

Inspection report for Tudhoe Moor Children's Centre

Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	383470
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	113991 Tudhoe Moor Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY270579 Jack in the Box Day Care

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 centre staff, representatives of the local authority and the healthcare trust; a wide range of external professionals with whom centre staff work in partnership, one group of childminders and a focus group of parents. They also spoke informally with parents attending activities with their children.

The inspectors observed the centre's work, visited activities at the healthcare centre and Tudhoe Moor's linked children's centre, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Tudhoe Moor Children's Centre is a phase one centre which was designated in April 2006. It operates within the district of Spennymoor and is situated five miles south of the city of Durham. The area has suffered significant economic depression since the decline of the local coal-mining and manufacturing industries. The centre's reach covers two local authority wards and includes six Super Output Areas which are among the 30% most deprived areas in the country. More than half the centre's potential users live in areas designated as among the 20% most deprived nationally. The vast majority of families are of White British heritage. Many families are challenged by social disadvantage, unemployment, drug and alcohol misuse, domestic abuse and low basic skills. Almost one quarter of families is dependent on workless benefits. Children's skills on entry to early years education in the area are generally below those expected for their age.

The centre is managed by the local authority, with governance provided by a recently re-established advisory board. In September 2011 a new One Point system was established throughout the area. Under this arrangement Durham County Council works together with County Durham and Darlington Foundation Healthcare Trust to provide integrated children's services for those aged from nought to 19 years. Tudhoe Moor Children's Centre is now part

of the Ferryhill Hub area which comprises six children's centres. It is separate from, but works closely with, Middlestone Moor Children's Centre, with many services provided on a rotational basis between the two centres. It provides the full core offer through centre-based services along with intensive one-to-one and home-based support. Health-based services are largely delivered at Spennymoor Health Centre, one and a half miles from the children's centre, although a child-health clinic runs weekly on site. The centre achieved the Investing in Children award in May 2011.

The centre shares its site with Tudhoe Moor Nursery School which offers nursery provision, flexible childcare, breakfast and lunch clubs for children aged three and four years. Privately run childcare provision for up to 40 children aged under eight years also operates on site. It is open 51 weeks a year between 7.30am and 6.00pm, Monday to Friday. The nursery and childcare provision are fully integrated. Neither of these provisions formed part of this inspection but reports of their last inspection can be found on the Ofsted website.

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

Tudhoe Moor is a satisfactory children's centre which shows clear signs of improvement. The great upheavals of the past year, which included an almost complete change of staff, have led to some disruption in services but, as one partner professional said, 'Although it's not quite where it was, it is beginning to improve.' The numbers of families with young children who have contact with centre staff are increasing. This includes families identified as potentially the most vulnerable. However, although those who attend the centre's activities greatly appreciate its work, as yet too few potential users benefit from the centre's services, particularly lone parents and male carers. Similarly, although the outcomes for users are satisfactory overall, the centre is not having enough impact on reducing levels of obesity, reducing smoking in pregnancy or on improving the economic stability of a large enough number of local families.

The care, support and guidance provided for individuals are of good quality. Comments such as, 'I would be lost without the centre. My family worker offers practical help and support

for me when I'm having a difficult day', confirm the valuable work carried out by centre staff. Suitable safeguarding arrangements ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults. Users commend the 'family, homely atmosphere' and praised in particular the warm and helpful welcome extended by those on reception who, 'if they don't know the answer to a question, will always find out and ring you back.' Parents confirm that 'everyone is welcome' at activities and that, for example, male carers and grandparents regularly attend Twinkle Time.

Hard work by leaders over the past year has established clear staff roles, lines of accountability and supervision. The new staff team is enthusiastic and united with a clear determination to improve the confidence and prospects of local children and families. The centre does seek users' views and adapts activities according to these but, at all levels, staff's evaluation of the impact of the centre's work is not sufficiently rigorous to identify with precision what is working particularly well or where the weaker areas are. The available data are not fully accurate or detailed enough to demonstrate the usefulness of the work carried out by this centre. The work of the advisory board is at a very early stage of development without an independent chair or representative from among users.

