

# Inspection report for Western Tynedale Children's Centre

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Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	362619
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre governance	Advisory Board
Centre leader	Ms Helen Whitaker
Date of previous inspection	NA
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare	Haltwhistle Little Stars

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.

## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health, education and children's social care professionals and representatives from Jobcentre Plus, extended services and adult education.

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

## Information about the centre

Western Tynedale Children's Centre covers a wide and dispersed rural area with low population density. While all wards are above the national average in terms of deprivation, West Tynedale ward is ranked as the second most deprived ward in Tynedale. In the last 10 years major employers have left the area and now the tourist industry is a key factor in the local economy. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average, as is the proportion of children aged under four years who are living in households where no one is working.

The centre opened in 2003 and was developed from a Rural Mini Sure Start Local Programme. Originally operating from a shop front on the high street, the current purpose-built centre opened in 2006 and operates as a 'one-stop-shop' model, providing the full core offer through the management of Children North East. The centre has also developed two outreach centres in Haydon Bridge and Allendale and uses these to deliver some of its services. The day-to-day management and provision of service delivery at Western Tynedale Children's Centre is the responsibility of

Children North East as part of a contract awarded by Northumberland County Council in 2007. Governance arrangements transferred to an advisory board in 2010.

Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age. The proportion of children with special educational need and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.

## Inspection judgements

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

### Overall effectiveness

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

2
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2
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## Main findings

Western Tynedale Children’s Centre provides particularly good support to children and families who live within its locality. Strengths include the support for breastfeeding mothers, the impact of actions to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families and the well-established, effective multi-agency partnerships between agencies that provide high-quality care and support. The centre’s approach to safeguarding, safe recruitment and child protection is robust and meets statutory requirements. Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare provision is mainly good across the area and, although outcomes are still below the national average, there has been a marked improvement in children’s achievements in their combined personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy skills.

A range of partners very successfully work together to support the health and emotional well-being of children and families and there is a strong focus on reducing health inequalities. For example, the centre has exceeded its locality target for reducing the incidence of obesity in under-fives. Working in partnership with extended services and the parent support worker, the centre has run a series of courses designed to develop emotional resilience in parents, carers and young children. Parents and carers attending the ‘Bounce Back’ course commented that it helped them to realise that they ‘need to feel good and gain self-worth and confidence to be able to help their children’.

Parents and carers describe the centre and its staff as friendly and welcoming and say that they can trust the staff to offer them the right advice in times of need. Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is central to the work of the centre and research has been undertaken to identify those particular families in the area who might find it more difficult to access services, with some success. Well-targeted actions are taken to support families and children whose circumstances make them vulnerable and those who need support in times of acute need or crisis, through the effective partnerships established by the centre’s family support service. Parents and carers particularly value the personal attention that they and their children receive.

The good quality of care and support is the result of careful planning by managers to ensure that children and families are familiar with the adults who will be working with them and caring for them.

The vision for the centre is shared well across partners and services are fully integrated, particularly the shared actions taken to support, involve and improve outcomes for parents and carers and their children. The centre's staff are responsive to the requests of parents and carers and the majority of services have been developed and changed to meet these expressed needs. Collaborations with Jobcentre Plus and adult education services are well developed and, consequently, parents and carers have good access to information about employment opportunities. This is further facilitated by the Employment Engagement Partnership Group, established to develop the local workforce in rural areas such as this.

Since her appointment in 2008, the centre's manager, together with staff, partners and the West Northumberland locality manager, has developed a clear and focused vision to make a real difference to the community, based securely on local needs and wants. The whole family is at the heart of the centre's work, and this is evident in the increased range of activities that families, particularly those whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable, can access. Managers are aware that there is still some way to go to ensure that all needs are met. For example, through knowing the community well, and having a good understanding of the strengths and gaps in service provision, the centre's manager is aware that support for those suffering from domestic violence is a key priority as well as access to speech and language support. Following consultation with local stakeholder groups, plans have been developed that provide a clear agenda for future activities.

An advisory board, which covers four children's centres in the West Tynedale area, has been established. Members of the board fully support the work of the centre and meet regularly to monitor what the centre is providing. Work undertaken by locality managers identifies six key themes for the area as a whole and work on addressing these is carried out at the relevant local areas. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile and obesity have been significant areas of work for Western Tynedale over the past year. However, the centre's ability to evaluate fully the longer-term impact of their work has been limited to date. That said, a huge amount of work has been undertaken over the past year to address this and clear actions are now in place. In the meantime, information taken from a range of evaluations by parents, carers and stakeholder groups affords the board an effective understanding of the progress the centre is making towards achieving its priorities. While parents and carers have access to their own 'Your Voice' forum, their absence on other stakeholder groups and the advisory board limits the extent to which they can effectively contribute to the ongoing developments of the centre they represent. Again, this is an area that is being addressed by the centre.

