

Riverbank Children's Centre

Gilmour Street, Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees, TS17 6PF

Inspection dates	17–18 March 2015
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This centre is good:

- Close working relationships with key partners have helped the centre to increase the numbers of families that it regularly supports. As a result, a large majority of families identified as most in need of support benefit from the centre's good-quality services.
- Safeguarding practice is well established. Organisations work well together to assess the needs of children and their families. They work hard to keep children safe and improve their life chances.
- An effective, coordinated approach informs families of their entitlement to free early education. Consequently, a high number of two-, three- and four-year-olds take up high-quality nursery places.
- The dedicated staff team aims to support families to give each child the very best start in life. Families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are provided with particular services to effectively meet their needs. One parent said, 'This is our centre, we love it here, they listen to you and give you good advice on what to do.'
- Most adults who attend family learning or adult education courses complete them and go on to further training. A few act as volunteers at the centre.
- Leadership, management and governance are efficient as leaders analyse families' needs extremely well. Good knowledge of the community is used well to tackle identified issues effectively and drive improvement. Leaders know what is working well and where further improvement is required.

It is not outstanding because:

- Too many women smoke during pregnancy and too few choose to breastfeed their babies for at least six to eight weeks.
- Too few children achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Health partners should continue to work closely with the centre to:
 - reduce the number of mothers smoking in pregnancy
 - convince more mothers of the benefits of sustained breastfeeding.

- Work with relevant early years partners and schools to further increase the number of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre cluster manager, staff and key partners. They met representatives from 4Children, the local authority and the advisory board. The inspectors reviewed satisfaction surveys and they took into account parents' views. They conducted one observation of an activity jointly with a children's centre cluster manager.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, such as the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, data and a selection of case files.

Inspection team

Sue Pepper, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Anne Mackay

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Riverbank Children's Centre is a single centre which covers the wards of Mandale and Victoria. The centre delivers family support, health and some adult learning services from a building where families can also access library services and childcare provision offered by Riverbank Childcare. The childcare provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements and this information is available on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/ofsted.

The make-up of the community is diverse in culture and ethnicity. A major housing regeneration scheme has led to families moving in and out of the area. The majority of families are of White British heritage; approximately 20% are of minority ethnic heritage. There are approximately 892 children under five years of age living in the community. The majority of children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge well below those typical for their age.

The majority of families live in areas ranked among the 30% most deprived nationally. Data show that the number of children living in workless households is high and 38% are dependent on state benefits. The centre has identified children living in workless households, minority ethnic groups, asylum seekers, lone and teenage parents as most in need of its support.

The centre is managed by 4Children on behalf of the local authority, supported by an advisory board. A cluster manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of two children's centres.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families Good

