

Sunderland Children's Centre East

Hudson Road Primary School, Villiers Street South, Hendon, Sunderland, SR1 2AH

Inspection date

10–11 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that is inadequate.

- The local authority does not provide the centre with precise, easily accessible and timely data in order for it to plan, target and monitor the impact of its services. As a result, priorities are not sufficiently identified and targets to improve the provision lack challenge.
- The local authority's decision to merge four children's centres into a 'virtual centre' has resulted in there being an inadequate physical presence in the community. Consequently, some families do not know where to go for help and support, and the centre's dispersed provision is not meeting their needs.
- The centre lacks robust systems for registering all families and making certain that they access services. As a result, not enough children and families living in the area, particularly those who would benefit most from support, consistently engage in the services provided by the centre.
- Monitoring and tracking of the progress of children and adults attending services at the centre are not sufficiently developed. As a result, the centre cannot sufficiently demonstrate the difference it is making to the lives of families.
- There is not a broad enough range of groups and activities on offer to engage and sustain engagement from those who need them most.
- The lack of data means that the local authority and the advisory board do not provide sufficient challenge to enable leaders and managers to swiftly improve the centre's performance.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The centre's staff are passionate about their work and work hard to provide services and activities for families.
- There is a very well-managed volunteer programme which impacts positively on adults.
- Effective links with social care partners provide early targeted prevention for those children subject to a child protection plan or common assessment framework processes.
- There are good links with early years providers to support the good childcare in the area. A high percentage of children take up their free entitlement to early education.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with members of the centre leadership team, centre staff, officers from the local authority and a range of partners. These included representatives from health, education and social care. They also met with parents, volunteers and representatives of the Community Local Advisory Board (CLAB). At the time of the inspection the centre coordinator was on annual leave.

Inspectors listened to the views of parents and observed sessions including: the 'Childminder Network' at Diamond Hall Infant School; 'Stay and Play' at Hudson Road Primary School and Valley Road Community Primary School; 'Adult Learning', 'Baby Days' and 'Bosom Buddies' at Grangetown Primary School.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation including the self-evaluation form, action plan, minutes of meetings, safeguarding policies and procedures, and a variety of planning files. Inspectors looked in detail at a number of case files of children subject to child protection plans, those deemed to be children in need and others in receipt of outreach support, including those subject to common assessment framework processes.

Inspection team

Jean-Marie Blakeley, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Parm Sansoyer	Additional inspector
Jackie Hughes	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Sunderland East is one of five children's centres in Sunderland. It covers the south and east locality of the city. It comprises of five wards: Hendon, Millfield, St Michaels, Ryhope and Doxford. This stand-alone centre was previously four children's centres which were merged in 2012 by the local authority, in order to reduce costs. The main site is at Hudson Road Primary School, however there are no Children's Centre staff based on site. The children's centre staff are based in a building which is not a delivery site. Delivery of services is from Hudson Road Primary School and across a minimum of 10 other different venues. The centre delivers a range of services to meet the core purpose, including parenting programmes, play sessions, health clinics, one-to-one family support and adult education classes.

There are 3,300 children under-five-years of age living in the area. The majority of families are of White British heritage, although increasing numbers belong to minority ethnic groups. Of children living in the area, 31% live in workless households. The Hendon ward has the highest percentage of children in poverty of all Sunderland wards. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge generally at or below those expected for their age. Target groups identified by the centre are children aged nought to two years who live in the areas of most deprivation, and teenage parents.

The centre is directly managed by the local authority. It is governed by the Children's Local Area Board which consists of partners, parents and staff. The board feeds into the Local Authority East People's Board.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- The local authority should ensure that the centre has precise, easily accessible and timely data, in order for:
 - the centre to plan, target and evaluate the impact of its services
 - the advisory board and leaders to challenge the centre's performance and set demanding targets for continual improvement.
- Increase the number of families and children using the centre's services, especially those from groups identified as most in need of support, by:
 - ensuring the centre has a greater physical presence in the community so that families know where to go to access services and support
 - improving systems for the registration of families
 - better targeting of services
 - increasing the range of groups and activities.
- Improve the assessment and tracking of children's and adults' progress in order to measure the impact of the centre's work.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The local authority does not provide the centre with sufficiently robust, accessible data in order to identify the families and groups that should be targeted. As a result, priorities are not sufficiently identified and measures to improve the centre, through increasing the numbers accessing its services, lack challenge. An example of this is the failure of the centre to identify and engage with

the high number of children, particularly in one ward, from minority ethnic groups.

