

Inspection report for Middlestone Moor Children's Centre

Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	406958
Inspection dates	21 - 22 March 2013
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Middlestone Moor Primary School URN 131886
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Rainbow Nursery and After School Club EY282940 Rainbow nursery at Middlestone Moore Children's Centre EY453157

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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 the senior managers, centre staff, members of the advisory board, representatives of the local authority and those from a wide range of agencies that work in partnership with the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Middlestone Moor Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2006. It operates within the district of Spennymoor and is situated five miles south of the city of Durham, within two local authority wards that are in the top 30% of the most deprived in the country. This area has suffered significant economic depression since the decline of the local coal-mining and manufacturing industries. It is positioned on a shared site with Middlestone Moor Primary School and Rainbow Nursery and After School Club. The linked provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The school was last inspected in March 2010 and the childcare was last inspected in June 2009. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre delivers the full core purpose through a varied programme of activities and services to meet the needs of children and their families, and by signposting them to other provision in the area. These include; health services, social care, family play sessions and adult services. The centre has undergone changes to the team and management over the last two years.

The centre is now part of the Ferryhill Hub which comprises six children's centres. It is separate from, but works closely with, Tudhoe Moor Children's Centre. Under this arrangement Durham County Council works together with County Durham and Darlington

Foundation Healthcare Trust to provide integrated children’s services for those aged from birth to 19 years. Much of the health provision is delivered through the Spennymoor One Point Spoke. Almost all of the families are of White British heritage. Housing is a mix of privately owned, privately rented and social housing.

There are 535 children aged from birth to five years in the reach area, 79% of whom are accessing services in the centre. Unemployment is 5.4% with 24.7% children aged from birth to four years living in households dependant on workless benefits. In addition, 36.8% live in households accessing the childcare element of the working tax credit. Many families face significant issues in their lives, such as social deprivation, unemployment, drug and alcohol misuse, domestic abuse and low levels of basic skills. Children’s levels of skill on entry to early years provision are typically 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

The effectiveness of the centre in meeting the needs of its wider community is satisfactory, and is steadily improving after a recent major restructure and low staffing levels. The new centre leadership team has quickly evaluated where improvements need to be made and formulated sensible plans for improvement that are now being implemented. The ambition and determination to quickly bring about improvement is shared by the whole staff team, and contributes to an optimistic atmosphere. The centre has focussed its attention on ensuring good quality care, guidance and support to those families most in need. In particular providing tailored support in the home, where families, for a variety of reasons, are unable to attend the centre.

Positive developments have been secured in a short period of time, particularly by improving the number of families who are registered with the centre, including those in the top 30% super output areas. There is however, evidence that there are some families with toddlers who may not have registered with the centre, and other families who are still reluctant to engage with the centre. Recent actions have led to an increase in fathers being more

precisely supported by the centre but this work should be extended to engage more of them.

Safeguarding information is shared with parents and services are provided to satisfactorily support the safety of children both in their home and at the centre. Although outcomes are currently satisfactory they are improving through their work with partners, in particular the wide range of breastfeeding support, counselling services and strong emphasis on speech and language development and tailored support for some fathers. However, further work is needed to ensure health inequalities are addressed. Due to funding constraints, there are few opportunities for adults to access learning programmes that would support their future economic development, and while information on current job vacancies are displayed, work with Jobcentre Plus to improve employability is limited. In addition, the centre no longer delivers activities in the wider reach area, although some of these families can and do access services at centres that are closer to them.

Enjoyable activities, particularly for younger children, such as 'Twinkle-Time' are well-attended. Sound progression onto the next programme provides ongoing support for parents in developing their knowledge on better sleep strategies, weaning and communication and is valued. Parents' commented that they feel safe in the centre and can talk to staff about any worries they have, as well as how good it is to meet other mums. Parenting programmes contribute to improving relationships with their children and in promoting better behaviour. Satisfactory links with the co-located childcare provision provides opportunities for children to access nursery provision with early education funding for two-year-olds, providing some sessions in the centre. However, links with the co-located primary school and other schools in the area are limited and there is no clear strategy for preparing children for their transition to school. Taking all this into account the capacity to improve is satisfactory overall.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance the number of families that engage with the children's centre by:
 - checking if parents with toddlers and older children have missed opportunities to register in the past and taking steps to rectify this
 - developing more provision out in the wider local community
 - increasing the number of fathers engaging in activities.
- Improve the achievement of families and their long-term prospects by:
 - providing access to courses that improve their skills and that they are able to complete successfully
 - improving the centre's partnership with Jobcentre Plus.
- Further develop actions to improve the outcomes for families that will better impact health inequalities.