- Close work with health partners, who regularly run a clinic from the centre, has helped to increase significantly the engagement of those expecting babies. In addition, almost all families with young children are registered with the centre. This has led to a large majority of children accessing and benefiting from the centre's services.
- The centre was described by one partner as being 'the centre of the community'. It works collaboratively with library services and the linked childcare provider to successfully encourage families to participate in relevant services. Together, they foster good relations and tackle discrimination by delivering a programme of events that attract families to attend their integrated services.
- The diverse needs of the community are well known and understood by centre staff due to close work with a range of community partners. They use effective methods to encourage families to participate in relevant services, including those who may be less likely to do so, such as teenage and lone parents. As a result, at least a large majority of all the families that the centre has identified as most in need of its support access services. The 'Olive Group' runs in partnership with Stockton Migrant Health Team and successfully engages most asylum seekers and minority ethnic families.
- The centre collates information on families, which keeps it well informed of their good attendance and any changing needs. Adults living in workless households are supported to access courses, manage debt more effectively and encourage their children to save. Staff's work in families' homes is effective in making sure that families with complex lifestyles keep engaged until their needs are met.
- Partnerships with the Family Information Service is good. The centre effectively helps to promote the high take-up of funded early education places for all children, particularly two-year-olds.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- While good partnership working is in place with health, resulting in a high uptake of immunisation, other health aspects, such as the number of mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies for at least six to eight weeks, remain stubbornly low. In addition, the percentage of mothers who smoke in pregnancy is above the national average.
- Parents are informed of the importance of regularly brushing their children's teeth to reduce or prevent cavities. A strong promotion is in place to support healthy eating on a budget, and activities such as 'Funky Feet' aid families to enjoy more exercise. This approach is beginning to have a positive effect on gradually increasing the number of children entering school at a healthy weight.
- Good partnerships are in place with schools. Established pre-school nursery groups are helping some children, with low starting points, to be better prepared for school. However, too many children fail to achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Good support is in place to help to improve parenting skills and raise adults' aspirations. Evidence-based parenting programmes help parents to reflect on their own parenting skills. This support is helping parents to understand better how children learn and what they, as parents, can do to manage everyday situations more effectively to improve their families' well-being and lives.
- Adult education and the monitoring and tracking of adult learning are good. Attendance on accredited and non-accredited courses leads to adults gaining qualifications and improved confidence levels. Some parents aspire to become volunteers or they are ready for further education and, for some, this leads to employment.
- Children benefit from good-quality crèche provision and an exciting, challenging outdoor learning environment. Staff use 'Magic Moment' books to monitor children's individual progress and to plan for the next steps in their development. Speech and language services are in high demand, therefore centre staff are trained to help parents develop their children's early communication skills through activities such as the popular 'Stay and Play' sessions.
- Staff use their thorough assessments of the needs of families to plan a range of relevant services that are open to all or to just those families who most need the centre's support in order to reduce inequalities. Parents are well supported to learn how to keep their children safe. They learn the importance of providing children with exciting new learning experiences through training courses, activities such as 'Sensory Explorers', and going out on interesting trips.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Governance, leadership and management arrangements are clear. The local authority, 4Children and the children's centre cluster manager work very well together. Good relationships are evident and professionals share their expertise well to reflect on and maintain the good-quality practice and services. Leaders sensitively challenge each other and monitor how well the centre is closing the gap for children and families.
- Self-evaluation is accurate, aided by improved data on the centre's performance and well-established monitoring tools. Good performance management arrangements are in place that drive improvement and reduce inequalities. 4Children have access to a national development team to further aid staff development. Staff and volunteers report that they are very well supported.
- The experienced staff team members have specific lead roles and are passionate about reducing inequalities. For example, the 'Equality and Diversity Champion' is aware that boys' attainment is not in line with that of girls and staff have developed resources, such as the outdoor mud kitchen which is successfully attracting boys to this fun learning experience.
- Limited financial resources are managed effectively by the sharing of premises and staff resources across several centres. Additional funds have been successfully secured, some through local retailers, to develop planting and growing opportunities in the newly developed garden. In addition, the 'Little Sprouts' group works with families belonging to minority ethnic groups to promote healthier lifestyles.
- A wide range of policies and procedures underpins the centre's good safeguarding arrangements. Staff maintain case files to a high standard. The needs of looked-after children, and those subject to a child protection plan, are well met. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively to

coordinate early support and prevent the escalation of some difficult situations.

- The well-established advisory board has a passionate, independent Chairperson and a range of partners. Adults who attend the parents' forum represent the diverse families living in the community. A parent representative regularly takes their views to the advisory board meetings.
- Staff frequently consult users of the centre on their opinions at the end of sessions, and use their views to analyse needs and shape future services. The 'Listening Ear' and 'You Said, We Did' board further aids parents to share their ideas and they are kept well informed of any changes. As a result, users report that they are highly satisfied with the centre's services.

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 well-being 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	22512
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	454023
Managed by	4Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	892
Centre leader	Ben Chisanga
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01642 673738
Email address	ben.chisanga@4Children.org.uk

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