- The centre lacks robust systems for registering all families and making certain that they access services. Opportunities to increase registration are missed, for example midwives do not ensure that they register all new mothers and their babies.
- The centre has no hub or children's centre building and lacks a physical presence in the community. Partners' venues are not used to their full potential to attract and sustain the engagement of target families from the most deprived areas. Staff are spread too thinly and services are too dispersed, run infrequently and inconveniently and, as a result, participation rates at targeted sessions are often poor.
- The centre does not adequately track or analyse how many families are regularly engaging with its services. As a result, only a minority of those targeted and most in need of support consistently engage with the centre. The centre has failed to make contact with about one third of families referred to it for support.
- The recently given priority of improving the registration of children aged nought to two-years-old living in the areas of most deprivation is improving the centre's contact with these children. Nevertheless, too few sustain their engagement with the centre's services.
- A high percentage of two-year-old children that are entitled to free nursery provision take this up at good local providers. In addition, most three- and four-year-old children take up their free entitlement to early learning.
- The centre does not have complete data to demonstrate the engagement of pregnant teenagers or teenage parents with services provided by itself or its partners. Data indicate that too few of them are accessing education, training or employment.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Too few families, including those identified as in most need of support, are accessing the centre because the range and relevance of services are inadequate.
- The centre fails to track and monitor the quality and impact of all of its services. Staff do not undertake regular checks on whether what is being delivered is making a positive difference for the adults and children who use its services. As a result, the centre cannot sufficiently demonstrate its contribution to promoting equality of opportunity, improving the lives of families and ensuring more children are better prepared for school.
- The quality of planning and delivery of sessions for children and their families are variable. Although some sessions delivered by well-qualified staff are good, practice is inconsistent as not all staff have appropriate qualifications or experience. Staff do not record children's starting points in order to demonstrate the progress children are making when they attend activities.
- There is an insufficiently broad range of groups and activities on offer to engage, and sustain engagement from, those who need them most. Targeted activities are poorly attended in some of the most deprived areas. Staff do not make best use of existing groups that are used well, such as the toy library, 'Bosom Buddies' and 'Baby Days', to engage families further.
- Not enough families are receiving good care, guidance and support or develop their parenting skills, as too few families engage with the centre. There are few home visits. In addition, the lack of a children's centre base restricts how the centre is able to provide helpful, easily accessible information and signposting to other agencies.
- Strong links with social care staff lead to effective intervention and prevention work, in particular for looked after children, children identified as in need, or those subject to a child protection plan or common assessment framework process. Case files are well managed and supervised.
- The participation of parents in the adult education coordinated by the children's centre is low. Too few learning opportunities are specifically targeted at those identified as most in need. Although a number of parents are signposted to other training providers there is insufficient tracking of their participation and outcomes.
- Obesity rates at Reception Year are reducing and breastfeeding rates are improving, but too many mothers continue to smoke during their pregnancy. Health professionals liaise well with centre staff

but opportunities are missed to increase the impact of these services.

- The well-established volunteer programme impacts positively on its participants. Some parents develop employability skills, improve their self-esteem, gain qualifications and move into paid employment. Parents speak highly of the rapid, individualised response to their requests for work experience placements.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The lack of data from the local authority limits leaders' ability to set and monitor precise and challenging outcomes and performance measures, based on a secure and accurate analysis of the needs of targeted families in the centre's area.
- Self-evaluation and performance monitoring systems are not used effectively to set challenging targets in order to promote rapid improvement of the centre. Key priorities are not sufficiently identified and too few measurable targets are set. Without good access to data, senior leaders do not adequately monitor the quality and impact of services and performance, and cannot demonstrate that targets are met.
- A committed advisory board, including partners, the community and parents, provides support to the centre. However, the lack of robust data limits their ability to provide rigorous evaluation and effective challenge to help drive the centre's continuous improvement.
- The management team realises that current systems, such as the lack of control over access to venues, are restrictive. The systems hinder them from being responsive to the needs of the community in order to plan and deliver activities in ways which meet the needs of families.
- The culture of safeguarding is embedded. Robust policies, procedures and practices are in place and ensure that safeguarding and the welfare of children remain at the forefront of the centre's purpose. The centre works collaboratively and successfully with partners to reduce the risk of harm to children.
- Staff files demonstrate effective supervision by managers and good opportunities for training. Staff receive strong support from managers in relation to case work management. This support helps them to remain passionate about, and committed to, their work.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

East Sunderland Children's Centre

Unique reference number	22985
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	427487
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,300
Centre leader	Gillian Patterson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0191 561 5783
Email address	gillian.patterson@sunderland.gov.uk

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