- Ensure transitional arrangements are in place for children to better prepare them for full-time education through closer links with local primary schools.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Early contact has been appropriately established through midwifery services in providing centre registration information for all new and expectant mothers. Further additional support is provided by healthcare and centre staff in making daily phone calls to provide encouragement and to identify any early issues breastfeeding mothers may have. Initiatives including establishing a breastfeeding 'café' and working towards achievement of the UNICEF award are supporting improvements in those initiating and sustaining breastfeeding. However, the numbers remain low with 33% initiating and 29% sustaining breastfeeding. Emphasis is also placed on smoking cessation in pregnancy and recent information from midwifery services shows small, but significant, successes with mothers stopping smoking in the later stages of pregnancy. Small steps in progress are celebrated and are being used to focus on the promotion of the overall health benefits of these. Support is provided to younger mothers through central services, including opportunities to continue in education or training, and encouragement in attending the centre. Obesity rates for school age children remain high at 10.5%, despite a constant focus on weaning, healthy eating and exercise for families. Further work is therefore needed to improve these health outcomes.

The impact of the centre's work is beginning to improve the outcomes for families, with higher numbers attending sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Mini Movers'. Parenting sessions provide guidance and practical support on clear routines and structures for their children and how to effectively manage their children's behaviour. One parent expressed the views of many saying; 'the support has given me the confidence to move on in my life.' The numbers of children who are subject to a child protection plan in the reach area is small. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used appropriately to deliver a package of support, and centre staff work closely with staff from social services to make sure that children are kept safe. Centre staff successfully support access visits for children who are looked after by the local authority. The views of families are sought through 'Parent Voices' sessions that are held four times a year and present an opportunity for them to express their views and choices on how the centre might improve. For example, one parent had expressed concerns following a choking incident and the centre delivered an infant first aid course, which improved knowledge on what to do as well as confidence should this occur. This information supports future planning and decision making with two parents attending the advisory board.

The proportion of children who reach expectations for their age in their personal, social and emotional development and communication and language skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved significantly, falling just below the national average, and some five points above the local average. However, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest widened slightly. A qualified teacher from the nursery provides support to centre staff in developing their learning strategies with children. However, there

is little contact with the co-located primary school and other schools in the area, to support the transition of children into education. Childminders are well supported by the centre with some of them attending the centre where they are provided with good information and guidance on child development and safeguarding. While programmes provide appropriate development for children there is currently limited access to courses for adults who might wish need to improve their skills. In addition, although current job vacancies are posted in the centre, there are no links with Jobcentre Plus to support adults to progress into work.

Centre staff have been appropriately supported by a speech and language therapist and are now able to provide a strong emphasis on the development of speech and language in the centre. They can identify those children at risk or have need of further support. Through satisfactory use of the decision making pathways they are able to make referrals where needed, providing support while families await one-to-one therapy.

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

Staff are very focussed on providing a range of services that will meet the needs of the families in the area. The quality of the care, guidance and support provided to families is good. As the centre becomes more aware of those families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable, they are also becoming more proficient at assessing needs and tailoring services to meet these needs. Counselling support is effective in addressing personal issues and in building parents' confidence to be able to attend sessions in the centre that further develops their skills in looking after their children.

Partnership working ensures specialist support is provided both in the centre and through one-to-one work with families in their homes. Parents and children enjoy their activities and are pleased to see the benefits from their learning through better behaviour and improved relationships. Services organised through the hub and close working with another centre meet much of the need in the area. However, there are still some families who are hard-to-

engage with, and those living in parts of the reach area that are not fully supported. There are also some slightly older children who are not currently engaging with the centre following the recent changes. Further work is therefore needed to ensure these families have access to good quality services, particularly by developing more provision out in the wider local community and by increasing the number of fathers engaging in activities.

