

# Inspection report for Footsteps Children's Centre

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Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	404529
Inspection dates	21 - 22 November 2012
Reporting inspector	Nora Waugh

Centre leader	Julie Peacock
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Ochil Terrace Billingham Stockton TS23 2QL
Telephone number	01642 528841
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	Julie.peacock@stockton.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Footsteps Nursery EY368378

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:** December 2012

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Piccadilly Gate  
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Manchester  
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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre and the local authority, front-line professionals, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners. Partners included health practitioners, the service manager for fieldwork from social care, a representative from Prior Pursglove College, the manager of a neighbouring centre, the home safety officer and a representative from the library service.

Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key safeguarding information, the centre's self-evaluation, performance monitoring and planning and a wide range of case studies and evaluations of individual activities.

## Information about the centre

Footsteps Children's Centre is situated in Billingham on the east side of Stockton-on-Tees. The community of Port Clarence is also within the reach area. Billingham is a mainly industrial town surrounded by large chemical plants. There are high levels of unemployment and low paid work. Footsteps Children's Centre is a phase one centre. There is an active advisory board and a dedicated manager. Governance is through Stockton-on-Tees local authority.

The centre provides the full core purpose of services, working closely with Pentland Primary School with which it shares a site and with High Clarence Primary School. Some outreach services are delivered from both schools. Footsteps Nursery is in the same building and offers full-time childcare provision and early years education. The linked childcare provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The report of this inspection is available on

our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). A small team of early years workers, a parenting advisor, a community development worker and customer care staff are based at the centre. They are co-located with a range of services from the North Tees and Hartlepool Foundation Trust including health visiting, midwifery and speech and language therapy. Other partners include the Citizens Advice Bureau, Prior Pursglove College and Tees Achieve who all deliver services from the site. As part of a recent restructure the former home visitors have been moved into the social care team as family workers and are no longer based in the centre.

The reach of the centre is currently 593 children aged under five years with 72% of these living in the 30% most disadvantaged areas. Currently 34% of children live in households dependent on workless benefits. Traditionally the area is of mainly White British heritage with very few families from minority ethnic groups. A small number of Polish families moved into the area a few years ago but recently the number has dropped significantly. Children enter early years provision with abilities and skills well below those expected for their age.

## 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

Footsteps Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre which is improving and in which there are significant strengths in some of the services offered to families. Priority is given to safeguarding ensuring that all checks and systems, including safe recruitment of staff and regular training are in place. 'Child Protection at a Glance' cards are carried by staff and are effectively enlarged and displayed in all rooms. This ensures that the procedure and contact details can be swiftly accessed. Information about keeping children safe and healthy is thoughtfully woven into adult courses and activities, which reinforces its importance. Parents are able to access useful advice and low cost safety equipment to enable them to make their homes safer. Support for children with circumstances that make them vulnerable is underpinned by strong partnership working. The recent restructure of the centre has moved the home visiting team out of the centre and into the social care service to focus more directly on high level preventative work. Integrated work is well established and support for families is continuing to be tailored to their needs.

Learning opportunities are good for both adults and children. The recently appointed manager has wasted no time in improving the opportunities for adult learning and both accredited courses in basic skills and those that will directly improve employment prospects are currently running. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these courses but they have been popular and so far, retention rates are good. Crèche facilities are available to make it easier for parents to attend these courses. Groups for children such as, 'Little Explorers,' are very popular.

Parents like the centre and are very grateful for the support it offers them. 'Everything is well explained here and it's friendly' and, 'If this hadn't been here when I had my two I would have been lost' were typical of the comments made. Parents feel valued and consulted and are right to do so. Activities, such as the accredited adult learning courses, were added after consultation with parents. However, at the moment very few parents are involved in the governance of the centre. The team has taken action to establish a family forum but with little success as yet.

The centre has undergone a significant restructure recently and many of the systems and protocols in place are very new. The advisory board is well established and offers appropriate continuity. A wide range of partners are involved and it works satisfactorily to the benefit of the whole community. However, members appear less confident in challenging leadership. Although performance management systems to provide strategic direction for service delivery have been developed by the local authority, they are yet to be fully implemented. Currently, the available data are not used well enough to support the centre's ability to evaluate provision, inform target setting and future planning. For example, targets have not been set to address the low rate of sustained breastfeeding and the high number of mothers smoking throughout pregnancy.

This is an inclusive and welcoming centre. There is evidence that staff are in contact with most teenage parents, children from minority ethnic groups and with the majority of children from other target groups. However, data are not being used routinely to ensure services reach all of those in most need.

