

Inspection report for Marine Park Children's Centre

Local authority	South Tyneside
Inspection number	384004
Inspection dates	14–15 November 2012
Reporting inspector	Rachael Flesher HMI

Centre leader	Karen Pippet
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Marine Park Primary School 108675
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Marine Park Children's Centre Daycare EY415094

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Early Years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, the advisory board and the local authority.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Marine Park Children's Centre was designated in September 2004 and is a Phase One centre. It is situated in the refurbished Jane Fry Family Centre building next door to the health centre at Flagg Court, in the Woodbine Estate, in the town centre of South Shields. The centre's Early Years provision is situated approximately a three-minute walk away on the site of Marine Park Primary School. It is one of four children's centres in a cluster sharing the same 'access to services for children and childcare co-ordinator', responsible for day-to-day management and provision of service delivery, and 'reaching families co-ordinator' who is responsible for the delivery of outreach services and family support.

Currently, 555 children below five years of age are living in the centre reach area. Of these, approximately 23% live in one of the 5% most deprived areas in the country, 15% live in one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country and 62% live in one of the 50% to 70% most deprived areas in the country. The majority of families is of White British heritage. Approximately 34% of families are from minority ethnic groups and English is an additional language for almost all families. Of these families, 54% are from the Bangladeshi community.

Families living in the centre reach area often face issues of income and employment deprivation, barriers to housing and services, domestic violence, crime and substance

misuse. The majority of families in the area lives in social and rented housing. Approximately 146 children under the age of five years are living in lone-parent families and 24% of children are living in households dependent on workless benefits. On average, 9% of families benefit from the childcare element of working tax credit.

The majority of children enter Early Years provision with skills below those typically expected for their age, particularly in relation to communication and language and personal, social and emotional development.

The centre is governed by the local authority and has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, parents and partner professionals. This advisory board represents all four children's centres in the cluster. The centre also has a parents' network.

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

Marine Park Children's Centre is a good centre overall. The centre is truly established at the heart of the diverse community it serves. Staff and services are highly valued by users and partners due to the positive impact they have on meeting the needs of, and improving the outcomes for, vulnerable families. Families using the centre receive good, tailored support and guidance particularly in times of crisis from caring, approachable and dedicated staff. The centre regularly consults with users, ensuring that they are positively contributing to making decisions regarding the centre and services, resulting in high user satisfaction. Consequently, the centre has successfully engaged with 61% of families from the reach area and 76% of these are those with circumstances that make them most vulnerable and in most need of support and intervention. Centre staff have been particularly successful in engaging with the often hard-to-reach Bangladeshi community.

Children are making good progress from their often low starting points due to the early intervention and support provided by centre staff. Parents are supported in understanding how to promote their children's learning and development through play, during centre

activities and in the home. However, systems for tracking, monitoring and readily demonstrating the impact of the centre's services and activities on the learning and progress of children are not fully developed.

The centre's safeguarding policies and procedures are robust and embedded among staff and effectively promote the safety and welfare of children and adults. This is further enhanced by the very good information-sharing and referral processes between partners and the centre. It ensures that the right support is provided swiftly to families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable.

The centre's leadership and management team evaluates the centre's effectiveness well overall and is consequently aware of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. They set appropriate priority targets that link back to those set by the local authority. However, not all the centre's targets are precise enough to measure and demonstrate fully when the centre has been successful. The centre has good capacity to improve further based on what it has accomplished so far.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve systems for tracking and monitoring the impact of the centre's services and activities on the learning and progress of children to better demonstrate:
 - children's achievements and readiness for school
 - the rate at which the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest is being reduced.
- Refine action plans by ensuring that all targets for improvement are precise, measurable and have clear success criteria.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Current data show that 39.3% of children in the reach achieve at least 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 and language development. In comparison, nationally, 64% of children achieve this good level of development. Nonetheless, the centre can demonstrate that children, particularly those for whom English is an additional language and those with starting points below those typically expected for their age, are making good progress. Centre staff and partners are working with the majority of families with children who are at risk of not reaching their full potential, particularly families from the Bangladeshi community, to promote children's learning, progress and readiness for school. They support parents to understand and value the importance of learning through play, both through centre services and at home. They also effectively promote the development of children's English skills. In addition, in partnership with the childcare provision and school and through the centre's school-readiness project for vulnerable two-year-olds, they are ensuring that those who may achieve less well are supported to develop their skills and are well-prepared for school. As a result, the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Profile and the rest is rapidly narrowing and stands at 39.9%, although above the national average of 30.1%. However, the centre does not have robust systems in place to demonstrate readily the impact the services and activities are having on the learning and progress of children, for example, through observational assessment.

