

Inspection report for Frederick Nattrass CC

Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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 senior managers, centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including health, education and children's social care professionals. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and the centre's equality and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Frederick Nattrass Children's Centre is a phase two centre situated within the grounds of Frederick Nattrass Primary School in Stockton-on-Tees and was designated in January 2008. It offers a range of services to meet the core purpose which include child health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult education and family outreach services. Currently, there is no childcare provision delivered on site.

A recent local authority borough-wide review, in order to place greater emphasis on targeting the most vulnerable families, has resulted in significant changes to the geographical area served by the centre. These changes have resulted in the centre no longer sitting within the community that it serves, leading to the site not always being the most convenient and accessible centre for some families within the reach area. In addition, the boundary changes have led to some families that fall within the centre's reach accessing other centres that are closer to them. The centre delivers services across a number of ward boundaries and the geographical area consists of eight lower super output areas, many of which are regarded as having some of the highest levels of deprivation.

There are 895 children aged under five years in the reach area with 41% accessing services in the centre. Within the reach of the centre, there are significant issues surrounding mental health, isolation, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, substance misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy. The population is mostly White British with smaller percentages of

other ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. Housing is mostly social or private rental with some small areas of high affluence and privately owned housing. Levels of unemployment are high with 37% of children living in households dependent upon workless benefits. Many of the existing jobs are low paid. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills that are significantly below expectations for their age, particularly in communication and language, literacy and personal, social and emotional development. There are links to the five local primary schools.

The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery at the centre has been the responsibility of Big Life Families, a social enterprise within the Big Life Group, since June 2012. Governance of the centre is provided by Stockton-on-Tees local authority, in conjunction with a partnership board that includes providers, delivery partners and members of the local community. Frederick Nattrass is one of two children's centres run by the manager. Staff work across both centres, with management and administration being located at The Star Children's Centre, while outreach staff are based at this centre.

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

Frederick Nattrass is a satisfactory children's centre which shows clear signs of improvement. Staff morale is high despite the great upheavals of the last six months, which include a change to the organisation overseeing the running of the centre and an almost complete change of staff and reach area. One partner professional said, 'There is a feeling of excitement in the community because they are starting to see things happening.' The numbers of families with young children who have contact with centre staff are increasing. However, although those who attend the centre's activities greatly appreciate its work, too few potential users benefit from the centre's services and activities, particularly lone and teenage parents and fathers. Similarly, although the outcomes for users are satisfactory overall, the centre is not having enough impact on increasing the number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding or on reducing levels of obesity in Reception-age children. Nor is it improving the economic stability of a large enough number of local families through the

promotion and tracking of a wide range of adult learning, further education and employment opportunities.

Parents who attend the centre value the support extended to them, particularly in times of crisis. Comments such as, 'It's been a lifeline and has helped me to move on', and, 'without the centre I would have sunk into depression', confirm the valuable work carried out by centre staff. Suitable safeguarding arrangements ensure the safety of families with circumstances that make them vulnerable. Parents who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe at the centre and that everyone is welcomed by staff who are very approachable and friendly. 'They make you feel part of a family', is a typical comment expressed by parents.

There has been an increase in the proportion of children achieving 78+ scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile which reflects a satisfactory level of development overall. However, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is slowly increasing and the centre does not track children's learning and development in centre activities. In addition, partnership working with local schools and childcare settings to implement programmes for school readiness are still in the early stages of development.

Hard work by leaders over the six months has established clear staff roles, lines of accountability and supervision. The newly established staff team is enthusiastic and united with a clear determination to improve the confidence and prospects of local children and families. The centre adequately promotes equality and diversity and seeks users' views through regular evaluations and a recently formed parents' forum, and adapts activities accordingly. In addition, parents' views are shared with the partnership board. However, due to the many recent changes at the centre, the board is still developing its role, including appointing parent representatives and increasing the range of partners from the local community, which restricts their ability to effectively challenge and hold the centre to account for its work.

The centre manager has quickly and appropriately identified the strengths and areas for development of the centre's work. She has clear plans in place to develop a number of initiatives, some of which have already begun to be implemented. Satisfactory systems are in place for development planning, but the sharing and use of all available data, in conjunction with partners, to set challenging targets is not fully effective. This makes it difficult for the centre to monitor and demonstrate the full impact of its work on improving outcomes for families. However, 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 outcomes by working with partners to:
 - increase the number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding and reduce the number of children who are obese in Reception Year
 - narrow the achievement gap by improving the tracking of children’s learning and development, and develop programmes to support school readiness by working more closely with schools and childcare settings
 - increase the promotion and participation rates in adult-learning programmes, progression into further education and employment, and further develop procedures to track and measure the centre’s effectiveness in this area.