Taking into account the good outcomes overall, the centre's overall effectiveness is also good. This, together with leaders' determined focus on improvement, and identifying and meeting needs, indicates the centre has good capacity for sustained

improvement.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Continue to develop work relating to participation to ensure that parents and carers are empowered to contribute to the governance of the centre through meaningful representation on stakeholder groups and the advisory board.
- Develop and embed systems further to ensure the consistent evaluation of the longer-term impact of all services delivered through the centre.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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Evidence through case studies and discussions with partners, parents and carers all reflect the very positive impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and their physical health across the Western Tynedale locality. Effective partnerships with child and family health services ensure that the majority of local families benefit from the wide range of activities offered. This includes breastfeeding peer support, baby massage and yoga, the baby and toddler café and weaning advice. The work undertaken in relation to the promotion of breastfeeding has been particularly successful in some areas of the locality. As a result, the figures for breastfeeding prevalence at six-to-eight weeks in Western Tynedale at 37.5% are higher than the Northumberland average. However, the centre recognises that there is still work to be done in changing attitudes among a small minority of its reach population and there are plans in place to address this local need, including the establishment of the Haltwhistle breastfeeding support group. Support and advice offered to teenage parents through the family support worker is good, with the majority of young mothers in the locality accessing services delivered through the centre.

The promotion of healthy lifestyles is very well supported through activities such as 'Living Well, Looking Good', 'Tasty Treats', aqua-tots, Jabadao and regular, outdoor activities such as bear hunts and a buggy push. These ensure that families are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy and have contributed to a marked reduction in pre-school obesity rates from 12% to 7% over the past two years. The importance of the role of dads is also well supported through the local dads' group, 'Men Behaving Dadly'. The very positive impact of this work is reflected in the number of dads who attend a variety of activities, many of whom commented on how included they now feel and how much more confidence they have in their very important role as a dad.

Good procedures ensure that children are well safeguarded. Parents and carers say that they feel safe in the centre and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Well-established partnership working with health visitors, police and the local fire service is helping successfully to raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. A series of child

safety road shows over the past year has resulted in an increase in the number of parents and carers accessing the safety equipment scheme. Parents and carers told us that they had changed practice in their homes, particularly in relation to carrying hot drinks around children and shutting doors behind them, as a result of the information they have received. Given the rural nature of the Western Tynedale locality, the centre has also established productive links with the local 'Farm Watch' programme in an effort to raise awareness of the potential risks to children who live in this environment. The centre's good understanding of the particular needs and characteristics of the area it serves has led to the identification of additional local targets such as increasing awareness of issues relating to dental health and the reduction in the incidence of chimney fires. A well-established multi-agency approach to supporting families referred to the centre in times of acute crisis is helping to minimise the number of children entering care or moving onto the child protection register.

The extent to which children and young people enjoy and achieve is good. The appointment of an early years practitioner, combined with a close working partnership with local early years consultants and the centre's involvement in the 'Every Child a Talker' project has had a significant impact on the achievement of children, particularly in relation to their personal, social and emotional development as well as their communication, language and literacy skills. The gap between the lowest 20% of children achieving expected levels in key early learning goals and that for all children in Northumberland has narrowed considerably over the past year.

Behaviour across the centre is good. Children observed in centre activities and local childcare provision were well behaved and related well to one another. A number of parents and carers inspectors spoke to commented on how their confidence as parents and carers had improved as a result of their participation in a number of activities offered by the centre. A visit to the baby and toddler café provided compelling evidence of young children and their parents and carers bonding well, and children developing their play, exploration and communication skills as they explored the lights in the sensory room and joined in with the toddler singing sessions. Groups of mums shared stories and tips about dealing with increasingly mobile babies and several parents and carers reported that they feel better on days when they have an activity in which to participate. The vast majority of parents and carers felt that they had a voice within the centre through the well-established 'Your Voice' forum. A number of examples of how services have been provided or adapted to meet their specific needs were shared, for example the introduction of a twins group. However, the centre is aware that opportunities for parents and carers to influence services through the local stakeholder groups and the advisory board are limited. An action plan is in place to improve this.

Through good childcare and early years provision, children are successfully developing skills for the future. There is good evidence of how the centre has helped parents and carers into learning, training and employment, and several reported that their economic stability and independence had improved as a result of the opportunities they have had through the centre. The Jobcentre Plus advisor has a

long-established link with the centre, offering advice on how to access benefits and tax credits. This is facilitated by the work of the resource and information worker and there are many examples of parents, carers and families gaining invaluable advice and guidance. In addition, the centre runs a number of courses, such as a 'credit crunch' course designed to help families manage their finances.

