

Inspection report for Blyth Central children's centre

Local authority	Northumberland County Council
Inspection number	20352
Inspection dates	9–10 June
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

Centre governance	Advisory board
Centre leader	Amanda Peacock
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Blyth Central children's centre 103 Wright Street Blyth NE24 1HG
Telephone number	01670 798 800
Fax number	
Email address	Amanda.Peacock@northumberland.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sure Start Blyth

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 100024

© Crown copyright 2010



Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre and the local authority, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners; Barnardo's, health, community safety and fire and rescue services.

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

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

Blyth Central children's centre is situated in the industrial town of Blyth towards the south-east of the mainly rural county of Northumberland. It serves a community that continues to experience relatively high levels of social and economic disadvantage and is the second most deprived area in Northumberland. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage. The proportion of children aged under-four who are living in households where no one is working is above the national average as is the proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals. The purpose-built centre opened in 2003 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. It is linked to a group of children's centres that form a Blyth Valley partnership. The centre provides the full 'core offer' of services. In addition, several services are delivered on an outreach basis in venues such as schools, community centres, the local library and baby clinics. Governance arrangements have recently changed from a strategic partnership group to an advisory board with a range of members. A new children's centre manager was appointed in December 2009 and an Acting Locality Manager was appointed in May

2010. Early Years Foundation Stage provision and childcare is provided on site at Sure Start Blyth/ Rainbow Play Group and this setting has been subject to its own inspection. The inspection report can be found at www.Ofsted.gov.uk. Most children enter early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age. The proportion of children in local schools deemed to have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

3

Main findings

This well-established children’s centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families. There are a number of strengths including the impact of actions taken to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families, and the care, guidance and support provided to them. Parents report how safe and caring the centre is and they are full of praise of the work of the staff and the activities on offer. The centre’s approach to safeguarding, safe recruitment and child protection is robust and fully meets statutory requirements. Good, successful actions are taken to enable children to enjoy and achieve in their learning and development. Early year’s provision in the centre was judged outstanding at the time of their last inspection and, given their sometimes well-below average starting points, children make good progress during their time in the nursery, Rainbow playgroup and in the outreach playgroup the centre provides.

An additional strength is the impact of the centre’s good partnership working with many agencies to support children and families referred to the centre who are facing temporary or major challenges in their lives. Such joint working is helping to reduce the number of children placed on the child protection register and ensuring vulnerable families access multi-agency support for as long as they need it. Partners such as those from the voluntary sector, social workers, community safety, fire and rescue and health services talk with conviction about the difference their partnership working is making to the lives of children and families in the local community. However, partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and adult education services are less well-developed. For example, Jobcentre Plus does not currently offer any advice and guidance to parents using the centre. This gap is being filled successfully to some extent, by the good work of the Young Fathers Worker from the Barnardos "Lets Work Project" and the part-time Learning and Work Advisor, who support a number of parents, including lone parents, referred to the centre by Jobcentre Plus, into the world of education, training or employment. The centre helps by offering crèche facilities to parents who need childcare while training.

Provision in the centre is satisfactory overall with strengths in the quality of activities provided. These ensure productive, enjoyable learning and development opportunities for children and families alike. It was a joy to see how well the young parents' group related to each other, to the activities on offer and to see the smiles on the young babies' faces as they explored the interesting activities available. A small team of determined outreach workers, the community development worker, language development worker, family support workers, the small but increasing group of volunteer parents, Parent2Parent, and volunteer minibuss driver are helping the centre to increase the number families attending the centre and helping them access activities across the Blyth Valley area. However, leaders are aware that more needs to be done to make sure more local parents and children access all the good things the centre offers. They are also aware that while they gather the views and satisfaction rates of parents using services regularly, and sometimes make changes to services as a result, they would like more families to be involved in helping to determine what the centre provides.

Since her appointment in December, the children's centre manager's priority has been to improve the impact of the centre's work across the local community. The centre's promotion of equality and diversity is currently satisfactory and extending and improving services to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and diverse groups lie at the heart of her vision. She, together with the recently appointed locality manager is harnessing staff commitment to this endeavour; and to some effect. For example, in order to increase the involvement of families from minority ethnic communities and improve services and support to families of, and for, children with special educational needs and/or difficulties, the manager has recently consulted representatives from both groups. Activities are planned for the very near future.

Through regular feedback from parents, evaluation of individual activities, case studies and quarterly self-evaluation, leaders have a clear view of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. They are aware that monitoring and evaluation strategies and the use of data to set challenging targets for improvement are not robust enough and are taking action to tackle this. An advisory board with parent representation has recently been developed and members are fully supportive of the work of the centre. However, the board's and the county's Children's Trust's ability to fully evaluate the impact of the centre's work is limited because the centre does not use management information systematically to evaluate the full impact of its work against the key priorities and targets.

The centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Given the outcomes and current range provision, the centre offers satisfactory value for money and has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the Children's Trust and the advisory board to improve their ability to evaluate the impact of the centre's multi-agency work by:
 - ensuring systematic and accurate management information and self-evaluation records the full impact of the centre's work and helps them to set consistently challenging targets for improvement
 - using information from evaluation to ensure services provided meet the needs of the community, particularly for the most vulnerable.
- Ensure the views of parents and carers consistently contribute to the governance of the centre and to determining and shaping services by:
 - consulting with parents to establish the most appropriate mechanisms to improve their contribution
 - ensuring parents' evaluations of services are fully taken into account when developing provision.
- Work with the Children's Trust to:
 - increase the involvement of Jobcentre Plus in supporting parents into training or employment
 - ensure adult learning education opportunities meet the needs and interests of the centre's users and take full advantage of the good facilities available.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The centre offers a range of child and family services which promote children's and their parents' physical and emotional health and understanding of how to adopt healthy life styles satisfactorily. Collective actions with partners are helping to reduce the proportion of obese children entering reception classes in local schools. Rates are currently similar to that found nationally. Although breastfeeding rates remain low in the area, they are improving. Parents speak positively about the quality of breastfeeding support including peer support from volunteers. They also praise activities such as 'Healthy Share' that are helping them to learn how to make healthy meals for themselves and their children. Smoking cessation classes are successfully encouraging pregnant mums and young parents to give up smoking but rates remain much higher than that found in the county as a whole.

Children are well-safeguarded in the centre and in all other provision. Security at the centre is excellent and underpinned by effective risk assessments that minimise risks both to users attending the centre and those accessing the community based provision. Strong partnerships between the fire and rescue service, health visitors and family support workers have helped to increase the proportion of families using smoke detectors and accessing free home risk assessments; consequently the number of chip-pan fires in the area has reduced significantly. Parents speak confidently about the safety and care provided in the centre. As a result of very good relationships between the centre's staff, children and parents, parents say they have confidence to speak out if any thing should concern them.

The extent to which children and young people enjoy and achieve is good. The gap between the achievement of lowest 20% of children and others, at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has narrowed at a much faster rate than that found nationally. Case studies and discussions with parents show the positive impact that parenting skills courses such as 'Triple P' are having on theirs' and their children's enjoyment, achievements, personal development and well-being.

Children's behaviour is good in all settings. Children relate well to one another and adults provide excellent role models. Children are successfully encouraged to make choices and take decisions in their work and play. For example, in the outreach play group, high expectations from staff ensured that children delighted in choosing activities and tidying away when it was time eat their healthy snack. Effective services for identified families are helping parents to develop positive relationships with their children. Parental evaluations of courses such as 'Parent Factor' for substance misusing parents and 'Horizons', for parents who have suffered domestic violence, show how successfully these courses are in helping to raise their self-esteem, developing their skills and equipping them with confidence to manage their relationships with their children and their personal situations more effectively.

A good range of information to promote parents' pursuit of education, employment or training opportunities is available in the centre. A satisfactory range of adult learning classes are in place such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, which lead to some accreditations. However, not enough use is made of the good facilities available in the centre, or in providing more training that meets the needs and interests of the centre's users.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre meets its core offer satisfactorily. While all provision is of good quality and helping to improve outcomes for children and parents who come to the centre, a significant minority of parents and children, including some of the most vulnerable in the area, are not yet accessing this good provision. Additionally some services in the

area are yet to fully recognise the good activities and support the centre can provide.

Assessment of individual cases is robust, especially for children and families referred to the centre who are then provided with timely, high quality multi-agency support where necessary. The use of assessment to ensure activities are appropriate to the needs of the whole community is less well developed as is the use of the common assessment framework (CAF). This is currently only used to support families of children aged two years who are placed in the nursery as part of a government programme. Some staff say this is having a negative impact on the ability of the centre to always identify and ensure timely and coordinated support to all families in need. The Children's Trust is taking action to increase the use of the CAF to better meet needs across all communities.