Users state they feel safe at the centre and their children are safeguarded. A good range of interventions is provided by centre staff and partners, for example, first aid and child safety training, home safety advice and smoke alarm installations by the fire service. As a result, there are few hospital admissions for intentional and unintentional injuries. Good partnership working and the effective systems for assessing users' needs, making referrals and intervening early are having a positive impact on outcomes for children, including all those subject to Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes, looked-after children and children subject to a child protection plan. Staff intervene swiftly to support families in partnership with professionals and, as a result, 96% of these cases have been de-escalated down the continuum of need. This has also resulted in many of these families being empowered to know to ask for help before situations escalate to crisis point in the future.

The centre provides a range of activities and services to promote healthy outcomes for families and more families report they have taken up healthier lifestyles. The most up-to-date available data state that approximately 7% of children in Reception Year at school are classed as obese which is below the national average of 9.4%. The centre positively promotes breastfeeding and the health visitor and centre staff run a highly valued and well-attended breastfeeding support group and weekly baby drop-in session. As a result, more mothers are sustaining breastfeeding their babies at six to eight weeks and beyond. This has increased year on year to 37%, although below the national average of 47%.

Those seeking suitable employment and volunteer opportunities receive good support with many achieving good outcomes. In addition, over a third of parents accesses training opportunities, resulting in very good retention, completion and progression rates. A broad range of advice and guidance is provided to families, particularly the most vulnerable, by centre staff and partners organisations such as the 'community entrepreneur' project. Families receive help with budgeting, debt, credit and loan advice, and are enabled to access all the benefits they are entitled to, resulting in improved economic stability and independence.

The centre routinely seeks the views of users through a range of consultation exercises and uses these to shape services and ensure that they are meeting their needs.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2

The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a safe, warm and welcoming environment. Staff are highly regarded by families and partners and are skilled at identifying the needs of families. They intervene early to ensure that families receive the personalised support they need to improve their outcomes and prevent situations reaching crisis point. Intensive targeted work with families who are often the most vulnerable, is highly successful in improving their outcomes and caring staff provide good support and guidance. As some parents stated, 'it's been a real life-saver', 'my life is positive after the support' and others said they had formed much-needed friendships and received support from other parents.

Staff consult with families and partners meaningfully. They ascertain what services those families identified as in most need of support and intervention and from target groups, need and want. Provision is matched accurately to the needs of families and enables and empowers them to achieve good outcomes. Staff rightly focus on moving families on as appropriate to avoid them becoming over-dependent on services, and support them to make progress. Services are well-attended and users reflect the diverse community the centre serves. The centre has been particularly successful in engaging with, and improving the outcomes for, families from the most deprived areas and minority ethnic groups. As a result, the majority of families is engaged in centre services and activities.

Provision to help children learn and develop is good and parents are developing a good understanding of how to support their child's learning at home. Children have very good access to a well-resourced indoor and outdoor learning environment. Group sessions provide a range of adult-led activities following on from observations of children's interests from the previous session. Parents report these groups are having a positive impact on their children's progress stating, 'As a bilingual family my child was a bit late with her speaking, but now she is developing well', 'The group has given me a really good idea of a range of activities to do with my child at home that I would never have thought of', and 'it encourages me to do more messy-play activities at home.' A good range of family and adult learning opportunities is provided and is attended well. Those for whom English is an additional language are supported very well to develop their English skills to a range of levels to suit their abilities and needs.

