

Inspection report for Redcar Coast Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Redcar and Cleveland |
| Inspection number | 361093 |
| Inspection dates | 23–24 June 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Wendy Ripley HMI |

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| Centre governance | Advisory Board |
| Centre leader | Christine Richardson |
| Date of previous inspection | N/A |
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| Linked school if applicable | N/A |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Sunshine Day Nursery |

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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 held meetings with senior managers from the centre and the local authority, parents, members of the Central Locality Advisory Board and a number of partners including HomeStart, Jobcentre Plus and health and social care practitioners. They also observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation form and development plan, case studies and the wide range of individual evaluations the centre holds about the quality and impact of the services provided.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

Redcar and Cleveland's 12 children's centres operate as part of the local authority Integrated Family Support Unit within the Directorate of Safeguarding Children and Families. The centres are managed by the Principal Officer Sure Start and Early Years. A Service Development Manager and an Information Strategy Officer support the work of all 12 centres. The centres are managed through three localities: East, Central and West. This locality model aligns the centres strategically with other local authority and health service provision.

Redcar Coast sits within the Central locality along with Redcar, Dormanstown and Marske children's centres. These four centres are managed by two children's centre managers and an extended senior leadership team that includes the Early Years Teacher, coordinators for Early Learning Development and Community Development,

the Family Support Worker, and a Senior Support Officer. The manager with responsibility for Redcar Coast has been in post since April 2010.

Redcar Coast children's centre is located in Redcar town centre. It is in close proximity to a health centre, job centre, social care and council offices, the library and the sea front. Redcar continues to experience relatively high levels of social and economic disadvantage. At the time of the inspection 830 children aged 0-4 years were known to be living in the area. Of these children, 72% reside in an area ranked in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country and 28% live in households where no one is working. Nearly all families are of White British heritage.

The centre first opened in 2002 as a Sure Start Local Programme operating out of St Peter's church. It moved to the purpose built centre it now occupies in June 2004. The centre provides the full core offer of services. Governance arrangements are through the Central Locality Advisory Board.

The centre's full day-care provision is delivered by Sunshine Day Nursery which is housed in a separate building in the immediate locality. Sunshine Day Nursery has separate inspection arrangements to the Children's Centre and was last inspected in February 2010. 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 expected for their age. The proportion of children in local schools with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. The proportion of children in local schools eligible for free school meals is well 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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This children's centre is an excellent example of what can be achieved when 'joined-up' thinking at strategic and operational levels translates into concrete and effective actions sustained over time. Working with its partners in different agencies and through close collaboration with the other children's centres in the area, Redcar Coast provides outstanding support and promotes individualised purposeful learning extremely effectively. Activities are of a high quality, meet the core offer very well and result in some excellent outcomes for users. Some of the numerous strengths of the provision include the impact of actions taken to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families, the quality of the information advice and guidance provided, and the many ways in which users are actively encouraged to contribute

their views and participate in the development and delivery of services.

A high proportion of local families and children are engaged in the wide range of services Redcar Coast provides. A recent survey of 400 local households indicates that the vast majority of families are aware of the children's centres in their area and suggests that around 75% of respondents have benefited from the provision. Users' regular attendance over a number of years, often for more than one session each week, progression between activities and sometimes into employment, stands as testimony to this and indicates that activities are effectively matched to local requirements. This is because staff have developed long standing relationships within the local community and have a deep understanding of the needs of the families who live within in it.

Children who attend the centre are confident and relaxed around adults, behave very well and eagerly engage in purposeful learning. Early years and childcare provision is most often good across the area. Outcomes for children are also good and sometimes outstanding; especially when taking their starting points into account. Childminders are supported effectively through the centre and the childminder network it supports. They are helped to develop good practice and capitalise on the expertise that the Early Years Teacher and other centre staff offer.

