

# Inspection report for Martonside Children's Centre

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Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	384007
Inspection dates	27 - 28 February 2013
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY281718 Marton Children's Day Nursery EY411165 Easterside Day Nursery EY508458 Grove Hill Playgroup EY296175 Childcare plus – Grove Hill EY333837 Childcare Plus - Easterside

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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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with families using the centre, the children's centre cluster manager, the senior leadership team, members of staff and representatives from the local authority, partnership agencies and community groups.

They observed the centre's work, including visits to outreach sessions, linked day-care providers and the allotment. They looked at a range of relevant documentation including minutes of meetings, case studies, users' evaluations, the centre's self-evaluation form, action plan and data reports.

## Information about the centre

Martonside Children's Centre evolved from a Sure Start Local Programme and was designated as a phase one centre in May 2005. There are 1071 children under five in the reach area. Middlesbrough Council retains responsibility for governance of the centre. Children's centre services have been part of a wider local authority review which has taken place over the last two years. This has resulted in two localities merging, a number of changes to the staff team and some long-term vacancies that have only been filled recently.

The Children's Centre Cluster Manager has overall responsibility for three centres in the South-West Locality and is the designated centre leader for Martonside Children's Centre, although she is based at Hemlington Children's Centre. The centre comprises of one main centre at Martonside with two outreach sites, at Grove Hill and Easterside. The main centre is a purpose-built facility co-located with a medical practice and childcare provision. Grove Hill outreach is based in Grove Hill Resource Centre, a local authority community hub. The Easterside outreach operates from Easterside Community and Resource Centre, a multi-agency community building, which also houses the local library and is currently developing as a Community Hub. As a result of a recent reconfiguration of children's centre services, the centre at Martonside is no longer staffed on a regular basis.

The reach area is made up of three very distinct communities with similar, but different, community needs. There is a high prevalence of domestic abuse, teenage pregnancies and substance misuse. Nine of the ten Super Output Areas within the reach are in the top 15% most disadvantaged areas nationally, with four of these in the highest 2% most disadvantaged. Unemployment is high, with two wards having more than twice the national average of people unemployed. A third of the population have no formal qualifications. Although there is some owner-occupied housing, the majority of families are housed in social housing or private rental accommodation. A regeneration programme has led to a large number of properties being demolished. Many families have already moved, but some families are still waiting to be rehoused whilst living amongst rows of boarded-up houses. The population is predominantly of White British heritage with 2–3% of families of Indian or Pakistani heritage.

From its three bases, the centre offers a range of services, in conjunction with partner agencies, including health, social care, play and learning sessions, parenting programmes, adult learning and family outreach. The centre’s designated childcare providers are Marton Children’s Day Nursery and Rosedene at Easterside. The centre has two registered crèches at Grove Hill and Easterside and also uses Grove Hill Playgroup to provide additional crèche places. These childcare providers have been separately inspected and their reports can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). When children enter early years provision, their skills, knowledge and abilities are below or well below those typical for their age.

## 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 families**

<b>3</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>3</b>
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## Main findings

Centre users are unanimous in their appreciation of the improvements to their lives as a result of their involvement with Martonside Children’s Centre. ‘We wouldn’t be where we are today without the centre’ and ‘It’s good to have a friendly face and support whenever you need it’ were typical comments from those who have benefited from the centre’s work. The centre has, until recently, delivered a wide range of services and activities to ensure children are safe and to improve the well-being, educational achievement and economic stability of local families. However, the impact of these services on outcomes is only satisfactory overall because too few families and children in the community take advantage of them currently.

The centre has experienced a lengthy period of uncertainty and under-staffing with the amalgamation of two localities, unfilled vacancies and some long-term staff illnesses. This has slowed the development of the centre and has resulted in some services being discontinued so that some families find activities more difficult to access and their needs less well met. It is testimony to the strong but sensitive local leadership of the Children's Centre Cluster Manager that high expectations have been set, innovative projects identified and the staff team remains resilient and well-motivated throughout the changes.

Successful multi-agency working, through the 'Early Help Forums', provides a robust approach to keeping children safe. Skilful implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process underpins the effective initial assessment of need and the swift coordination of services when families are in crisis. Although inspectors found that some of the local authority's comprehensive safeguarding procedures are not always applied consistently by centre staff, this does not have a direct impact on the well-being and safety of children. Staff are dedicated and committed to improving the home circumstances of many families that have complex needs and regularly provide good care, guidance and support. Parents who are experiencing challenges in their lives show improved confidence and parenting skills after attending the well-structured programmes and courses.