The centre has established a good working partnership with adult education and can point to numerous examples of parents and carers who have gained the confidence to progress through a number of courses and qualifications. The centre is acutely aware of the particular barriers faced by parents and carers in their locality, including confidence, travel and childcare costs, and have worked closely with partners to overcome these. A recent 'Moving On Up' course has been designed to encourage parents and carers to think about taking qualifications to enable them to get back into employment once their children start school, while 'Make Your Voice Heard' and 'Skills4Life' courses have focused more specifically on building confidence and developing adults' basic skills. The centre has used its in-depth local knowledge to target specific families within the community who they feel might particularly benefit from these opportunities.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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	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	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre meets its core offer well. The centre's staff and their partners have a good understanding of individuals' needs. Well-established and effective multi-agency partnerships increasingly ensure that the individual needs of children and their parents and carers are being assessed quickly when they are referred to the centre, so that interventions and support can be targeted appropriately. Parents and carers report that the timeliness and quality of individual support is good and is available for as long as needed.

Assessment of individual cases is robust and the Common Assessment Framework is successfully implemented, ensuring that teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need. Careful exit strategies are in place to



ensure that parents and carers can build their confidence and parenting skills, and support them to independence, at a pace that is appropriate to them. Very effective partnerships between the health visiting team, police and the local fire and rescue unit ensure that any families known to be at risk are quickly identified and then supported.

Learning, development and enjoyment are promoted well. Good partnership working with childcare providers and local development workers ensures that aspirations are raised. All of the centre's staff are being supported by the early years practitioner to integrate the Early Years Foundation Stage into all aspects of their work, ensuring that children are well prepared when they start school. This has been facilitated further through effective arrangements and projects designed to help children in their transition into school and nursery. The centre has recently begun a series of 'play and learn' sessions aimed specifically at children who are about to start school. These sessions have been developed in partnership with the first school, and the local educational psychologist and parents and carers, including young parents, speak highly of the impact this course has had, particularly in relation to their understanding of how to help their children learn. Evaluations from parents and carers about individual interventions demonstrate the difference these experiences have made to their own and their children's development and well-being.

The range of provision available through the centre is good. Participation rates in activities are improving because the centre is making sure that activities meet the range of needs and interests of the community. Located in a rural area, the centre is acutely aware of the two main barriers to parents' and carers' engagement with the centre; childcare costs and transport. As a result, a number of activities are delivered through outreach centres in Haydon Bridge and, most recently, Allendale. The addition of a purpose-built play van has enabled the centre to take activities to families and children who live in some of the more isolated areas of their reach population. The centre also works closely with a local community transport charity, Action by Differently Abled People in Tynedale, to provide transport for those who would otherwise not be able to attend sessions. There are also opportunities for some parents and carers to access free driving lessons through a local scheme, thereby reducing their isolation. The shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly flexible. These include home visits and targeted support through the work of extended services, parent support partners, portage and access to local groups such as 'Little Gems'. Parents and carers are able to take elements of level 1 programmes at the centre, gradually building up to a full qualification. Many parents and carers have progressed from entry level courses offered at the centre to a range of higher-level courses and work-based learning providers.

Care, guidance and support are good. Sensitive individualised and tailored support is provided to all families and children who access the centre. There is evidence of much good multi-agency working which ensures that families can access the right kind of support, be it from the family support worker, information and resource worker, or support and advice on breastfeeding.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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	2
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?

2

Governance arrangements are developing well. Lines of accountability are understood, reporting arrangements are beginning to embed and the local authority provides robust challenges to the manager and her team through the annual conversation and quarterly performance audits. Arrangements between Children North East and the local authority to manage performance are well established.

The centre has made a significant commitment to developing its systems for monitoring and evaluation. As part of the planning cycle, the locality managers and managers at the centre work with staff and partners to identify future priorities through themed meetings with stakeholders. The focus of these meetings is based on robust local data combined with good local knowledge provided by the members of each group. The views of parents, carers and users are collected through evaluations of individual activities and interventions in order to check quality and usefulness and to support improvement. Impact of the work with individual families takes place within team and multi-agency meetings, case studies and through regular supervision of staff. However, these systems are yet to be fully embedded in order to ensure the consistent evaluation of the longer-term impact of all services delivered through the centre. The centre's action plan links to the local authority strategic targets and includes specific centre targets. Resources are used effectively to provide a warm and welcoming environment. Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure. Delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support to families. This ensures good value for money.

