

# Inspection report for Laurel Avenue Children's Centre

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Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	365689
Inspection dates	23 - 24 January 2013
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Centre leader	Fiona Malyan
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Laurel Avenue Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Laurels Childcare Company

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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 and talked with centre management and staff, representatives of the local authority, health services, local schools and other partner organisations, volunteers and parents.

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

## Information about the centre

Laurel Avenue Children's Centre is located in the Sherburn Road estate, to the east of Durham city centre. It serves Sherburn Road, Gilesgate and the surrounding areas. While some parts of the local community are among the 30% most deprived in the country, others are very affluent. Overall, 20.9% of the children in the area live in households where no-one is working and 44.3% of families are in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children's levels of skill on entry to early years provision is slightly above the local and national average, although there are considerable disparities between schools. The majority of families in the area are of White British background, although there are a small number of families of East European origin and some members of other black and minority ethnic communities associated with the nearby university and hospital, as well as a Traveller community on a local authority site.

The centre occupies custom-built premises adjacent to Laurel Avenue Primary School and Laurel Avenue Community Centre. It was opened in February 2007 and is a phase two centre, providing the full core offer. It is part of a cluster of six centres with a hub at Ushaw Moor and is managed by One Point, a collaboration between the local authority and the local NHS Foundation Trust, through a local advisory board on which there is parent representation.

The linked provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The childcare was last inspected in January 2013 and the primary school was last inspected in May 2011. The reports of both of these inspections are available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## 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

Laurel Avenue Children's Centre provides a satisfactory service to local families. Families who use the centre praise the helpfulness of staff, from receptionists to managers, and say that they are 'brilliant with the bairns'. A particular strength is the effective support provided to victims of domestic abuse, which has been identified as a priority in the area. Safeguarding procedures are good and have resulted in positive outcomes for children identified as being at risk.

The centre has recently suffered from an uncertain future and staffing difficulties, but following the appointment of a new senior lead practitioner last August, it has been reorganised and now provides an improved service. The amalgamation of local authority and NHS Foundation Trust staff into the One Point service took place last year. It results in information sharing and cooperation between professionals working with children and young people up to 19 years and produces positive outcomes for families. The centre has a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

The centre celebrates diversity. The International Group integrates families from a variety of cultures and communities. Families from the Traveller community are offered support on their site.

The centre has succeeded in registering the majority of families in the area, including a majority of fathers. However, few fathers actually access the centre, although those who do value the support that they receive. A survey of fathers is in progress, but very few responses have been received and the centre does not have clear plans to engage them.

Schools have identified that poor speech and language development among children is a problem in the area and the centre has developed the 'Sing Starz' programme which is being delivered in local primary schools. Although it appears from data in one school that this programme has been effective, the centre does not measure children's abilities before and after the programme, so it cannot monitor how successful it has been. Similarly, the centre does not record the progress of children who have received support in other areas, for example through funded nursery placements.

The centre consults with users through a suggestions box and evaluations are carried out after every activity. However, these responses are not analysed and used to inform future planning. Although there is a display of local job vacancies in the centre, there are no current links with Jobcentre Plus. Staff are unable to track whether users have entered employment or training.

The centre has arrangements with a local further education college and some adult education programmes have been delivered, including basic literacy and numeracy, English language, information and communication technology (ICT) and a preparatory course for teaching assistants. However, only a few adults have accessed these courses.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- The centre should take further steps to increase the number of fathers participating in activities.
- The centre should put in place appropriate systems to track the progress of children attending programmes or receiving support.
- The centre should incorporate parents' comments and evaluations of activities into its forward planning.
- The centre should take steps to increase the number of users accessing its adult learning programmes.
- The centre should work to establish links with Jobcentre Plus and should track the progress of families who have been helped into employment or training.

