

Sunderland Children's Centre East

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

Inspection dates	21–22 October 2014
Previous inspection date	10–11 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement.

- The local authority does not always provide data that is easy to interpret and use, to plan services in a timely way. Consequently, while managers understand their locality much better than at the previous inspection, there are still some parts of the locality, such as the numbers and make up of the ethnic minority community, that remain insufficiently understood. This means that families' engagement in centre activities is hard to demonstrate.
- The inconsistencies in the data affect the ability of the local authority and the advisory board to set clear and distinct targets in order to measure progress effectively.
- Monitoring and tracking of the progress of children and adults, while in the process of development, are still not fully in place. The centre is, therefore, still not fully able to demonstrate its impact on families.
- Programmes and activities to enable parents to increase their employability are not fully developed.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Leaders and managers have taken very good actions to re-organise the delivery of services and work more effectively with partners so that the centre can identify and meet families' needs. As a consequence, almost all families are now registered with the centre.
- The centre's staff are passionate about the families in the area and provide enthusiastic and motivational role-models for both children and parents.
- The volunteer programme is particularly good, having a very positive impact on adults and families.
- Partnerships with social care continue to provide good, early, targeted prevention for children subject to child protection plans or common assessment processes.
- The centre continues to use its 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.
- The advisory board has a good range of very active members who understand their locality well and use their collective skills well to drive improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- The local authority should ensure that the centre's data is produced in an easily accessible, consistent format that allows the staff to:
 - have confidence in the reliability of the data, particularly the calculation and definition of engagement in the locality
 - be able to use the data for trend analysis year-on-year as well as for in-year monitoring
 - obtain the information in a timely way that allows both the local authority and the advisory board to set accurate and challenging targets
 - use service level agreements and commissioning arrangements to gather partner data and intelligence in a speedy and consistent format to set targets and milestones, and measure their progress collectively.
- Use information and data to assess the working practice with parents and the programmes currently delivered for employability. Plan a programme with partners that can show at least a ten percent increase in activity in the next year with in-built agreed measures of impact for parents and families.
- Complete the pilot activities in assessing and tracking of children's and adults' progress, evaluate and refine them, and apply them universally so that staff can measure the impact of the centre's work accurately.

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 two additional inspectors and one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, the leadership team, centre staff, officers from the local authority and a range of partners. These included representatives from education, health, social care, Connexions and the voluntary sector. The inspectors also met with parents, volunteers and representatives of the Children's Local Area Board (CLAB).

The inspectors visited a number of community venues and observed sessions including: the 'Childminder Network' at Diamond Hall School; 'Storytime' at the Salvation Army Hall in Millfield; 'Bosom Buddies' in the Serendipity Café; 'Baby Days' at Grangetown Primary School; 'Stay and Play', the Toy Library and an adult mathematics class at Valley Road School; and 'Time for Rhyme' and an infection control adult education course in Hudson Road.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the annual conversation, action plans, minutes of meetings, safeguarding policies and procedures, and a range of planning documents and files. Inspectors looked in some 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 (CAF) processes.

Inspection team

June Cramman, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jackie Phillips

Additional inspector

Eileen Grimes

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 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. The main site is at Hudson Road Primary School. There are no children's centre staff based on site, however, the team is based in offices a few minutes walk from the school. Delivery is from Hudson Road School and from around five community venues based within the various wards. The centre delivers a range of services to meet the core purpose, including parenting classes, play sessions, health clinics, one-to-one family support and adult education classes.

There are approximately 2,918 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 in the area, 31% live in workless households. The Hendon ward has the highest percentage of children in poverty of all children in Sunderland wards, which is well above national averages. Children enter the early years with skills and knowledge generally at or below those typical for their age. The groups identified by the centre as most in need of its support are: children aged nought to two years who live in the areas of most deprivation, teenage parents, and those from minority ethnic communities.

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.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The local authority has made progress in gathering and using data since the previous inspection, however, this still requires improvement. Managers can now identify the families in their locality and have registered almost all the children. However, the authority has not yet sufficiently identified the families in its area it considers to be engaged in meaningful work with the centre. While it has improved significantly, it is difficult to measure accurately and managers cannot easily assess the impact of the centre's work.
- The centre's work with different target groups varies significantly. For example, almost all teenage parents are reached, however, the centre is less able to quantify its work with families from minority ethnic communities.
- As a result of the centre's much improved work, the vast majority of eligible children take up their funded two-year-old place at an early years setting. There are similarly high levels of take-up for children who receive three-and four-year-old funded places. All of these children take up their place to support their learning and development.
- The passionate and enthusiastic children centre staff know the area very well and have an excellent understanding of the needs of the local families. They provide good role-models to both parents and children. They use their knowledge well with partners to identify and register families in the community with the most significant need.
- Staff target support and advice appropriately and effectively to meet individual families' needs. This has resulted in a large number of families registering with the centre, including a wide range of families from other cultures and backgrounds. Centre staff work hard to further increase participation of those groups where engagement is low.
- The centre appropriately uses venues across the locality, such as schools and community venues, to make sure the range of services is easily accessible. Activities are interesting and appropriate for the age-range of children attending, resulting in them being motivated to learn and actively engaged.