The manager and her team are enthusiastic and want to do their best for the families in the reach area. Although performance management systems and the use of data to support improvement are in the early stages of development, the recent actions taken have improved provision. In addition, there is a clear sense of purpose in this centre and everyone knows what they need to do. As a result, this gives the centre a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Link performance management more effectively to the strategic direction of service delivery.
- Improve the use of the data available to:
  - support the centre’s ability to evaluate provision
  - assist in the setting of challenging targets for improvement
  - ensure all target groups are fully engaged in centre services
  - improve the rate of sustained breastfeeding and reduce the numbers of mothers who smoke during pregnancy.
- Strengthen the work to develop a family forum and increase the involvement of parents in decision-making and governance of the centre.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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Health staff are co-located in the centre and everyone works to promote healthy lifestyles for children and their families, but with limited impact on health outcomes, which are satisfactory. Breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are currently at 26.3%, an increase from 21.9% in 2011 but still well below the national average of 47.1%. The centre itself is breastfeeding-friendly with quiet, comfortable areas available for feeding baby. An active support group meets weekly and an ante-natal breastfeeding initiative is just starting in the area. Smoking is actively discouraged and groups such as ‘Family Health’ go into detail about the potential risks. Signposting to smoking cessation is then available but 18% of expectant mothers are smoking at full-term, which is well above the national average.

There are courses to encourage healthy eating and informative support materials available. This has had some impact as the percentage of children identified as obese at the end of the Reception Year at 9.8% is similar to the national average. Some aspects of healthy living are good. Immunisation is actively promoted and rates for children under one year are at 98%. ‘Tiny Teeth’ promotes dental health well. Detailed health data have only been available comparatively recently and the use of it to help direct services is just beginning to develop.

Everyone’s safety is important in the centre. The building is safe and secure and resources are bright and cared for well. Monthly courses add to the advice and resources available relating to home safety. Guidance covers the wide range of risks, including fire hazards and dogs. Robust policies and training are in place to ensure the safety of staff. The Common Assessment Framework process is used well from an early stage to ensure that the necessary support is available for those who need it. Case studies show the variety of support available and its success in helping families to move forward, particularly those subject to a child protection plan and looked after children.

Group activities which promote children’s play and learning are of good quality and increasingly targeted at narrowing the achievement gap between the most disadvantaged children and the rest. For example, ‘Play at Pentland’ sessions are specifically designed for children before they start nursery and are delivered in partnership with the school. The school has recognised that these sessions make a significant difference in supporting children’s transition and parents are positive about this. For example, ‘It’s great for children, they enjoy singing songs’ and ‘It gets them ready for nursery’ were similar to other comments made. The early years team make detailed observations and track children’s progress carefully in this and other groups. Children who regularly attend the crèche are effectively supported by key workers.

Parenting programmes are also targeted to those in the greatest need although a shorter behaviour management course is available on a self-referral basis. Support for developing skills for the future is satisfactory. Accredited courses are designed to improve employment opportunities. The centre is working hard to replace the advice sessions previously delivered by Jobcentre Plus and to improve opportunities for volunteering but at the moment the support for employment opportunities is mainly by signposting to other services. Parents feel valued and are very positive about how their ideas are taken on board. Currently, there is one parent on the advisory board and no formal way for parents to contribute to the governance of the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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

<b>3</b>
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There is a satisfactory range of services, activities and opportunities available at the centre. Most families are registered and the majority have contact with the centre. ‘Tell Us Once’ is allowing the centre to have information about new births in its area on a regular basis and this is being used to proactively encourage contact. This is relatively new but is beginning to make a difference. The customer care team is welcoming and help everyone access groups

or the information they need. There is a satisfactory balance between universal and targeted groups with an increasing emphasis on targeting those in most need of support. Regular outreach services are offered in Port Clarence and this helps parents in a comparatively isolated community to access services.

Families are given satisfactory care, advice and guidance to meet their needs. Co-location with health partners is effective in enabling professionals to consult with each other informally or to suggest groups and activities that families coming into the centre for appointments could attend. A flexible and thoughtful approach to meeting families' needs is developing. For example, parents expressed concern over the comparatively long Christmas break in adult learning classes, so short taster sessions have been arranged to give them something to go to during the holiday period. A dads' group has made a good start and the centre has planned to have a group for teenage parents by January 2013.

There is a good range of opportunities to promote learning and development. 'Stay and Play' is very popular and the toy library is easily accessible which encourages parents to use it as well. The linked nursery offers good provision and works closely with the centre to support children with circumstances that make them vulnerable, including those accessing funded places for two-year-olds. The centre team are passionate about adults having opportunities to learn and have introduced more classes. Successes are celebrated and parents who have achieved a level one qualification are actively encouraged to move on to level two courses.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>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>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>3</b>

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

**3**

New systems and protocols have recently been put in place as a result of significant reorganisation. Staff work effectively and receive appropriate supervision. Training and development are linked to the centre's priorities for improvement. A thorough performance management framework has been developed by the local authority, but has yet to be implemented. Although service delivery continues to develop, and the manager is supported by her line managers, there is currently limited strategic direction for the work of the centre. This leads to some aspects of the centre's work improving more slowly than they need to. Self-evaluation, the setting of ambitious targets for improvement and value for money are satisfactory. The staff and informally, parents, are involved in evaluating the centre and are clear about priorities but data are not yet used effectively to support this process or to set challenging targets for improvement. Similarly, although the need to concentrate services on



those who need them most is well understood, the available data are not always being used well enough to ensure all families and target groups are reached.

