work tirelessly alongside you to help improve your situation.

Staff are conscientious about making sure that they follow all the right procedures to ensure you and your children are properly safeguarded. This is the case whether you are at the centre, at outreach points, or at home.

We found that outcomes for you and your children are satisfactory overall. You all have a good understanding of how to stay safe which is very important for everyone's well-being. We were pleased to see how well children in the area are learning and developing, particularly in their language and social skills. Although there is a lot of information and support available to new mums about breastfeeding, the numbers who start to breastfeed and then continue for several weeks are still too low. So, we have asked the centre to work better with health professionals to increase this.

Staff are knowledgeable and help your children to make good progress through well-chosen activities that support their communication, language, social and physical skills. There are some inspirational individual stories about how well the centre has helped some of you to move on through college courses and to take up interesting and challenging work

opportunities. However, there are too few adult learning courses to help you to develop greater financial security through employment. We have asked the centre to improve this.

There is a range of partnership work which is increasing as the centre comes to terms with the new structures across the centre. There is a strong history of staff and professionals from other organisations working well to meet individual needs. However, the sharing of data remains a difficulty. We have therefore asked the local authority, the advisory board and centre partners to work more closely to ensure that data is shared, and analysed so that targets for the future are clear.

You enjoy attending the good range of activities available at the centre and around the reach area at outreach points. 'Active Babies' and the trips are certain favourites and you are able to give feedback to the centre staff about what you have enjoyed or would wish to change. At the moment though, this feedback relates to individual activities. The advisory board, which helps staff to plan for the future, is still new and currently there are no parents involved. We have asked the centre to get some of you on board so you can play a part in its work and make sure that the centre continues to provide exactly what you want.

We are grateful for your involvement in the inspection and we wish you every success for the future.

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