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
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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.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The senior leadership team and centre staff are passionate about the centre's work and morale is high. Good partnership working arrangements are well-established with a wide range of professionals ensuring that services are integrated well and cohesive. The centre has seen a significant rise in the number of referrals received for centre services, particularly from social care. This demonstrates an increased confidence in the good quality care, support and guidance provided through centre services. A good proportion of families is engaged in centre services and the gap between families from key target groups and the rest is narrowing. The centre is also successfully breaking down cultural and religious barriers to access, particularly with the Bangladeshi community.

Safer recruitment procedures are followed and all relevant checks are made to ensure that all staff, partners and volunteers are suitable and safe to work with children. All staff receive good quality child protection training and are very confident in their role to safeguard children. Protocols and practices for sharing information between agencies are very effective. Risks are thoroughly assessed and minimised, ensuring that the environment is safe.

Staff work very well together as a team and feel supported and valued by leaders and managers. Good professional supervision and management arrangements are in place to monitor the performance of staff and ensure their safety, well-being and professional development. Reflective practice is embedded among the team and staff are fully aware of the need to demonstrate the impact they are having on the outcomes for families. The centre leader is also held to account on the centre's performance and is supported well by managers. The centre's priorities for improvement are appropriate, challenging and realistic, although some lack precise enough detail for the centre to be able to measure fully and demonstrate their success readily.

Currently, the advisory board is made up of a range of community members and partners who appropriately support and challenge the cluster of centres it serves, including Marine Park. However, the local authority and subsequently the children's centre, are going through a time of change with some current roles being deleted and redesigned, with staff being required to apply for the posts. The children's centre is very soon to become a stand-alone centre with its own centre leader and advisory board rather than a shared leader and advisory board with three other children's centres in the cluster as at present. There will be a new, independent chair and vice-chair appointed in January 2013 and the local councillor will also sit on the board. During these turbulent times, staff remain committed to their roles and passionate about improving the lives of the families they serve. Staff are effectively

deployed and the centre services, activities and space are utilised well by the diverse community it serves, securing good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which 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	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.	2

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

The findings from the most recent inspection of the centre's linked Early Years provision, and local primary schools and local Early Years provision were used to inform the judgements made during this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Marine Park Children's Centre on 14 and 15 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection. Like you, we found your children's centre to be welcoming and friendly. Your children and families are safe when using the centre and staff are swift to intervene early with any safeguarding concerns to

ensure that children are safe and families are fully supported. You receive good care, guidance and support, particularly when facing times of crisis as some of you told us, 'it's been a real life-saver', 'my life is positive after the support' and others said they had formed much-needed friendships and received support from other parents.

Caring and dedicated staff are knowledgeable about your community and the families they serve. They are enthusiastic and committed to improving the outcomes for your families. They have worked hard to establish the centre at the heart of the diverse community it serves. Staff also work very well with other professionals to ensure that your families get the right support when you need it. Your centre also gathers and listens to your views about what your families need most. As a result, services and activities are matched to your needs and are successfully encouraging many more families to use them. This is particularly the case for those of you from minority ethnic groups and with circumstances that make you most vulnerable. This ensures your centre provides good value for money.

Over a third of families in your area is from minority ethnic groups, predominantly from the Bangladeshi community, for whom English is as an additional language. Due to cultural and religious beliefs and practices, some of these parents do not understand the importance of play to support children's early learning and development and help prepare them for school. In addition, a high number of families using the centre is from deprived households. As a result, many children begin to attend the centre with skills well below those typical for their age. Staff and partners are working hard to identify and support these parents and children early, to ensure that children develop their skills to enable them to be ready for school. As a result, the gap between the lowest-achieving children and the rest is narrowing. However, the centre cannot easily demonstrate the impact it has had on children's learning and progress.

Your centre has a good understanding of what it does well and what it needs to do to be even better and sets targets accordingly. However, these sometimes lack precise enough detail for the centre to be able to measure fully and demonstrate their success readily. Your children's centre has a good capacity to improve further the outcomes for families living in your community and to continue to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest. It does so with great determination and dedication.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

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