Users report they enjoy the learning opportunities on offer. Activities for children are carefully planned and satisfactorily meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children’s learning is beginning to be tracked and their next steps in learning are well considered. There are some good examples of continuity of care over time, even where changes in outreach workers have occurred.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with the staff team working diligently and enthusiastically to establish better ways of working within the new structure. Staff are well motivated and support each other in their work. The views of the users of the centre and members of the local community have been sought and are being used to inform development planning.

Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and the centre has outlined sensible priorities for improvement, clearly linked to the vision outlined in the planning of all children and young people’s services across the County. Systems of governance and accountability are clear. The centre’s work is appropriately appraised by partners in the local authority. The joint advisory board provides some challenge that relates directly to outcomes for families in the reach area, and is practically involved in supporting community based activities for all families. With the support of the local authority the centre leadership team are ensuring that the centre provides satisfactory but improving value for money.

The centre’s arrangements for safeguarding are in place and practice meets requirements satisfactorily. All staff, including volunteers are suitably vetted, have completed appropriate training and are aware of any safeguarding concerns. Regular supervision meetings take place which provide adequate guidance and support. A handy guide has been prepared for staff to place in their diaries as a reminder of appropriate steps to take should concerns be identified during any situation.

The centre works closely with other agencies, such as health and social care, to make sure that children on the child protection register are safe and cared for well. Some staff have expertise in tackling specific issues, such as domestic violence and the centre is involved in delivering specific programmes designed to empower these users and support their emotional well-being. Work with health partners is satisfactory and improving with a renewed emphasis on early registrations following new contacts and referrals to appropriate programmes that supports their emotional health and well-being. The centre adopts an inclusive approach and is firmly committed to promoting equal and diverse opportunities and provides adequate support for families with disabled children and those with special educational needs.

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

The Ofsted inspection report for Middlestone Moor Primary School and Rainbows Nursery and After School Club provided supporting information about the achievement of children and contextual information about the area in which the centre is situated.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Middlestone Moor Children's Centre on 21-22 March 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We very much enjoyed our visit and thank you for the time you gave to sharing your experiences of the centre. Your views have helped us to inform the conclusions we have made about how well the centre is doing and what it needs to do to improve further. We also talked to staff and other professionals who work with you.

As you are aware there have been many recent developments at the centre. The staff team are now bringing about changes for the better. The leaders know where improvements are needed and have made sensible plans that are starting to make a real difference to the quality of provision in the centre and outcomes for local families. The advisory board is already providing leaders with challenge about the work of the centre within your community and working to support the centre to offer a range of different services.

While the numbers of you who are now registered and working with the centre have increased, we have asked them to improve these rates further and to especially encourage those families who are reluctant to visit the centre to become involved. Some families in the reach area live some distance away and find it difficult to access services, and we have asked the centre to consider how best to meet their needs.

We saw how much you enjoyed the activities for younger children, such as 'Twinkle Time' and 'Mini Movers'. A few of you also enjoyed and valued the parenting programme where support was provided in a friendly way to help you to find solutions to some of the problems you encounter when managing your children's behaviour. There are however, few opportunities for you to develop skills and achieve qualifications that would help in improving your economic well-being and the centre's partnership with Jobcentre Plus is limited. We have, therefore, asked the centre to find solutions to these issues.

While there are adequate links with the nursery and some sessions for two-year-olds are provided in the centre, we have asked the centre to work more closely with local schools to help ensure your children are better supported on their entry into education. We did meet some of the fathers in the centre, and were pleased to hear how the centre is supporting you in a variety of ways to help you gain a greater understanding of your children's needs. We have asked the centre to try to increase these numbers so that more of you benefit from this help.

Outreach workers in the centre are able to provide appropriate advice to parents about how they can keep themselves and their families fit and healthy. Although lower than the national average, rates for breastfeeding are improving. Obesity rates of children at the end of Reception Year remain high and we have asked the centre to try to address this by continuing its efforts to promote healthy lifestyles.

We judged the care, guidance and support provided by the centre as good. The majority of you told us that the centre provides you with valuable personal support, especially when times are difficult. Workers have provided support both on a one-to-one basis and through sessions in the centre that have helped you to manage your situations better. They are also able to provide access to specialist services, such as counselling to help you come to terms with aspects of your lives that cause you pain.

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.