Parents hold the services and support they receive in high regard. Feedback shows that all of the services accessed were most often rated by users as 'very good'. Data indicates that health visitors refer just over half of the users to the centre and most of the remainder arrive by way of a word of mouth recommendation about the benefits including the support they can give each other. As one parent speaking for many explained: 'We absolutely love it! I've become a much more confident and relaxed mum because of the things I've learned on the parenting course and if I'm happy so is my baby...sharing tips and forming friendships with other parents has helped me feel much less isolated'. Parents and other users are actively encouraged to participate in the development of the centre and contribute to other community activities. As one parent remarked this 'makes me feel better about myself... proud to be doing something and giving something back in return for the help that I've had.'

The local authority has successfully implemented the organisational changes recommended by its comprehensive 'SureStart children's centre self-evaluation challenge' that was completed in October 2009. This has resulted in an effective transition to locality based provision and a carefully staged roll-out of extremely well thought through and consistent strategies, policies and practice to all 12 children's centres. Staffing has been restructured to maximise resource utilisation and impact. Most changes are now successfully embedded, although the very rigorous data capture and cleansing process undertaken to ensure the reliability of information and establish robust baseline figures has only just been completed. This means that as yet, it has not been possible to measure progress and report outcomes for Redcar Coast against the challenging local targets and national performance indicators contained within the sharply focused 2010-2011 children's centre service plan.

The new centre manager has settled into her role quickly and is already having a very positive impact on day to day operations. The extended leadership arrangements through the Redcar and Cleveland Children's Centre Senior Management Team and the Central Locality Team results in outstanding leadership and management at Redcar Coast. The local Authority Principal Officer for SureStart and Early Years has provided a very clear vision and ambition for children's centres over a number of years. This lies at the very heart of the passion and resolute drive to improve the life chances of the local community seen in all of the staff.

Excellent relationships forged over time foster a strong sense of common purpose amongst the vast majority of providers and professionals. Nonetheless there is widespread acknowledgement that there is more work to do to engage midwives and increase the range of activities to support pregnant mums offered through children's centres.

Partnership working is exemplary. Jobcentre Plus links with the centre are a model of best practice. JobCentre Plus advisors routinely work in children's centres. The Child Poverty Pilot: Work Focussed Services in Children's Centres is successfully supporting local families into training and employment.

Governance arrangements, through the Central Locality Advisory Board established in autumn 2010 are secure and developing well. Children's centre matters are routinely raised at the Children's Trust Board and this ensures that their activities and plans are coordinated with other activities and inform the Children and Young People's Plan.

Taking into account all of these factors the centre's overall effectiveness is outstanding. This, together with the insightful and determined leadership team and the highly effective use of resources resulting from the reorganisation, indicates the centre has outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- By the end of September 2010, ensure that the accurate management information and data that is now being captured is rigorously analysed and interrogated so that:
 - performance can be reviewed and evaluated against the benchmarks and indicators in the development plan
 - self-evaluation records the full impact of the centres' work
 - it provides the information and analysis needed to help all staff know how well they are doing and can set consistently challenging targets for improvement.
- Work with the Children's Trust Board and the Primary Care Trust to consider and agree how best to engage midwives so that the centre can expand the range of activities it provides for mums-to-be.

How good are outcomes for users?

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Evidence through case studies and discussions with partners and parents indicates the very positive impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and their physical health. This includes the work of health visitors, HomeStart, counsellors and the portage service. All of the activities the centre provides are well attended and popular. Several parents spoke with conviction about how their emotional health and self-confidence in particular have been supported. For example, they feel much better equipped as parents because they are 'more able to cope with the demands of parenthood and understand their own feelings as well as those of their child much better'.

Breast Friends drop-in sessions are very well attended and are demonstrably improving the prevalence of breast feeding at six to eight weeks amongst mums attending the centre. Parents talked enthusiastically and knowledgeably about how the Baby Allsorts with a Health Drop-in, Infant Massage, weaning sessions and the healthy meals the centre provides in homely surroundings have given them a better understanding of how to eat well and stay healthy. Other health related activities for teenage parents such as Parents with Prospects and smoking cessation for instance, are not currently on Redcar Coast's timetable but these can be accessed at nearby centres.