One staff member commented, 'The fog of the reorganisation is starting to lift', and many other staff and partner professionals confirm that effective relationships are becoming established, with increased sharing of information. The clear evidence of sustained improvement over the past six months demonstrates that the centre is on the right track and has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the rigour with which the centre evaluates the impact of its work, tracks the progress of those using its services and uses the information to guide its planning.
- Increase the proportion of those living in the reach area, particularly lone parents and male carers, who regularly use the centre's services.
- Improve the effectiveness of the centre's work by:
 - working with health partners to reduce levels of obesity in children at Reception Year and the proportion of women who smoke during pregnancy
 - working with education partners to increase adults' access to courses and training aimed at improving their, and their families', economic well-being.
- Increase the effectiveness with which the advisory board supports the centre and holds it to account by:
 - establishing an independent chair
 - increasing the involvement of parents and centre users
 - ensuring that the information provided to aid members' decision making is based on accurate data.

How good are outcomes for families?

'Coming to sessions has given me the chance to socialise and I can also see a positive influence on my children.' Comments such as these exemplify the value of the centre's work. Parents speak about the increased confidence they have gained through the initial one-to-one support provided by family workers that encouraged them to attend sessions at the centre and then broaden their horizons. They praise the support for breastfeeding, which has helped increase the proportion of those in the locality who continue to breastfeed their babies at six to eight weeks from 20% to 25% over the past six months. Work across the locality has also encouraged 10 mothers in the Spennymoor area to train as peer breastfeeding counsellors. Mothers with older babies also say that they have learnt a lot from weaning courses about, for example, the amounts of salt and sugar in foods. With this information, mothers confirm they are now better informed when preparing solid foods for their babies. However, work to reduce obesity in young children or the numbers of women who smoke during pregnancy is not yet having enough impact, with both these figures well above national levels.

Families using the centre say that they feel safe there. Appropriate arrangements ensure that only those with suitable cause have access to the building. Members of the local safeguarding team state that the information that family workers provide enhances discussions and decision making when using the Common Assessment Framework. They also praise the centre's flexibility and willingness to support supervised contact between family members for those children subject to child protection plans and in the care of the local authority. Centre staff's referral of two-year-old children to childcare provision contributes positively to their safety, helping to ease emotional stress within the family as well as improving children's skills. The headteachers of more than one nursery which local children join comment that those who have attended activities at the centre, or its associated childcare provision, demonstrate better developed skills on entry to nursery than other children. The proportion of local children achieving the expected level of skills for their age at the end of Reception has risen from 34.6% in 2009 to 52.98% in 2012. Reducing the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest remains a continual priority for the centre and the local schools.

Those attending the centre behave positively and form good relationships. Children are inquisitive and confident to explore new activities; they concentrate suitably when, for example, mark-making or completing a jigsaw, and soon learn to take turns. Parents of disabled children and those with special educational needs are delighted by the way that, after attending both special and universal groups, their children increase, for example, their willingness to make eye contact or their tolerance of loud noises. Users' views are encouraged and acted upon leading, for example, to changes in the timing of sessions but few have contributed to the Parents' Voices forum and none of the centre's users are members of the advisory board. This inhibits the ability of users to contribute to the development of the centre's services in order to ensure they are relevant to the needs of all members of the local community.

In the recent past successful courses such as parenting or basic English and mathematics skills have run to support users' progress towards improving their economic well-being. Some, including young parents whose attendance at school has been sporadic, have moved on to college, university and employment, boosted by the initial steps taken under the wing of centre staff. Currently no such courses are available. Centre staff are extremely helpful about signposting users to possible courses elsewhere and large displays advertise local job vacancies but there is little hard evidence to show the impact of the centre's work in this area.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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

How good is the provision?

3

The rotation of services and activities between the town's two children's centres ensures that potential users have equal access to them. Some families take part in 'everything that they have on offer' but this is less easy for those without transport. Data show that, in particular, contact with lone parents and male carers remains low. The centre organises activities according to both strategic and local need. For example, the recent opening of the baby-cafe was part of an area-wide push to increase breastfeeding rates but it was sited at the health centre in response to parents' comments that this central position makes it more likely to attract users. Through the centre's outreach work, including promotion by midwives, health visitors and others who come into contact with families with young children, information about events is suitably distributed in order to attract interest from those who are more difficult to reach. Successful targeting of young parents means that all families in the area are contacted regularly even if they do not wish to participate in activities. Staff are very flexible in their delivery of the programme to support those experiencing domestic violence, willingly providing sessions on a one-to-one basis wherever the individual feels safest.

Sessions are purposeful and enjoyable. Staff plan them according to users' previous learning and ensure that they are designed to develop children's skills in all areas of development. Courses such as those teaching basic first aid lead parents to make comments such as, 'If an accident happened I would be more confident now', but only two thirds of those who signed up for the most recent course completed it. Users evaluate sessions and comment how they have helped them and their children. For example, one wrote, 'My little boy's speech seemed to be delayed but since attending Outdoor Explorers he is starting to make sounds and attempt words.' However, centre staff are at a very early stage in tracking the progress of children or adult users and using the information to target future activities.