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

<b>3</b>
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Outcomes for families are satisfactory. The involvement of health visitors and other health professionals through the One Point system means that health concerns are identified at an early stage. It is easy for staff to make appropriate referrals. The 'Little Chefs' group introduces parents and children to healthy eating, including discussions about nutrition and practical cookery lessons. The number of mothers who choose to breastfeed is higher than average and is increasing. The centre provides a range of support options for breastfeeding mothers and has introduced a follow-up telephone call to offer further support. Childhood obesity figures are slightly above the national average but are falling.

The centre works closely with local schools to identify families in need of support and uses the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to assess their requirements. Where necessary, various agencies are brought together in a 'Team Around the Child' to provide appropriate services. The One Point system means that staff who work with older children such as education welfare officers and youth workers, as well as health staff, are all involved in the process from an early stage and can consider the needs of the whole family. Only two local children are subject to a child protection plan, a significantly lower percentage of children identified as being in need than in other local centres.

Domestic abuse is a serious issue in the area and staff have been trained to deliver support and assertiveness-training to victims. This has resulted in women having the courage to come forward and request help. The centre works closely with a women's refuge; a health visitor makes weekly visits and families are encouraged to use the centre. Some women have been helped to settle locally and continue to enjoy the support of the centre.

The centre is currently piloting a pre-birth intervention programme for families where previous children have been taken into care. Although this has not yet resulted in a child remaining with its parents, it has improved support for the family during the fostering process. Staff have also completed training to provide parenting courses to fathers serving long-term prison sentences.

The centre works closely with the co-located private childcare provider. Children identified as in need of additional support through the CAF process are offered free places through two-year-old childcare funding. At the request of headteachers, the centre has devised the 'Sing Starz' speech and language development programme which is delivered in local schools. Although this appears to have improved children's communication skills, there has been no formal monitoring of their progress, so the centre is unable to determine its success.

There has been a steady increase in the number of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage with 6 points in all areas of personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. The figures are slightly above the national average. The gap between the highest and lowest achieving children has decreased faster than average. The adjacent primary school confirms that children who attended the centre had higher Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores than their peers.

The centre offers adult education programmes in conjunction with a local college. These include basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Parents who attend the International Group and for whom English is an additional language have been directed to appropriate courses. Some parents recently commenced an introductory course for teaching assistants. However, few parents currently access these courses.

Children behave well, play together and take turns. Parents from different backgrounds develop mutual respect. The centre runs events such as summer fun days in conjunction

with the adjacent school and community centre to bring together residents from different areas who would not normally meet.

The centre is governed by a local advisory board which includes all local headteachers and representatives of partner agencies, including the adjacent community centre. Two parents have been recruited to the board. One parent volunteers at the centre. She is keen to give something back in return for the support she received from the centre during a difficult period.

Details of local employment and training opportunities are displayed within the centre. However, the centre does not have any formal links with Jobcentre Plus and does not monitor which users have gone on to employment or training.

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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>3</b>
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The quality of provision for children and families is satisfactory. The centre has registered the majority of families in its area. All families in the most deprived areas who do not currently access the centre receive a letter and a follow-up telephone call with an invitation to visit the centre and the offer of a home visit. This has resulted in the majority of children under one year using the centre's services this year. However, very few fathers participate, although those who attend describe it as 'absolutely brilliant'.

The centre has identified that families from certain parts of its area will not access the premises and has concentrated efforts into delivering outreach programmes in local schools such as the 'Sing Starz' programme. Where programmes are offered in other children's centres, local families are provided with transport. Baby clinics continue to run in the centre, which means that parents can be offered other services, once in the building.

Families are full of praise for the care and support that they receive from the centre. They say the staff, 'do not judge you' and that they provide individual care and attention. A range of parenting programmes has improved relationships within families; these are supplemented by individual support where necessary. The integrated working fostered by One Point enables family support workers, for example, to request a consultation from health visitors while a family are in the centre, when they might otherwise not have returned for a separate appointment.

In partnership with local headteachers, the centre is developing 'Team Around the School', which addresses the needs of the entire family where the school has identified problems with children of school age. This is already done by the educational welfare officer who is based in the centre and can, therefore, call upon family support staff and health visitors where necessary.