The well-resourced crèche provision, successful family learning courses and effective family support service have ensured that families, in particular those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, are well looked after during this period of change. By prioritising the need to maintain the good quality and consistent delivery of its most important work in safeguarding children, the centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

The provision for children and adults to learn is also a key strength of the centre's work. Two-year-olds who need additional support with their learning are quickly identified and offered a funded place with one of the good-quality childcare providers. This provision is having a positive impact on their development. Effective partnership work with the adult learning service promotes a progressive pathway of courses. Users enjoy learning as their confidence grows and they move on to gain accredited qualifications, seek advice about future employment or prepare to access higher education.

Case studies and discussions with parents evidence that support is available with developing employment skills, financial management and benefits advice. However, the centre does not routinely seek information about the outcome of its work in signposting users to other agencies. Data from the health service, in respect of some key performance indicators, are not always available to the centre to assist in assessment of performance and further improve development planning.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and the areas for development. Although the centre's self-evaluation of its work is broadly accurate, the large number of targets and some key priorities, which are not directly linked to outcomes for children and families, do not assist the centre to conduct a sharp, critical analysis of its

performance. The manager has started to build and extend links in the community and recognises the importance of this in improving levels of engagement and outcomes for families in the reach area. Only some partner agencies are engaged satisfactorily in shaping the strategic direction of the centre, through individual meetings with the manager, as the advisory board has not met for almost a year. Parents are encouraged appropriately to provide feedback during sessions but have had no recent opportunities to be involved in decision making or make a positive contribution to the centre through volunteering. Work is in hand to address this and some parents shared their keenness to attend the 'Parents' Network' meeting already planned.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve outcomes for children and families by:
  - increasing the number of children and families using the centre's services
  - re-establishing opportunities for users to make a positive contribution to the centre through volunteering and formal decision-making networks
  - seeking further the views of parents to ensure that activities and services are organised to best meet their needs.
  
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
  - re-establishing the advisory board to ensure that parents and all partner agencies have a strategic involvement in improvement planning and provide robust challenge for the centre's leaders
  - routinely requesting information from partner agencies who work with users, in order to evaluate more effectively the impact of the centre's work
  - working with the local authority to ensure that all health data are provided for the centre's reach area in a timely manner.
  
- Sharpen self-evaluation by ensuring that key priorities are focused on improving outcomes for children and families, with a limited number of specific, measurable targets against which to assess the centre's performance.
  
- Ensure that safeguarding systems are consistently implemented.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>3</b>
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The staff team is building increasingly good links with health colleagues and, consequently, the number of children accessing mainstream health services and take-up of immunisations has increased. Following a concerted effort across the whole local authority, teenage conception rates in the reach area have reduced significantly from 70.3 per 1,000 to 44.4 per 1,000 since 2010. Although the number of mothers initiating breastfeeding shows a small increase, only 22% of babies continue to be breastfed at six to eight weeks, which is well below national and local rates.

A range of initiatives, including an award-winning gardening club and 'Little Chefs' sessions, have helped families to engage in physical exercise, introduce their children to new tastes and produce healthier meals. However, limited staff capacity has reduced delivery of these activities currently and the most recent data for 2010 – 2011 show that obesity levels of children at the end of Reception Year are higher than national averages. There is also a lack of up-to-date data for smoking in pregnancy, although there has been success with the 'Smoke Free Homes' initiative, as 78 people locally have stopped smoking.

The centre promotes improved emotional and mental health well through a continuous programme of parenting courses and intensive one-to-one support. Parents attending the 'Parent Puzzle' course gain a better understanding of their children's needs and use techniques such as 'choices and consequences' successfully to help create a calmer atmosphere and improved relationships within the home. The 'Be Healthy Baby Group' offers valuable opportunities to build social networks, share information with other parents and obtain advice and guidance from outside speakers on topics such as weaning, baby massage and car seat safety.

The 'Team around the Family' processes a good coordination of the multi-agency work associated with children who are subject to child protection plans or who are deemed to be in need and has resulted in greater stability within the family home, which many families have sustained. The majority of those receiving one-to-one support subsequently feel confident to access activity sessions which are open to all parents. The centre's strong links with 'My Sister's Place', an organisation to support those experiencing domestic violence, have enabled several families to attend the 'Freedom Course' and, as a result, become more assertive in taking control of their lives, thus safeguarding their children more effectively. Parents are supported in minimising risks in the home through First Aid courses, home safety assessments and provision of safety equipment, further enhancing the safety and well-being of children and families.