The good-quality care, guidance and support offered by all those at the centre contribute to the creation of its welcoming, positive environment. Family workers build up a strong rapport with those they support and are adept at tapping into the services provided by others which can lead to, for example, swifter access than usual to counselling or speech and language support. Both users and partner professionals praise the patience shown by staff when nurturing and supporting those identified as especially vulnerable, using words such as 'they never give up, giving extra and extra, going back and back again.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The clear management systems that are now in place provide a steady foundation on which to build improvement. Staff have good access to supervision and this is suitably linked to further training. This, in turn, is targeted so that staff develop different skill-sets to avoid duplication. Training related to safeguarding is regularly renewed, as are checks to ensure staff's suitability to work with children and vulnerable adults. As a consequence, staff are suitably alert to possible safeguarding issues and demonstrate that they know what actions to take in time of need. Partnerships between different professionals are developing in the light of the significant restructuring of services across the area. There is a very evident willingness to strengthen the awareness of what different agencies can provide and a determination to work together in families' best interests. Throughout the changes, the promotion of equality and diversity has continued. Sessions to support disabled children and their families have remained providing, in the words of one parent, 'essential help for not just the child but parents also.' This demonstrates the centre's commitment and promotion of inclusive practice even though it only has regular contact with just over half of local families.

High-level agreement about access to, and the sharing of, information between county and health staff is too recent to have yet had an impact on improving this for front-line staff. Inconsistencies between data have made accurate analysis difficult to achieve but, even acknowledging this, the centre's systems to evaluate its effectiveness are not yet sharp enough. This reduces the centre's ability to identify areas of particular need and take swift action to promote improved outcomes for a larger number of those living in the reach area. The newness of the advisory board and its lack of an independent chair mean it is not yet effective enough at holding the centre to account for its actions. The value placed by users on the centre's work, combined with evidence of improvements in, for example, the skills of local children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and staff's flexible approach to delivery of services indicate that the centre provides satisfactory value for money. The words of one parent, 'Without the continuing support of staff at the centre I would be a much less confident parent. The service they offer is amazing', clearly show how those who use the centre benefit from its services.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.	3

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

When making their judgements, inspectors took into account the most recent report of Tudhoe Nursery School, which was inspected in March 2012. The childcare provision has not been inspected since February 2009.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Tudhoe Moor Children's Centre on 24 and 25 October 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much to all who spoke with us and helped us to understand how you feel that the centre benefits you and your families. It was heartening to hear your praise for how the centre staff have helped you to, for example, keep on breastfeeding when you might otherwise have given up. We also heard how baby massage sessions have helped you to soothe your babies at home and to solve one baby's problem with wind. Others of you commented on how activities have encouraged your children to communicate more. All of you praised the good-quality care and support that staff give you, and their patience in helping you to develop confidence and find ways around any difficulties that you encounter.

We know that you find both the sessions at the centre and the home visits useful but we also know that, at the moment, relatively few local families make use of the centre's services. So we have asked staff to find ways to attract more users to the centre, especially lone parents and male carers. We know that a dads' group has started recently and we hope that you will help staff to persuade more men to attend the next session or to come along to the other sessions that are open to everybody.

We have also asked the staff to improve the ways in which they measure the usefulness of the activities they deliver, in other words to gauge how well the centre's work is helping to improve the lives of local families. We know that staff take account of your suggestions about, for example, changing the times of sessions but it is a pity that the Parents' Voices group is so small and that none of you are on the advisory board. This means that at the moment local people are missing out on the opportunity to have a say in what happens at the centre. We have asked the centre to involve more of you in doing so. We have also asked it to make sure that the advisory board is led by an independent chair.

We are well aware that all the recent changes to staffing in the centre and wider area have been unsettling for you and also for the staff themselves. It seems that the leaders at the centre and for the wider area have now managed to iron out most of the uncertainties so the centre staff can focus fully again on providing the range of services that the Tudhoe area particularly needs. We have asked the centre to concentrate, in particular, on reducing levels of obesity in young children and reducing the numbers of parents who continue to smoke when expecting a baby. We have also asked them to improve the opportunities available to help you get onto training courses and into employment.

It was a pleasure to meet you and your children. Once again, thank you for helping us with the inspection. We offer you our best wishes for the future.

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