The performance management of staff is robust and arrangements for appraisal and supervision are thorough; outcomes are used to plan training and support the development of staff. The centre and Children North East place a strong focus on developing the skills of all staff, through quality training, and so deliver inclusive provision that is sensitive to the needs and views of users. An in-depth local knowledge, combined with the intelligent use of data, ensures that new provision is developed and adapted to meet local need and ensures a continued focus on developing services to meet the needs of those whose circumstances make them hardest to reach in the local community. As a result, the centre has succeeded in

reaching over 76% of its target population, with over 40% of these accessing services provided through the centre. Given the specific characteristics of this children's centre, effective partnership working has been crucial to supporting the successful involvement of groups whose circumstances make them harder to reach in their children's learning, care and support. All parents and carers to whom the inspectors spoke gave examples of how they had developed better relationships with their children and built up their parenting skills, confidence and self-esteem. Equality impact assessments have been introduced, and these, combined with a flexible approach to service delivery, ensure that all staff are sensitive to the specific needs of individuals. For example, staff may arrange provision of transport to enable disabled children to attend a specific group, or the allocation of a tutor within the centre rather than in a school environment.

The safeguarding arrangements to share concerns and record information are well developed. These procedures are used effectively by a range of professional agencies to monitor children's welfare and to provide appropriate support where necessary. Policies and procedures are robust and there are good systems in place to maintain and update these. As a result, all agencies are well aware of the wider safeguarding agenda and collaborate effectively to reduce the risk of harm to children. All checks on the suitability of staff directly employed by the centre prior to their appointment are handled by Children North East and are in place. The centre maintains a central register which records these checks. The centre has completed appropriate risk assessments to ensure the safety of children and their parents and carers.

**These are the grades for leadership and management**

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the	2

range of provision	
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## Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

There are four private sector childcare settings within the Western Tynedale Centre remit area. These are Little Stars, Little Badgers, Herdley Bank Under 5s and Greenhead Rainbow Nursery. Two local First Schools, Haltwhistle and Shaftoe Trust, with Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children over three years, are also part of the centre's remit. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections has been taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in the report.

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### Summary for centre users

We inspected the Western Tynedale Children's Centre on 16–17 September 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

Some of the things that the centre is doing really well include the activities and support offered to ensure the continued safety and well-being of you and your children as well as the good quality of care, guidance and support offered by those staff who work with you. In particular, activities and provision for children before they start school are improving across the area and your children are doing really well as a result, especially in regard to making friends and developing speaking, listening and reading skills.

The centre offers lots of programmes and activities aimed at improving the health of people in your local community. In particular, it has done really well in helping lots of people to live healthier lifestyles through courses such as 'Living Well, Looking Good' and 'Tasty Treats'. You told us you particularly enjoyed the family fun learning sessions last term and have enjoyed opportunities to take part in other outdoor activities such as den building, bear hunts and magical mystery buggy pushes. However, there is still more work to do to improve access to speech and language services, as well as to increase the number of new mums in some local areas who choose to breastfeed their babies. The centre has already taken lots of actions to begin to improve these aspects of its work and we are sure these will benefit you and your family.

Parents and carers who spoke to us all said that your children's centre is a warm and welcoming place, full of staff who they feel they can trust to help and support them. Parents and carers told us that staff listen to them and so make sure that they get the right advice. We found that the centre was really good at helping people at times

in their lives when they most need it. We found that action was taken quickly and that different people and organisations worked well as a team to support both children and families. However, because the area you live in is very rural, the staff at the centre are developing ways to enable all families in the community to have access to it, so that they can benefit, when necessary, from the good support and activities available.

We found that services worked well together as a team to provide help and support to families where a child has special educational needs and/or disabilities and for parents and carers of babies and very young children. In particular, activities relating to weaning, the baby and toddler café, baby yoga and massage, and story and rhyme sessions were really good. Parents and carers we spoke to said they had really enjoyed the safety road shows and that these made them think about things they did at home such as carrying hot drinks around the house and making sure doors were shut behind them. A lot of parents and carers, especially those who are bringing up children on their own, told us that they felt really happy on the days when they had an activity to go to.

We found that the people in charge of the centre are doing a good job. Managers of the centre and locality managers have worked hard together with other partners and staff to make sure that everything the centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. We know that all those who work with Western Tynedale Children's Centre share this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a real difference to your lives. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is seen in the number of activities on offer as well as the numbers of you who attend them. Managers know there is still more to do if they are to really get to know the needs of your community. They have already developed plans to show how they will do this in the future.

The centre has spent a lot of time developing the way in which decisions are made about its direction and the different services it provides. As a result, some of these systems are quite new and so the ability of the centre to understand properly how well it is doing in improving the lives of you and your families in the longer term is limited. We know that it will take time for these things to be established but we are confident that there are actions in place to improve this. We know the centre is good at asking you to tell them how you have found all the activities and services which you go to and that you have used the 'Your Voice' group to influence and change the way some services are delivered. However, the centre needs to increase the involvement and influence of you as parents and carers in their work, and there are plans in place to enable you to become members of local stakeholder groups and the advisory board. We hope that these are things you might be interested in joining.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).