The centre targets sessions accurately to support improvements in children's personal, social and emotional development, and communication and language skills. Well-planned sessions, such as 'Soccer Tots', promote physical activities, listening skills and turn-taking and provide parents with ideas to try at home. 'My daughter's confidence and language skills have come on leaps and bounds' and 'My child is more confident sharing and mixing with other children' are typical comments from parents attending the popular 'Jolly Jingles' session. Children are actively engaged in stimulating activities throughout these sessions. As a result, they play well together, develop positive relationships with adults and are becoming more independent learners.

Specialist speech and language support and the 'Every Child a Talker' programme promoted by the centre and adopted by childcare providers are ensuring good progress in the development of communication and language skills. The achievement gap is lower than the local average and has reduced by 5% over the last three years. Baseline data show that entry levels to school nurseries are similar to the local authority averages. Schools and childcare providers work closely together to ensure smooth transition through individualised arrangements for each child.

Good progression routes are in place for adults, from introductory courses such as 'Fun with Numbers' and 'Storysacks' to accredited courses in mathematics and English. All students are clear about their own learning goals and generally achieve them as sessions are enjoyable and well-structured to promote learning. Staff are strong advocates for families in helping to improve their living conditions, access essential household items and obtain food vouchers that promote improved economic stability and well-being.

A code of conduct is clearly displayed around the centre's premises and implemented in sessions. As a result, mutual respect is fostered appropriately and users from different communities within the reach area generally get on well together. The centre has previously encouraged some users to become volunteers and a few still contribute to community activities and support counselling services. The centre listens to and uses the feedback from parents using the centre to shape and develop its services appropriately.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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

### **How good is the provision?**

<b>3</b>
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Although the centre's services and activities are of a high quality, provision is satisfactory overall as the centre engages with too few families from the reach area. Refocusing of services to extend one-to-one support and the decision not to staff the Martonside centre on a regular basis have had an impact on the number of local families using the centre, which has reduced by almost half to 20%. Some parents highlighted that they are unable to attend any sessions locally for their two-year-olds now as these are offered only in other parts of the reach area that they cannot access. Nevertheless, the centre's sphere of influence is slightly wider than the data reflect, as many families and childminders from other areas, where children's centres have closed, access sessions and courses at the Martonside venues.

The centre engages positively with some of its key target groups including young parents, parents with mental health issues and lone parents. The organiser of 'Middlesbrough Mums', a group for mothers who have learning challenges, describes the centre as 'a perfect venue' as mothers develop peer networks and improve their life-skills while the crèche provides the

opportunity to assure children’s continued development and well-being. Some young parents have used the ‘Baby and Me’ sessions to successfully develop their parenting skills, learn how to make food when weaning their babies and obtain advice about contraception. Staff have been diligent in using different approaches to involve fathers but this remains an on-going challenge.

Children have access to good-quality crèche facilities whilst their parents enjoy courses, such as ‘Fun with Numbers’. Crèche staff plan a range of purposeful activities for children to explore and learn both indoors and out. Children’s individual needs are met skilfully so that their social, language and independence skills are developing well. Monthly ‘Development Parties’, held in conjunction with health visitors, provide parents with a valuable opportunity to discuss their children’s progress at nine months and two years. Parents appreciate the helpful advice they receive from staff and the reassurance that their children are meeting milestones typical for their age. Many have used the opportunity offered to join the library with their children and find out more about courses available to them. Effective early identification of children who need additional support results in assistance being provided quickly, for example through specialist equipment sourced to support children attending childcare provision.

Families with extremely complex needs and those who are experiencing sudden difficulties in their lives are particularly well supported on an individual basis by caring staff members. The sensitive approach to the individual needs of some families from minority ethnic groups has fostered their access to services successfully. Good links have been established with ‘Families Forward’, who now refer families they are supporting with substance misuse issues to the centre for support with other aspects of their lives. Users are effectively signposted to the local Credit Union which helps in more efficient management of family finances.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>2</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>3</b>
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Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The children’s centre cluster manager, who has responsibility for two other centres judged to be ‘good’ by Ofsted, knows that there is much work still to do. A large amount of time has been committed, necessarily, to the merging of two staff teams to work together as a locality team. Regular performance management arrangements and supervision ensure that staff are well supported and are able to extend their own professional expertise through training opportunities. As a result, they are enthusiastic and passionate about their work. The centre leader continues to pursue ambitious strategies. For example, funding has been secured to extend a successful pilot promoting oral health, as dental decay in the reach area is high and increasing.