Evidence from evaluations of activities, discussions with parents and individual case studies pay tribute to the difference activities and support have made to their own and their children's well-being. Parents say they feel empowered and comment on the tangible difference the centre has made to their confidence, aspirations and achievements as well as their children's progress and development. Celebration of the achievements of all, parents, children, partners, volunteers and employees, is an integral part of the culture of this nurturing and welcoming centre and this adds to the enjoyment of those using services and working here. Good care, guidance and support together with increasingly good multi-agency working ensures registered families access the right kind of support; be it from nurture groups, one-to-one guidance and advice in the centre or at home, family or parenting support, specialist health services, or just to have fun in the increasing range of community 'fun' days and holiday activities the centre provides.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Effective performance management arrangements are in place across the centre. All staff are supported through a coordinated approach to training and development. Regular supervision ensures staff and volunteers carry out their work effectively. At appropriate times, staff also contribute to the centre's self-evaluation processes and future planning. Plans are satisfactorily developed following some analysis of needs within the community. For example, the recent development of services to meet the identified need of parents who are substance misusing and for children and parents who are subject to domestic violence. Although plans have priorities for improvement,

they hold few smart targets and very limited resource information. This makes accurate evaluation of the impact of corresponding actions difficult for managers, the advisory board and the Children's Trust. While there is some congruence between the Children's Trust's priorities and the centre's priorities, accountability arrangements are less clear. In order to improve these arrangements a children's centre improvement partner has been appointed.

A notable strength of leadership is its commitment to develop the volunteer workforce, particularly parent volunteers. They are treated as equals, access training and support and their value is celebrated. A number have successfully moved on from voluntary work into paid work as a result of their experiences. Parents' views are sometimes used to inform developments in the centre, for example, the timing of specific sessions and the development of the Dads' Saturday group. The centre is taking action to increase their involvement and that of the wider community. Community cohesion and celebration of the diversity of the community is effectively promoted through celebration events such as multi-cultural days, 'fun' and 'activity' days.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspection of Sure Start Blyth Nursery and the Rainbow Playgroup has been taken into account when writing about early year's provision and outcomes for children in the report.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected Blyth Central Children's Centre on 9–10 June 2010. As part of our investigations we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff and volunteers who work with you. We have judged that the children's centre provides satisfactory and improving support to you and your families. The centre does some things especially well. For example, the support provided to ensure yours' and your children's safety and well-being and the good quality care, guidance and support offered to you. Children who use the centre are making good progress in their learning and development as a result of the good work and activities that are available in the centre. Parents told us their children really enjoy what they do here.

We found that the centre works very well with other services like health, social workers and fire and rescue services. For example, the number of fires caused by chip pans is reducing due to such work. Parents told us how they have improved safety in their homes following the advice and support provided and that they now have confidence to deal with situations, such as if their child chokes, following the baby lifesaver course. The children's centre offers a number of activities to help the people in your community to improve their health. In particular it has helped some of you to eat a healthier diet by giving you information and advice on what is good to eat and ways to help to get children to eat healthy food. Breast feeding groups and support volunteers have helped mums to successfully breastfeed their babies. Those who spoke to us said how helpful this has been. But there are still fewer mothers in this area breastfeeding their babies than in Northumberland as a whole. Sessions to help pregnant and new mothers give up smoking are working well and valued, but again, the number of people in your community who smoke is still high. The centre is working with partners to improve this. A number of parents are helped to gain qualifications and given good advice on training and employment opportunities. The centre is aware that more help is needed from Jobcentre Plus and adult education services to make sure that more of you can access such activities and advice.

Parents who spoke to us all said how warm and welcoming the centre is and that they love to come to the centre. It is clear from seeing the children that they too

love coming here. Parents were full of praise for the staff and the activities on offer. Many said they view staff as friends. They told us how coming here has improved theirs and their children's lives. We found that the centre is really good in helping people when they most need it. Once families are known to the centre, everyone works together as a team to provide support and help quickly. A small team of outreach workers is helping to encourage more families to come to the centre, to make use of the good activities and to access the good help and support available. However, the centre manager knows that additional action needs to be taken to make sure more parents and children can make use of all the good things on offer.

People in charge of the centre are doing a satisfactory and improving job. The children's centre manager and all staff are determined to continue to improve the centre and to make sure the activities and support they provide for you are based on your needs. Centre staff ask how happy you are with the services you receive through discussions and through evaluation forms and some changes have been made to in response to your feedback. For example, they have recently introduced Saturday dads' group because dads wanted to have more involvement in the centre. This is proving to be popular and dads who talked to us let us know just how much they liked coming to the club with their children. The centre manager would like more parents to be involved in deciding what activities they need to provide. We hope that you will be interested in doing this.

The centre has recently changed the way in which decisions are made about its work and the services it provides. An advisory board, with parent representatives is now in place. However, the ability of this group to properly understand how well the centre is doing in improving the lives of you and your families is limited. This is because the centre's reviewing arrangements are not strong enough. We have asked the centre to make sure actions are in place to improve this.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us, we are very grateful for your help and we wish you all every good wish for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.