

Durham – Stanley Children's Centre Cluster

Clifford Road, Stanley, Co. Durham, DH9 0AB

Inspection dates

Previous inspection date

29 April–1 May 2014

Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness

This inspection:

Previous inspection:

Inadequate

4

Not previously inspected

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

4

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

3

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This group of centres is inadequate.

- The local advisory board is not fit for purpose, leaders have been unable to secure effective partnership working at a strategic level and the board does not include the active contribution of parents in decision-making.
- Significant local authority restructuring has reduced staffing and weakened the capacity of the centre group to stabilise and improve. Leaders do not routinely quality assure the centres' work leading to some inconsistency in quality, performance and practice across the four centres.
- Arrangements to protect and safeguard centre users are inadequate because policies and procedures are not consistently implemented. There are too many barriers to engagement, information sharing is weak across some partners, such as health and children's social care, preventing contact with some vulnerable children in the reach area.
- Case files are not consistently recorded to a high standard and links between case supervision and decision-making processes are not well evidenced.
- Data and local information are not used rigorously to influence development plans and targets, monitor the performance of the centre group or drive improvements in services. Nor is it used effectively to identify families or target groups who are less likely to use services, assess needs, reduce health and education inequalities or interrogate the level of sustained engagement by families.
- Provision and opportunities for adult learning and volunteering are limited. In addition, participation and progression for parents accessing adult services are not systematically tracked.

It has the following strengths:

- The centre group offers a comprehensive range of parenting programmes which have a positive impact on parents' confidence, skills and ability to promote their children's good behaviour.
- Parents value the range of services available and the non-judgemental approach used by family support workers. Parents receiving one- to-one help describe how they have found the strength to flee domestic violence, settle in a new area and improve the safety and well-being of their children.
- Regular crèche provision provides essential childcare for parents accessing adult learning courses.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve access to services by:
 - using population data more effectively to understand and inform the levels of sustained engagement by families across the reach area and the impact of services they use
 - devising strategies to assess need more effectively and tackle the engagement of harder to reach families and communities
 - increasing the registration and engagement of all target groups including; black minority ethnic families, families whose lifestyle or circumstances make them particularly vulnerable and children subject to child protection and child in need plans or who are looked after.
- Improve the quality and impact of practice and services by:
 - developing opportunities for adult training and volunteer opportunities to improve pathways to work experience, qualifications and/or employment. Ensure that progress for participants is systematically tracked and used to inform the learners' journey
 - developing further, targeted staff support and training to improve the quality of analysis and recordings related to family support interventions and the quality of the action plans designed to move families forward
 - reviewing and implementing revisions to paperwork to ensure that the managers' involvement in decision-making is clearly recorded on all family case files.
- Work with the local authority to significantly improve the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management by:
 - providing a locality advisory board which is fit for purpose and includes the active participation of key partner agencies, particularly local health professionals and parents. Ensure that members to the board clearly understand the role of the board in supporting and holding centre leaders to account for all aspects of its work
 - reviewing the availability and delegation of resources and staff to ensure that all centres in the group meet the needs of families and perform consistently well
 - improve information sharing between the children's centre group, health professionals and children's social care to enhance support and protection to the most vulnerable children
 - review and improve the implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure the on-going protection and safety of centre users
 - improving the collation, interrogation and analysis of data to assess community needs more effectively and target services in communities which are much harder to reach
 - improving the centres' business plan so that all key priorities are grounded in measurable success criteria and contain well-informed targets to reduce inequalities in health and education outcomes in particular, and subsequent pace of improvement
 - establishing rigorous quality assurance procedures by leaders, to improve the quality, consistency and practice across provision, in particular, the services and activities for children in their early years.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the principal family worker and locality manager. They held discussions with senior family workers, representatives from the local authority and members of the Local Advisory Board (LAB). Meetings were also held with some of the centre group's partners.

Inspectors reviewed the written evaluations of the centre group's work and spoke to parents at different times during the inspection. The inspectors undertook joint observations of centre activities with children's centre leaders and staff. They visited all four children's centres that form the centre group and they visited other venues where activities are delivered off site.

They observed the group's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including self-evaluation documentation, the action plan, safeguarding policies and procedures and a sample of case files.