The portage service co-located in the centre ensures that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified at an early age and they and their families receive the support and specialist help they need as soon as possible. Inspectors observed some very effective practice first-hand including the specially trained dog that visits each week to work with autistic children.

The centre makes an outstanding contribution to the safety and welfare of its users. Robust systems for security in the building ensure that parents and children remain safe when attending activities. As a result of the very good relationships between centre staff, children and parents, parents have the confidence to speak out about any issues that concern them at home, in the centre or the local community. The centre offers a wide range of activities aimed at raising parents' awareness of how to keep their children safe and provides effective links to home safety equipment schemes. All these activities help to prevent accidents in the home and lower the incidence of emergency hospital admissions.

Exemplary personalised support ensures even the harder to reach families are helped to access both targeted and universal services. A good range of information and acutely sensitive support is available to support those users experiencing problems at home such as domestic violence or alcoholism. Some excellent targeted work involving social care professionals makes the most of the centres' outstanding indoor and outdoor play areas. For instance, through the Nurture Group that provides supervised contact for children that are in the care of the local authority and their

parents. Through activities such as Mellow Parenting staff model behaviours and instil routines that help parents manage their own behaviour and that of their children, providing them with coping skills for times when they are most likely to feel under pressure. These activities also aid children in making the transition into early years provision or school.

A rich and varied range of high quality activities such as Rhythm and Rhyme, Fun with Phonics and Messy Play, as well as a variety of drop-in sessions, makes an outstanding contribution to children's development in their early years. Parents report that these sessions have also given them confidence, reduced their isolation and enabled them to make friends and feel part of a community. Early Years Foundation Stage inspections for settings in the Redcar Coast area, report good and occasionally outstanding practice in relation to enjoying and achieving. As a result most children are making good progress from their starting points. Speech and language therapists based in the centre provide drop-in sessions for parents as well as targeted support. These activities make a strong and effective contribution to improving the communication skills of children who attend the centre and other early years settings. This is helping to increase the proportion of children achieving 78+ points in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

Information, advice and guidance available to users on a range of issues such as support for health and well-being issues, housing, benefits and accessing employment and training are of high quality. Access to services is facilitated by clear and effective signposting and regular sessions provided by other agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Centre users are active advocates of the centres benefits. Many users confidently contribute to the development and delivery of services. For instance suggesting the need for and then running Network and Natter and the Baby Group themselves and working alongside centre workers to identify the sort of activities that will attract more dads. Some users participate in decision making processes formally through membership of the Central Locality Advisory Board. For example, one young mum with a disability who raised a problem she had with a piece of equipment explained how this was dealt with quickly and she was subsequently invited to become a member of the Advisory Board. She now undertakes accessibility audits of all the children's centres in the locality. As she explained this 'makes her feel valued, important and boosted her self confidence no end'.

Nowhere is consultation with users more evident than in the design of the centre itself. Parents' input is clearly seen in the calming atmosphere they wanted to create through the curved walls and door panels, and the amazing 'wavy' ceiling that stimulates children's interest. It is felt in the warmth of the kitchen at the heart of the building and the care they have taken over their art work about local life in the centre's entrance area. The hope and optimism for their futures that the centre stands for in their eyes, is expressed in the name they chose for the access road: Rainbow Lane.

Signposting to learning opportunities and employment through community education workers and Jobcentre Plus advisors is strong and effective. A range of accredited courses offered through children's centres includes National Vocational Qualifications in Business Administration and Health and Social Care, while Confident You helps to build basics skills in literacy and numeracy. Although the proportion of parents who move into employment is low, this is largely because there are very few job opportunities open to them in the area at present. Nonetheless, there are some excellent individual cases of parents being helped into accredited training and employment. Two of the children's centre assistants currently working at Redcar Coast followed this route.

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| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them | 1 |
| The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 1 |
| The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 1 |
| The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training | 1 |

How good is the provision?