- Increase further the proportion of families and children who regularly engage in the centre’s services and activities, particularly lone and teenage parents and fathers.

- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - strengthening the role of the partnership board, including increasing the range of partners and parents from the local community, so that it can effectively challenge and hold the centre to account for its work
 - improving self-evaluation and development-planning by working with the local authority and partners to share and make full use of all available data to set clearly defined and measurable targets that will help the centre to demonstrate the full impact of its work on improving outcomes over time.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Comments from families such as, ‘It’s gone beyond my expectations, I want others to get the benefit too!’ exemplify the value of the centre’s work. There are sound links with health colleagues and the number of children accessing mainstream health services and the percentage being immunised have increased. There is satisfactory health promotion through leaflets, group activities, displays and from outreach staff. However, at 23.1%, the percentage of mothers who continue to breastfeed their baby at six-to-eight weeks is well below the national average of 47.7%. Family exercise sessions such as ‘Funky Feet’ and discussions about weaning and healthy eating are beginning to develop parents’ understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle for their whole family. However, data show that the percentage of Reception-age children who are obese has remained stubbornly high over the last three years and currently stands at 14.7%, which is higher than the national average of 9.5%.

Families using the centre say that they feel safe. Staff provide parents with appropriate safety advice to help them gain a better understanding of how to keep their children safe both at home and when out in the community. For example, parents praised the monthly

safety sessions and access to reduced-cost safety equipment and first aid courses. The outreach staff have a clear knowledge and understanding of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and how to use this effectively to target specific tailored support for looked after children and those subject to a child protection plan. Early intervention work helps prevent some complex situations from accelerating for families. A typical comment from a parent regarding the impact of individual support was, 'They have been really supportive and helped me a lot, without them my family would have struggled.'

Data show that the percentage of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with at least six points in each of the scales for personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy has increased from 42.3% in 2011 to 48.8% in 2012. However, the achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is slowly increasing from 26.1% in 2010 to 29.5% in 2012. The centre is aware of this but programmes to improve children's transition to school, run in conjunction with local schools and other early years providers in the area, are in the early stages of development. In addition, the centre does not currently track children's learning and development to measure the impact of its work in this area.

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, exploring a tray of sawdust, and soon learn to take turns. Users' views are encouraged and acted upon leading, for example, to changes in the names of 'stay and play' sessions. The newly formed parents' forum is very keen to share ideas on how to improve the services provided to their community. However, although users' views are shared with the partnership board and the results fed back, there are currently no parent representatives who attend these meetings. This inhibits the ability of users to ensure that decisions made about the centre's services are relevant to the needs of all members of the local community.

Adults have access to a satisfactory range of courses which help develop their basic knowledge and skills, such as specific programmes for promoting parenting skills and literacy and numeracy courses. However, only a small minority of adults gain relevant qualifications and there is limited evidence of the active promotion of, or increased participation rates in, a wide range of adult learning programmes and progression into further education and employment. In addition, the procedures to track and measure the centre's effectiveness in this area are in the early stages of development. The centre is keen to encourage parents to take ownership of the centre and to support their own community. As a result, they have started a volunteer programme, with the first group just completing their training.

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

Overall, parents and children receive a satisfactory quality of care, guidance and support. The centre offers an appropriate range of outreach services and activities which support users who attend to socialise with others in the community. For example, parents enjoy attending the 'Giggle Tots', 'Wiggles and Giggles' and 'Sticky Kids' groups which promote early learning through fun and active play sessions. At 67%, registration at the centre of children aged from birth to five years is slowly increasing with 41% of these currently engaged with centre services. However, the number of lone and teenage parents and fathers participating are lower than other groups.

The midwife and healthy start clinic sessions are well used and the midwife team and outreach workers work cooperatively to offer families appropriate advice and support to help with their young children's needs. Resources throughout the centre are of good quality. A satisfactory range of literature, some in different languages, provides parents with valuable information about sexual health and domestic violence helplines.

Parents who attend the centre confirmed the inspectors' findings and told them that activities are interesting, give them confidence, help support their children's learning and appropriately promote their parenting skills. Those wishing to find employment are appropriately signposted to the Jobcentre and plans are in place to offer both an employability and a confidence-building course in the near future. A programme of family learning courses is tailored to meet some users' needs. Attendance is satisfactorily monitored but the systems in place to track adults' progression into further education or employment are underdeveloped.