The Citizens Advice Bureau and the local authority housing service both run weekly advice sessions in the centre and handle a range of benefits and financial queries. Families prefer to access these services within a familiar environment.

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>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>2</b>

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

<b>3</b>
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The centre is managed from the One Point hub at Ushaw Moor. The day-to-day running of the centre is in the hands of the recently appointed senior lead professional. He is responsible for local authority and NHS Foundation Trust staff working with children and young people up to 19 years of age. After a period of uncertainty and change, there are now clear policies and lines of management and staff receive monthly supervisions. Staff, parents and partner agencies all feel that the joint working between professionals which One Point fosters has resulted in improved outcomes through efficient information sharing and faster referrals.

Criminal Records Bureau checks have been carried out on all staff and volunteers. Staff are aware of the procedures to follow should they have concerns about a child or family. Because of the particular focus on supporting victims of domestic abuse, safeguarding procedures are well embedded and all staff have received appropriate training. Safety of users is paramount and adherence to procedures has prevented incidents developing. Staff have gained the confidence of a women's refuge and have supported residents to integrate



into the community. Effective early intervention has minimised the number of children who require child protection plans.

The centre promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily. It accurately identifies the minority ethnic communities within its area. It is working with the local authority's Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service to support the Traveller community on its site. The International Group brings together members of other minority ethnic communities, who are helped to access English language courses and encouraged to integrate with other users.

The centre's sensory room is used by a weekly portage group which transports disabled children and their families from across the area. These parents feel well supported and appreciate the helpfulness of all staff, including the receptionists who assist them with their buggies.

The centre consults with users through suggestion boxes and invites evaluations after activities. However, the results of these consultations are not monitored or used to help plan future activities.

The range of professionals and partners who make up the One Point service ensure that a variety of activities take place in the centre. Staff are deployed in outreach work to widen the number of families who can be supported. Management has a clear understanding of where improvement is needed and has set realistic targets to improve outcomes for families. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.</b>	<b>3</b>

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Laurel Avenue Children's Centre on 23 and 24 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We met with some of you during the inspection and spoke to others on the telephone. Thank you very much for giving up your time to speak with us.

You told us that you feel that the centre has greatly improved over the last six months and we agree with you. We can see that the One Point system is beginning to work and that all the staff, whether they are employed by the county council or the NHS Foundation Trust, are working together to give you and your families the support that you need. We also agree that the new management is making a difference to the way that the centre is run.

You told us that you have received good support from the centre and that you feel safe in it. We know that the centre has made a big difference to some of you during difficult times in your lives and has supported you when you have had problems within your family. Staff are hard working and do their best to help you when you have problems.

Centre staff do their best to provide you with the services that you want, where you want them. They go out into the community to bring activities to your schools and community centres. Health visitors and family workers will visit you at home or you can come into the centre for baby clinics and checkups.

The centre is trying hard to get families to attend and has succeeded in bringing in a lot of mothers and children, but there are still very few dads using it, although the dads that do come are very happy with the activities and the advice. We have asked the centre to look at ways of getting more dads involved.

Some of your children have taken part in 'Sing Starz' in their schools, which helps their speech and language, and some schools have told us that they see an improvement. Other children have been helped by being given free nursery places. However, the centre does not keep track of how children are improving as a result of these activities. We have suggested that they start measuring this.

We know that the centre asks you for your opinions about groups and about what you would like to see in the centre. We notice that they do not record this information in a way that would allow them to use it to improve their services to you, so we have asked them to start doing that.

The centre has run a number of courses to help you improve your literacy and numeracy and some of you have been able to take courses to learn English. At the moment, there is an ICT course running and some of you started on a preparatory training course for teaching assistants. Unfortunately, most parents do not take advantage of these courses. We have asked the centre to try to involve more parents in adult learning.

There is a noticeboard in the centre which advertises local job vacancies and some of you may have used this. The centre does not keep records of how many of you have found jobs or gone into training and it does not work closely with Jobcentre Plus. We have recommended that it does both in the future.

Thanks again for your help during the inspection. We wish you 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).