1

Across all areas of the core offer and the five outcomes the centre provides an excellent range of activities which are developed in partnership with other agencies and the service users themselves. Health visitors deliver several activities on-site with centre staff and undertake some joint visits to individual homes alongside family support workers. HomeStart, speech and language therapy and portage services are based in the centre. The needs of vulnerable children and their parents are assessed quickly and effectively using the common assessment framework when necessary. Services work extremely well together and meet regularly to devise coordinated strategies that results in integrated actions and individual plans. These lead to timely, high quality multi-agency support when it is needed and that is reviewed and developed as necessary. The provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is particularly good. It is targeted effectively and this ensures that a high proportion of families who have specialist needs receive the support they require.

Highly skilled, dedicated and enthusiastic staff ensure there is always a warm welcome and a listening ear readily available for users. They act as good role models and work sensitively and effectively with parents and children ensuring families can benefit fully from the provision. Parents interviewed confirmed high levels of

satisfaction with the centre's provision and were very clear about the benefits. They say that 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. Participation rates are high for the vast majority of activities. This is due to very good referrals from health visitors in particular, informative leaflets, word of mouth, effective consultation with users and the very strong ethos amongst staff that parents 'own' the centre and the sessions they attend.

The quality of early years education in the settings associated with Redcar Coast is mostly good. The qualified Early Years Teacher provides very good support for early years staff in the centre and other local settings and delivers some highly effective activities for them as well as for children and parents. The centre offers a range of support to local childminders and the childminder network, including access to centre facilities and training opportunities.

The views of parents and users of the services are regularly canvassed and are taken into account fully when planning and determining future provision. Areas that the centre has identified as priorities for future development as a result of such feedback include: finding ways to capture children's feedback about the activities they do, developing more weekend activities and engaging more dads. The leadership team has appropriate plans in place to address these.

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| The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users | 1 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users | 1 |
| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community | 2 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community | 1 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The local authority has provided a very clear strategic lead for children's centres and engaged other agencies to very good effect in their development. The Principal Officer Sure Start and Early Years has driven forward the ambition and vision for children's centres, whilst maintaining high quality service delivery during the recent area wide review of provision. This review has aligned services very effectively and ensures that resources are used extremely well. Consequently, with the support of the Principal Officer, Service Development Manager and Information Strategy Officer, the very able and experienced extended leadership team for the Central Locality provides outstanding leadership and management at Redcar Coast.

The Central Locality Advisory Board arrangements provide greater support and challenge for the leadership team. The representation of parents and partners on the board and the extent to which their voices shape provision is a considerable strength.

Partnership working and commissioning arrangements are a model of best practice. Founded on long standing collaborative relationships and practitioners' deep understanding of the local community, this ensures that provision and activities are effectively targeted to meet local priorities and needs.

The centre gives a high priority to safeguarding and undertakes risk assessments and health and safety checks routinely. Users' safety and wellbeing is protected by the robust and consistently implemented policies, procedures and practice adopted by the centre. Protocols and practice for making referrals and sharing information between agencies are effective, with good evidence of how collaboration between agencies has reduced the risk of harm to children. There are effective procedures in place within the centre to ensure all staff and volunteers have appropriate checks and these are kept up to date. Training of all staff, particularly in relation to child protection is a considerable strength.

Effective steps have been taken to narrow the gap for the most disadvantaged. Users generally reflect the make-up of the community Redcar Coast serves. The centre meets its duty to promote equality and diversity extremely well. Inclusion of all parents and children, particularly the most vulnerable lies at the heart of the centre's work. All are valued and encourage participating.

Performance management systems and staff supervision are robust. There is a strong focus on developing the skills of all staff and volunteers through training. This results in the delivery of high quality inclusive provision that is sensitive to the needs and views of users. A particular strength of supervision arrangements is the support that is provided through debriefing sessions and the involvement of psychologists for those staff who work with the most vulnerable families through Mellow Parenting for instance.

