

Durham - Chester-le-Street Children's Centre Cluster

Gray Avenue, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH2 2EL

Inspection date

20–21 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
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. It is not good because:

- The professional supervision of staff does not routinely ensure that leaders are sufficiently quality assuring and, where appropriate, challenging case files. This results in a potential impact on the safeguarding of children and families.
- Leaders are not making the best use of available data and information to ensure they are identifying all families and their needs from the groups the centre has identified as in most need of support; for example, families from minority ethnic groups. Leaders are not monitoring their engagement and targeting these families sufficiently to enable more to access the centre services and activities.
- Too few parents engage in the volunteering opportunities and there are insufficient formal progression routes to support and monitor parents into further education and employment.
- Attendance of members at advisory board meetings is weak. The expertise of all advisory board members, including parents, and available data are not fully utilised in challenging the centre's performance and driving improvement. The local authority and leaders support and challenge the centre and staff well, securing improvement.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Leaders, staff and partners have made a concerted effort over the last 12 months to work together better and improve the numbers of children and families registered and engaged in centre services, leading to significant improvement.
- Very knowledgeable and skilled staff with early years expertise, work closely with partners to monitor the progress all children make across the range of early years provision in the reach area, and identify any gaps in their attainment. They work very well together to address these gaps resulting in more children making good progress and being ready for the next stage in their learning, for example, school.

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. The centres that form part of this children’s centre group are Bullion Lane Children’s Centre and Pelton Children’s Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty’s Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff, partners, the senior leadership team and representatives of the advisory board and the local authority.

The inspectors visited each of the centres, and other venues where services are delivered through outreach.

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

Inspection team

Rachael Flesher, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Bob Busby

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Wendy Pawson

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Durham Chester-le-Street Children's Centre Cluster is a newly formed children's centre group. It consists of two previously stand-alone children's centres, that have merged and share services, including staff, and one overall leader. The group meets its core purpose by offering a range of services which include health services, family play sessions, parenting courses, adult learning and family support. These services are delivered to families from the children's centre buildings, community venues in the area and through outreach home visits.

In total, 2,177 children under five years old live within the area. The majority of these children live in areas within the 30% to 70% most deprived in the country and there are pockets of much greater deprivation. The number of children attending school that are known to be eligible for free school meals is high. Just over 20% of children are living in households claiming out-of-work benefits and there are 169 lone-parent families. A very large majority of families within the area served by the centre are White British. The target groups identified by the centre are: teenage parents and pregnant teenagers, lone parents, minority ethnic groups, disabled children, disabled parents, fathers and male carers.

The centre group is managed by Durham County Council, specifically the One Point Service. Each of the two centres currently has their own advisory board and parents are consulted through a range of forums. Most children typically enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those expected for their age. Overall, 94% of three- and four-year-olds are accessing their early education entitlement. Of those eligible for two year old entitlement, 76% are taking up their places.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- The local authority and centre leaders must improve safeguarding arrangements by ensuring:
 - sufficient staffing resource is in place to robustly manage the supervision of staff and their case files
 - all case files are sufficiently moderated and audited, and staff challenged accordingly to ensure they are of good quality.

- Make a positive difference to the lives of more children and families from the groups the centre has identified as in most need of support by:
 - making better use of data and information to thoroughly identify the needs of these families, particularly those from minority ethnic groups
 - rigorously monitoring their engagement and targeting those not accessing the centre, to enable more to participate in, and benefit from, services and activities.

- Extend the opportunities for more adults to enhance their economic stability by:
 - enabling more to access and participate in volunteering opportunities
 - working with adult education partners to secure a clear progression route into further accredited courses and onto employment, and monitor this.

- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board in challenging and driving improvement and holding leaders to account for the difference the centre makes to the lives of the most vulnerable families by:
 - increasing the attendance of members at meetings to ensure that the expertise of all members, including parents, is fully utilised
 - making sure that the centre provides clear data and information relating to progress against performance targets.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre has had varied success in engaging with the families from the groups it has identified as in most need of support. It cannot demonstrate that it has established and maintained contact with the large majority of these families.
- The centre is not making the best use of available data and information to ensure all families in their target groups and their needs are identified, for example, families from minority ethnic groups. In addition, staff are not thoroughly monitoring their engagement and targeting these families to enable more to access the centre services and activities to improve their lives.
- Not enough parents are supported by the centre to engage in volunteering or other opportunities to improve their economic stability and support their progress into employment.
- Crèche facilities are often available to families accessing adult learning sessions which parents highly value as this enables them to attend.
- Family support workers provide highly effective support in the home and in the centres to engage families that are hard to reach. Door knocking and leaflet distribution to schools within the reach area, to advertise services and trips, have resulted in increased engagement. Family support is now also offered as a drop-in each Wednesday at each centre. Take-up has been slow but is now increasing.
- Over the last 12 months there has been a drive by leaders, staff and partners to improve the numbers of children and families registered for centre services. Services and activities have been promoted more widely and the community involvement strategy has been successful in seeking the views of the community. As a result, numbers have dramatically improved and the very large majority of children and families are now registered with the centre.
- Partnership working has significantly developed, particularly with health colleagues, resulting in the centre knowing of and engaging with more children and families, including the most vulnerable, through referrals. This has particularly helped to secure high numbers of babies under one year of age and their mothers attending centre activities and services.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Case files are not being monitored and challenged effectively by leaders through professional supervision to ensure all are of good quality. Too many are descriptive and not analytical, limiting the ability to make sound and timely judgements. A new auditing system has been introduced but is not yet proving effective.
- There are insufficient formal progression routes into volunteering and employment. In addition these are not robustly monitored. As a result, the potential of adults is not always maximised and the centre cannot robustly demonstrate the difference that it is making in improving parents' readiness for work or employment prospects.
- The numbers of mother sustaining breastfeeding their babies remain low. The numbers of young children who are overweight or obese in the area are too high. Strong partnership activities have ensured that the good health and well-being of families is improving. The well-attended 'Baby Café' and baby massage and weaning courses, and the general support from family support workers and centre staff, are an invaluable resource to parents. They told inspectors they appreciate the care and support offered by knowledgeable and skilled workers. Focus is now, rightly, on enabling more mothers from the 30% most deprived areas, and groups that the centre has identified as in most need of support, to take up healthier lifestyles.
- In conjunction with education partners and Jobcentre Plus, the centre offers an appropriate range of good quality adult education courses. It also enables parents to make good use of the internet café to promote healthy lifestyles, improve work readiness and promote progression into work. Some courses are well attended and have good retention rates.

- Staff are very knowledgeable and skilled early years practitioners and demonstrate high levels of professional early years expertise. They have developed excellent strategies to identify, plan and provide for the next stages in children's learning and development. They work well with parents to develop their parenting skills to support their child's learning and development at home. This is particularly valued by parents of disabled children. As a result, young children make good progress.
- Staff work closely with partners to monitor the progress children make across the range of early years provision and schools in the reach area, and to identify any gaps in their attainment. They work together with great success to improve the quality of early years provision and narrow these gaps. This results in more children being ready for the next stage in their learning, for example, school.
- The centre actively seeks the views of parents who access the centre and it can demonstrate that it listens to their views and uses this to shape services. Parents who access services show through their feedback and evaluations that they are satisfied with the services and receive good care, support and guidance. Parents told inspectors 'The children's centre is an amazing resource', 'it has made a tremendous difference to me', and, 'I would recommend family support to anyone'.
- Staff promote safety in and around the home to families well. They provide much valued resources to support parents to help to prevent accidents, for example children's high visibility vests. They carry out home visits and have links with housing and other partners to identify any concerns and address these accordingly. As a result, the centre has seen a reduction in the numbers of accident and emergency admissions to hospital of young children in the area.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Systems for professional supervision do not routinely ensure that leaders are sufficiently moderating and auditing all case files to an acceptable standard. In addition, currently there is insufficient staffing resource to carry out this work and ensure all case files are of good quality. This has a potential impact on safeguarding arrangements. Professional supervisions do ensure that regular and supportive meetings take place, which are appreciated by staff and contribute to their professional development.
- Leaders are not robustly monitoring the needs and engagement of those families from the groups the centre has identified as in most need of its support. They are not using this information well enough to target all those who are not accessing the services and activities to improve their lives, in order to enable more to do so.
- The attendance of members at advisory board meetings, both partners and parents, is sporadic and low. As a result, the expertise of members is not being fully utilised and opportunities to provide robust challenge are limited. The advisory boards receive detailed data provided centrally by the local authority and challenge performance accordingly. However, data is not always clear enough in order to monitor and challenge each centre's performance against some of its targets.
- Clear processes are in place for the local authority and leaders to set appropriate targets to help the centre to close any gaps for children and families and reduce inequalities. They monitor and challenge the performance of staff at all levels accordingly. Staff receive good opportunities to share professional expertise among the team. In addition they are challenged and held to account by leaders to ensure they can demonstrate that the services and activities they provide are making a difference to families. A culture of reflective practice and self-evaluation is embedded among staff. This has secured swift improvement over the last 12 months.
- Strong partnership working, and clear and effective policies and procedures, ensure the centre is working collaboratively to support looked-after children, children identified as in need and children subject to child protection plans and Common Assessment Framework processes. This reduces the risk of harm to children.
- Premises are child and family friendly, inviting and welcoming with high quality resources and

activities that are overall used well by families. Families are safe and secure when using the services and activities, and risks are identified and minimised. A range of information is available and notices are displayed to further promote the safety and welfare of users.

- Families contribute well to the decision-making within the centre, particularly through informal means. Children's views are collected through 'smiley-face' questionnaires. Views are acted upon then reported through 'you said we did' monthly newsletters. Effective consultation takes place with existing and prospective users through community fun days, discos, trips and visits as well as through a thorough evaluation of courses and activities.

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 Group details

Unique reference number	80060
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	424856
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,177
Centre leader	Chris Peverall
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	03000 261511
Email address	Chris.peverall@durham.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 20496 Bullion Lane Children's Centre
- URN 22351 Pelton Children's Centre

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