Accommodation is safe and welcoming. Services are well used by a satisfactory range of families in the reach area. Activities and services generally meet their needs. Outreach activities makes services accessible to the whole reach area.

The centre is very accessible and all statutory requirements are met. Promotion of equality is satisfactory and improving. Fathers are encouraged to use the centre and contact data show that the small number who are the main carer for their children regularly use services. Families with disabled children and those with special educational needs tend to use the nursery based at High Flyers Children's Centre which provides an early support service. Diversity is appropriately celebrated in displays and resources. Staff are focused on the priority to narrow the gap for the most the most disadvantaged families and to help them overcome barriers to engaging with the centre.

Good safeguarding practice is in place across the centre. Recruitment and vetting procedures are robust for all staff. The centre is proactive in ensuring training is relevant and regularly updated. All activities are thoroughly risk assessed. There are good protocols for multi-agency working in place which allow families to be supported well. Early intervention and encouragement to be involved in the full range of centre activities is proving effective in helping families stay safe. For more specialist support, including domestic violence, referrals to agencies such as Harbour are effective.

The centre team have particularly good relationships with the local school. Partnerships with health and social care services are secure and underpin the everyday work of the centre. A wider range of partners such as the library service, childminders, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and sports development enrich the activities the centre offers. The Fire Prevention Team contributes to the good work with families on home safety. The Advisory Board are active and interested but only one parent is currently involved, impacting on the ability of the board to reflect the views of centre users. However, parents are appropriately encouraged to evaluate activities and are consulted informally about how they would like the centre to develop in the future.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.</b>	<b>3</b>

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

The childcare provision at Footsteps Nursery was inspected concurrently with this inspection. The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings of this inspection.

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 Footsteps Children's Centre on 21 and 22 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much for helping to make us feel welcome and for letting us share your sessions. The information you gave us, and what we saw happening, has helped us to make our judgements. We also looked at evaluations you had filled in and comments made about activities.

We think the centre is a very safe place for you and your children to come to and that the staff also do well at helping you to keep your children safe in your own homes. We liked the way that 'Child Protection at a Glance' is displayed in all rooms and that all staff are well trained and aware of the importance of the information. There are good displays about home safety throughout the centre such as, being careful with hot drinks. Good advice is readily available to you and is included in many of the groups and activities. You are also able to buy low cost equipment such as fireguards and stair-gates if you need to. Many of you stated that when you need extra help, for any reason, it is there for you. A wide range of professionals work well together to give you the support you need.

We were also impressed by the opportunities for both you and your children to learn and develop further. We know that most of the adult learning courses available have only started recently but they are clearly focused on helping you to gain qualifications and skills that will improve your chances of finding employment. You told us how much you are enjoying them and we know you want them to continue next year. We saw your children enjoying a variety of opportunities to play and learn together and staff carefully plan activities to help them learn further. The centre works well with Pentland Primary School and the transition into the school nursery is much smoother for children who have been part of centre activities. The only critical comment we heard was that you would like to see more groups running.

You are enthusiastic about the centre and value it. We know that you are listened to and that services are being developed to meet your needs. We were told about the consultation event in the summer and how you asked for a dads' group local to Billingham and for the adult learning classes. We saw both happening. However, not many of you are involved in the running of the centre so we have asked the centre to continue with its efforts to establish a family forum.

There have been a lot of changes recently and many of the systems we saw are very new. Your manager and her team have made sure that services continue to develop and that your needs are met but we have asked the centre to more thoroughly evaluate the impact of this work on you and your family. For this reason we have asked the centre's leaders to work with the local authority to make sure that all aspects of the centre's performance are looked at regularly. We have also asked that the centre makes better use of all the information and data available about who is, and is not, using the centre and which activities they attend. This will help with setting targets, such as improving the rate for sustained breastfeeding and reducing the number of mothers smoking throughout pregnancy, and making sure that everyone who needs the services of the centre are able to access them.

Your centre is very welcoming. The customer care team go out of their way to make sure everyone is helped to find the information or activity they need. Many services and activities such as parenting groups are for those who need them most. A lot of what we saw is very new but is already helping the centre to improve the services it offers you and your family.

We would like to thank everyone who spoke to us and wish you all well for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).