The centre development plan is sharply focused and sets challenging targets based on local priorities and national performance indicators. Progress towards these has not been reviewed as yet because the first quarterly returns have only just been produced following the implementation of extensive data collection and cleansing strategies. Similarly, the draft self evaluation form does not currently contain sufficient qualitative and quantitative evidence to support the judgements reached. However, now that that robust and reliable information is being generated and captured, greater emphasis can be placed on utilising this tenaciously to monitor, evaluate and report on the impact of the centres' actions and to measure progress against local and national benchmarks.

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood | 1 |
| The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community | 1 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community | 1 |
| The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties | 1 |
| 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 | 2 |
| The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

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

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspections of St Benedict's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Coatham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, John Emmerson Batty Primary School, Zetland Primary School and Sunshine Day Nursery, have been taken into account to a limited extent when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in the report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Redcar Coast Children's Centre on 23-24 June 2010. During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents, visited a number of activities and talked with you, centre staff and others that work with you. We have judged that the centre provides outstanding support for you and your families.

The centre is thoughtfully designed and reflects the local community and needs of parents extremely well. This is because many of you were fully involved in designing the building from the outset. Your input is clearly seen in the calming atmosphere created through the curved walls and door panels you asked for along with the amazing 'wavy' ceiling that stimulates children's interest in the play room. It is felt in the love and laughter over meal times served from the homely kitchen at the heart of the building and the care you have taken with your art work about local life in the centre's entrance area. The hope and optimism for the future that the centre stands for in your eyes, is expressed in the name you chose for the access road: Rainbow Lane.

The friendly staff team always provide a listening ear for you and are passionate about creating an extremely warm and welcoming place where you feel at home and able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you have pride in the centre and use the services regularly. The staff places the upmost importance on you, the parents, and your families. You are actively encouraged to contribute your views and act as volunteers, running Network and Natter and the Baby Group for instance. Your feedback is constantly used to develop the services provided to ensure they reflect any changes in your needs. The centre staff are working hard to encourage even more parents and their children to access services and activities and you can help them by continuing to tell people about all the good things the centre has to offer.

Health visitors are extremely good at telling you about activities at the centre. Once you get there, staff from a wide range of services are extremely good at working closely with you to find out exactly what help and support you and your family need and making sure this is provided. They successfully share important information with each other when they need to. This means you do not have to keep repeating your story and all those involved have a clear picture of how they can help.

You told us the centre has helped you gain more confidence and self-esteem and develop closer and more effective relationships with your children. This was very evident when we visited you. You also told us that the centre has provided opportunities to form friendships and support one another and that this has helped you feel less isolated. We could see how much you enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the extremely positive impact these are having on you and your families.

We found that the wide range of high quality services and activities the centre offers are very well matched to your needs and run by highly skilled and dedicated staff. The staff are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy. For example through Breast Friends, Infant Massage and Baby Allsorts. They provide you with access to safety equipment and advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your home to keep your children safe. The centre has some excellent resources in the indoor and outdoor play areas and these excite and interest your children and help them to develop new skills and learn through their play.

Knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff also help you to support your child's learning and development at the centre and at home. For example, through the excellent Mellow Parenting Programme.

You told us you have also been helped to learn new skills and achieve qualifications. Several of you have become volunteers at the centre and run some of the groups that parents really enjoy coming to. Others have been successfully supported back into employment as a result of excellent guidance from Jobcentre Plus advisors and other staff who have helped you to compile a CV and prepare for interviews for example. We are sure many more of you will use these services and go on to achieve similar success.

The centre has made many changes recently in line with Local Authority guidance. These have been extremely positive steps that have helped to ensure that the leadership and management at Redcar Coast is outstanding. These factors make sure that all children and families are getting the best services possible. Areas that the centre staff have rightly identified as priorities for future development include: finding ways for children to let them know what they think about the activities they are doing, developing more weekend activities, involving more dads and forging closer links with midwifery services to see whether antenatal activities can be delivered at the centre. The leadership team has appropriate plans in place to address these issues and we have every confidence that they will be successful.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was great to meet you and to hear your views. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every happiness and every success for the future.

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