Inspection team

Gillian Bishop, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Wendy Ripley	Her Majesty's Inspector
Anne Mackay	Additional inspector
Jackie Phillips	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Durham – Stanley Children's Centre group was established in April 2013. It consists of four previously stand-alone children's centres that have now merged to share services, including staff and an overall locality manager. Stanley Children's Centre is the central hub for Burnhope, Catchgate and Craghead Children's Centres. Burnhope Children's Centre is co-located with Burnhope Primary School and Catchgate Children's Centre is co-located with Catchgate Primary School. The centre group is affiliated to two on-site childcare provisions; Emerald Nursery and Catchgate Nursery. Separate inspection arrangements apply for both and their reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Services provided by Craghead Children's Centre operate from the Craghead Village Hall.

The Stanley Children's Centre Group is situated in the north of the county. The reach area stretches from Quaking Houses in the south of Durham to Tanfield in the north. The town of Stanley is centred on a hilltop between Chester-le-Street and Consett, and lies south west of Gateshead Borough. The majority of settlements in this area are former mining communities.

The group meets its core purpose by offering a range of services such as child health services, parenting courses, adult learning and family support. These are given to families within the dedicated children's centre, in a range of community venues and through outreach visits within families' homes.

The group has around 2,780 children under five years old within the area, of which around half live in the 0-30% most deprived areas in the country. Within the reach area there are significant issues around unemployment, poor health and education outcomes and domestic violence. The specific target groups identified by the centre group are: teenage parents, fathers, children with disabilities and children eligible for the two-year-old entitlement.

A very large majority of families within the area are White British heritage, with a very small, but growing, black and minority ethnic community. The communities served by the centre group include areas of high deprivation and unemployment. Centre data confirm that 14.8% of children under five live in workless households; 4% higher than the national average. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills below those typical for their age, particularly in their communication and language and their physical development.

Governance of the centre group is provided by Durham local authority through a local advisory board. Services are offered via the One Point Service which brings staff together from Durham County Council and the National Health Service which provides a variety of free advice, support and a range of activities for children, young people and families.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Following a concerted effort, centre data confirms that most families with children under five years living in the reach area are registered with the children's centre group and a large majority of these families have accessed services. Data also confirms that the centre group has engaged the large majority of some of their specific target groups such as, teenage parents and disabled children.
- However, access to services overall is inadequate because the extent to which engagement for children and families has been purposeful and sustained is not known by centre leaders and governors because centre data is not routinely analysed and evaluated. This means that leaders are unable to evaluate the full extent of the work.
- More significantly, centre leaders, managers and the local authority have not identified their target families and groups well enough. As a result, there are missed opportunities to target resources effectively and to support some families who may be particularly vulnerable and most in need of early childhood services and help.
- Consequently, some target groups have been overlooked and not engaged with services. These include, those living with substance misuse and vulnerable families living in local temporary accommodation, a number of children subject to child protection and child in need plans and looked-after children.
- There is a generally good range of universal and targeted services across the reach area, however; significant barriers to engagement still exist in some communities, particularly in the Burnhope Children's Centre locality. Participation levels across groups and activities vary too much with health related provision being most popular, but others such as the 'Dad's Group' and some 'Stay and Play' groups, running for very small numbers of families.
- The take-up of free entitlement for children eligible for three- and four-year-old education funding is good at 95% and has been maintained over a lengthy period.
- The take up of eligible two-year-old places in the Stanley group locality is good and improving at 87%. Systems are in place to assess the needs of these children, place them in good provision and track their development to ensure that they are ready for their next stage of learning.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre group provides a generally good range of universal and targeted services for those who attend, including provision for teenage parents, fathers and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, participation rates vary, there is still a reluctance to engage by some harder to reach families and the needs of some target groups have yet to be assessed.
- Parenting programmes to support children's health, development, well-being and safety are a key strength of the support the centre provides for parents. Parents speak very highly of the centres and the good levels of care, guidance and support they receive. 'I wouldn't have changed things for the better if it wasn't for the centre', states one grateful parent.
- Regular referral and allocations meetings ensure a pathway to early help. Staff work in a sustained, structured and supportive way with the families they know, using a range of highly appropriate interventions with parents and children where domestic abuse is present or has occurred.
- Adopting a healthy lifestyle for parents and children is subtly reinforced through healthy lifestyle displays, practical cooking activities, mini health checks and weaning classes. However, too few health specific targets are set or routinely used to measure performance. Consequently the impact of health related services and the effectiveness of partnership work to tackle health inequalities cannot be effectively measured. For example, obesity levels, although not significantly above local and national averages, continue to increase.
- An extremely successful 'Baby Café' has significantly improved the prevalence of breastfeeding at six to eight weeks after birth. However, despite a measurable increase, it remains around 15% below the rates seen nationally.
- The quality of case files between practitioners is inconsistent. In some, recordings clearly show how

secure assessment links with identified need and targeted provision. Other files do not provide enough analysis or show how parents are currently in agreement with, and engaged in the family action plans. Current supervision arrangements mean that there is little evidence of managers' involvement in decision-making contained on the case files.