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.	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Since taking over the management of the centre six months ago, the manager, supported by Big Life Families, has established clear management systems to 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 skills to avoid duplication. Training related to safeguarding is regularly renewed, as are recruitment and vetting 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.

Governance is supportive and the partnership board is keen to act as a critical friend in supporting the work of the centre. However, the newness of the partnership board means it is still developing its role, including extending the range of community partners and parents, which restricts their ability to effectively hold the centre to account for its work. Day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood. There are clear links between the centre's evaluation of its services and the priorities set out in its development plan. However, work with the local authority and partners to share and make full use of all available data to set clearly defined and measurable targets that will help the centre to demonstrate the full impact of its work on improving outcomes over time is limited.

Throughout the changes, the promotion of equality and diversity has continued and the centre's procedures meet all requirements. Most staff speak confidently about families' differing cultures and their growing understanding of known barriers which prevent some families from engaging with the centre's services. Families with disabled children, and those with special educational needs, are encouraged to attend the various play sessions where outreach staff support their individual needs. Those with more complex needs are signposted to other dedicated support services. Good support is provided for some families experiencing domestic violence or mental health issues, although only a minority are accessing these beneficial services. The value placed by users on the centre's work, combined with evidence of improvements in, for example, the volunteer programme, and the flexible approach of staff to the delivery of services, indicate that the centre provides satisfactory 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	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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Frederick Nattrass Children's Centre on 8 and 9 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much for talking to us and letting us come into your sessions. The information you gave and the stories you shared with us helped us to make our judgements. We also looked at the comments you made on feedback sheets and evaluations.

The centre has undergone a great deal of change during the last six months. Despite this, it has continued to provide a safe place for those of you who access the centre. It is somewhere you can be sure of a warm and friendly welcome. The new manager and her team are fully committed to making improvements to the lives of families in the area.

The centre provides you with satisfactory opportunities to engage in enjoyable and purposeful learning experiences. Those of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoy attending the centre. You trust the centre workers and find them very helpful. However, we noted that only a small percentage of families are registered at the centre and attend

regularly. Therefore, we have asked the centre to look at ways to encourage more local families to access activities and benefit from the services that it provides for you, particularly lone and teenage parents and fathers.

The number of mothers choosing to continue to breastfeed their babies is low. We have asked the centre to work closely with its health partners to ensure those of you who choose to breastfeed are given effective support and advice. You told us you particularly enjoy the 'Funky Feet' sessions and groups such as 'Wiggles and Giggles', 'Giggle Tots' and 'Sticky Kids' which encourage bonding with your babies and enable you to be more active. Despite these opportunities to increase your physical activity, the number of children in the Reception Year who are obese is high. Therefore, we have asked the centre to work closely with their partners to further encourage healthier lifestyles to help reduce obesity and promote children's healthy weight.

Partnerships are developing and are particularly strong with outreach workers. We have asked the centre to work on improving all partnerships to make sure all services work better together to meet your needs. In particular, to track children's learning and how well they develop, and to work with local schools and childcare providers to help ensure your child is well prepared for taking the next step in their education.

You were positive about the impact of the parenting courses some of you have attended. Some of you told us how you now encourage more positive behaviour in your children with praise and attention. We know some of you have enjoyed the new English and mathematics course and are interested in having important roles with the new volunteer programme which will further strengthen the work of the centre. We have asked the centre to find ways to increase the range of adult learning opportunities available to you and to increase the number of adults who gain qualifications to go on to further training or employment and to become financially secure.

The centre has begun to prioritise improvement in their development plans. However, the sharing and use of all available data with partners, to set challenging and measurable targets is less effective, so we have asked the centre to improve this. This will enable the centre to monitor where it is making a difference and where more work needs to be done.

Some parents are asked to share their views about the centre's activities and you are encouraged to contribute to the decision making and governance of the centre through attending the new parents' forum. However, due to the significant changes in the centre over the last six months, the partnership board is still developing, including encouraging more parents and local community partners to join and as a result this reduces the board's ability to effectively support and challenge the centre in driving improvement. Your centre has been asked to improve this and we hope that some of you will be interested in getting involved in both the parents' forum and the partnership board in the future.

We would like to thank everyone who was willing to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and wish you every success in the future.

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