Staff conduct useful home visits in partnership with health workers to reach children from birth onwards.

- Staff are piloting work with partners to track and monitor the progress of both children and adults. These processes are beginning to show some interesting and positive results for those individuals involved, however, they are too early in development to give accurate information across the locality.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The range of services, both those designed to support those with specific needs and those that are open to all, is appropriate to meet the needs of families. Increasing numbers of families, including those in most need of support, are benefitting from the provision. Staff use outreach, including home visits, well to work with families in the area. However, managers are not systematically measuring the effectiveness of the new outreach arrangements by monitoring any subsequent activity and its impact.
- Staff visit settings and activities on a regular basis to check on the quality of delivery and to see if they are making a positive difference to children in the area. Centre staff are working with partners to develop effective tracking systems across the locality though these are not yet fully in place.
- Staff are not able to measure consistently the positive difference they make as data is not always reliable. However, they can see the positive difference they are making with regard to the development of children from the most deprived wards in the area who are now keeping pace with their peers from more affluent areas. Staff and partners have worked tirelessly to achieve this. Unfortunately, the gap between the achievement of girls and boys in some instances, is widening.
- The quality of planning and delivery of sessions for children and families is generally good with children and parents developing skills well. Staff are motivating and knowledgeable, and they stimulate learning in families. They use their skills and training well to engage children and families. They promote equality and diversity well in sessions.
- Information, advice and guidance to families are appropriate. The Hudson Road site, as the 'hub' of the centre, now provides a welcoming environment in which families feel comfortable to ask for help. Parents have had to cope with some change however, as venues across the locality have had to be altered in the last year. Staff use a newsletter and social media appropriately to give generic information, advice and guidance.
- Centre staff give good support and advice to providers of early years care and education to improve their skills. Outcomes for the large majority of children are good.
- Partnerships with external agencies are developing to improve outcomes for families. The increase in breastfeeding and weaning programmes is having a positive effect on families. Partners are working together to combat the rise in obesity levels though this has not had enough impact in the short time since the previous inspection. The partnership supporting teenage parents is good.
- Strong links with social care staff continue to lead to effective intervention and prevention work. Case files continue to be well managed and supervised.
- The volunteer programme is particularly effective. Adults are well supported and are able to access good training. They gain nationally recognised qualifications, good skills and some gain employment.
- However, the centre is not doing enough training, or focussed work generally, with parents to develop their employability.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The local authority has much improved the data it uses to guide centre staff. However, this still requires improvement. Staff now have a firm understanding of registrations in the area but engagement with families is less well-defined. As a consequence, the centre does not have a fully accurate understanding of its impact on all families in the area.

- The lack of decisive defining of families within particular groups also means that the local authority and advisory board continue to have some problems in setting challenging targets for staff. They have compensated for this in the past year by using good local knowledge of groups to direct services but they remain unable to measure progress consistently across all areas of work.
- Leaders and managers in both the local authority and the centre have worked well in the past year to meet some of the main challenges set by inspectors at the previous inspection. They have developed good partnerships, particularly with health, that have ensured accurate and speedy registrations of the overwhelming majority of children in the area. They have led a successful re-organisation of working practice that now ensures that the services meet the needs of the families in the locality.
- Commissioning arrangements with partners are improving with revised contracts, more rigorous monitoring and better measuring of outcomes for families. Provision, such as crèche support for example, is now more fit for purpose and more cost-effective, leaving more resources to use elsewhere. However, partners are still not always giving information and data on the services they supply in a speedy way and this affects leaders' ability to set challenging targets.
- The advisory board responded to the challenge of the last inspection well, holding regular meetings to work on initiatives. Partners within the group worked tirelessly to direct staff and give advice. They organised good training in working with minority ethnic communities. They have worked well with the local authority to deploy resources effectively across the locality.
- Arrangements for self-evaluation require improvement. Managers and staff have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the centre. The annual conversation is used appropriately to provide outside challenge. However, the process does not use periodic milestones to assess the distance travelled by the centre, and targets are not always sufficiently specific or measureable.
- The culture of safeguarding is embedded. Robust policies, procedures and practices are in place and ensure that safeguarding of children remains at the heart of the centre's practice. The centre continues to work well with partners to reduce risk of harm.
- Staff's and volunteers' files demonstrate good supervision by managers and good staff development and training. Staff are well supported by managers and enjoy a culture of respect for all. They are passionate about the work they do. Performance monitoring is appropriate although not all targets are specific or measurable.

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.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	22985
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	447544
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,918
Centre leader	Gillian Patterson
Date of previous inspection	10–11 December 2013
Telephone number	0191 553 7684
Email address	gillian.patterson@sunderland.gov.uk

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