- The weekly 'Portage Group' provides children with additional learning needs with a broad and stimulating range of high-quality activities that include a variety of sensory and tactile activities. The session is well planned, structured and supports children's ongoing development.
- Some good quality play and learning provision such as the 'Again Project' and 'Music and Rhyme Time', are helping to tackle very low Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores and improve children's readiness for school. However, the quality, delivery and practice of each session is not consistently good, preventing all children from having their progress tracked, and from receiving high quality learning experiences.
- Success rates for the small number of parents who have accessed adult learning opportunities such as, 'Thrifty Families' and 'Adult Finance' courses are good. Courses tracked have sustained good levels of participation and resulted in accreditation such as, paediatric first aid, basic literacy and food hygiene qualifications. However, too few adults participate in adult learning and volunteering opportunities and leaders do not track the progress of those who have been signposted to other providers.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The leadership, governance and management of the centre are weak, mainly due to a significant local authority review of services which has caused disruption to the management of resources, staffing and strategic oversight. This has severely restricted the development, delivery and pace of improvements.
- Target setting is not sharp enough to secure rigour within the planning and assessment cycle, contact between staff and families in the Burnhope community has been limited and some local need has not been effectively identified.
- The Local Advisory Board lacks representation by parents and key partner agencies such as health professionals, some schools and others. In its current state the board is unable to demonstrate it has the capacity to challenge, fully understand and support the centres' work and secure and drive the rapid improvements the children centre group requires.
- The centre group is unable to demonstrate sufficient improvements following two previous children's centre inspections, particularly in relation to Burnhope Children's Centre which was judged to be inadequate in 2012.
- Despite some intensive support in the last year and improved strategic planning for the future, the level of challenge previously provided by the local authority to the centre group has not been strong enough.
- The locality manager and the principal family worker are thoroughly committed to improving services and life chances for families. However, this new leadership team have not had sufficient time to embed strategic changes as a new centre group or develop strong partnerships and systems to fully measure the impact of its work.
- In the main, staff are provided with appropriate continuous professional development opportunities pertinent to their roles. Staff redeployed into the service from other organisations such as Connections, have received training and support in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage and the learning and development requirements, helping them to develop their knowledge and skills in this area.
- Parents state they feel safe and secure when accessing services and this is reinforced by robust visitor arrangements. The effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) ensures that assessment is effective. As a result, targeted work with families at risk of domestic violence or receiving family support is good.
- Safeguarding arrangements are inadequate because everyday policies and procedures are not

consistently understood or implemented. For example, hot drinks cause a potential hazard to children within some groups, parents do not consistently adhere to mobile phone policies and parent volunteers are left to run groups alone without frequent monitoring. In addition, information sharing between some key partners is not robust enough to enable leaders to be made fully aware of the circumstances and support provided to some vulnerable children in the reach.

- The availability of localised and meaningful data, including health data, is too limited and not used well, preventing the centre group planning and utilising available resources more effectively to address emerging inequalities in relation to health, early years profile scores and engagement across the individual reach areas and communities.
- Staff receive regular professional supervision and some consideration is given to centre priorities and the link with staff performance. However, quality assurance arrangements are weak because managers are hindered from undertaking routine monitoring observations due to the demands on their time. As a result, volunteers running regular play sessions operate differently from other groups run by staff.
- Opportunities for parents to share their views and influence service delivery are valued by staff and leaders. Parental comment boxes are placed within all venues. Parents complete a 'Family Needs Questionnaire' which helps to inform the running of provision and a couple of regular volunteers are helping to sustain some activities in areas which the centres are finding hard to reach.

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.

Centre/Group details

Unique reference number	80330
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	434501
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2776
Centre leader	Allison Underwood
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	03000 266150
Email address	allison.underwood@durham.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20589 Catchgate Children's Centre
- 20847 Craghead Children's Centre
- 20510 Burnhope Children's Centre

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