There are clear links between strategic planning and service provision. Managers routinely monitor and evaluate the work of the centre. They use feedback from users together with information from staff and partner agencies appropriately to inform development of services and provision of activities. Users' evaluations indicate high levels of satisfaction with the quality of activities and demonstrate that they are having a positive impact for families that use them. Day-to-day partnership working with a wide range of agencies is effectively managed. However, some services do not systematically provide data to enable managers to track accurately the outcomes of users guided to use their services and not all partner agencies are involved in improvement planning and providing managers with robust challenge.

Managers deploy staff effectively and efficiently across the locality, making best use of their particular expertise and providing cover where required. Staff are aware of the need to engage more users and undertake to ensure that the views of those already engaged are used to inform service delivery. However, as services and activities have been curtailed recently the number of users has reduced and, therefore, users' views do not always fully reflect the needs of the community. The range of current services has a satisfactory impact on outcomes for users and so the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The centre promotes equality and diversity appropriately. Displays around the centre reflect and raise awareness of the wider community. Action to promote equality results in satisfactory engagement with some key target groups, including disabled children. The centre endeavours to remove barriers to engagement through provision of transport to activities, crèches to improve accessibility to adult learning and use of interpreters for those who do not speak English.

Risk assessments are thorough and conducted regularly. Staff have a good understanding of their role and professional boundaries in relation to keeping children safe. Parents are clear about safety precautions and are confident to share any concerns with staff as they have built trusting relationships with them. Safer recruitment procedures are followed adequately for all staff and volunteers; these include a check on an individual's suitability to work with unsupervised children and vulnerable adults, prior to their commencing work. However, some safeguarding systems are not rigorously followed by all staff. For example, while staff have undertaken safeguarding and child protection training appropriate to their role, managers do not have a clear oversight of this as staff do not routinely record their training as required. Record keeping of support work is improving as a result of the robust auditing of files.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.</b>	<b>3</b>

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

Recent inspections of two linked childcare providers (Marton Children's Day Nursery and Childcare Plus at Easterside) were taken into account when making the judgements.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Martonside Children's Centre on 27 and 28 February 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

For families using Martonside Children's Centre it is making a big difference in improving their lives and those of their children. You told us how your children's speech has improved with the additional help provided and how you have benefited from the parenting sessions that have helped you manage your children's behaviour with confidence. We were pleased to see how you enjoyed the course to improve your mathematics and are aiming to gain qualifications at the end of the course. Your children were well looked after in the crèche as the staff provided lots of interesting activities to help them learn and play well together.

Some of you shared how you had welcomed the opportunity for exercise and growing your own food on the centre's allotment. Many of you told us how much you and your children enjoy sessions such as 'Jolly Jingles' and 'Soccer Tots', as your children are learning good social skills and developing their confidence while you are able to meet other parents and gain ideas to continue to extend your children's learning at home. These sessions all help your children to start school with improved speech and language skills.

Families who are experiencing difficult times or have lots of different needs are very well supported as staff are caring and go out of their way to work with other agencies to make sure you have good support quickly when you need it most. Many of you told us how much the staff had helped to support you in your own homes when you did not feel ready to come to the centre. The staff are also knowledgeable about other agencies that can help you but

do not always follow up what difference the other services have made for you, so they do not know whether these services have been effective. However, it was clear from the information we looked at that there has been a welcome reduction in teenage pregnancies and that a large number of people locally have given up smoking following the 'Smoke Free Homes' campaign.

What the centre offers is of high quality but recently some activities have stopped and the centre at Martonside is no longer open regularly for you to pop into. This has meant that not as many of you use the centre, and some families told us that they cannot take their children to any sessions now as they cannot manage to get to Easterside or Grove Hill. Because so few families use the centre, it makes only a satisfactory difference to improving the lives of local families. We have asked the centre to find ways of understanding why families don't use the centre and to make sure that more local families can benefit from its services.

The centre is very keen to help you and your children keep safe, although we have asked the managers to check that all the very clear safeguarding procedures are followed. First Aid courses have helped you to deal with accidents more confidently and you are aware of the centre's procedures to help you keep safe. Some of you told us how you had been trained as volunteers, and one or two of you still help in the community as a result, but the centre has not helped any of you to become volunteers recently and we have asked them to look at this so you and the centre can both benefit from the help you can offer. Although the staff are keen to ask what you think about the activity sessions and use your views to improve the next sessions, there is no way at the moment for you to share your views about what the centre is doing overall. It was good to hear from some of you that you are keen to join the 'Parents' Network' when it meets shortly.

The centre manager is a good leader as she has been successful in helping the staff to cope with all the changes recently. She is also skilled at developing partnerships with a very wide range of agencies that can extend the centre's work. However, these other partners are not currently able to meet together to look at how the centre should progress, as the advisory board is no longer meeting, so we have asked the centre to set this up again. We have also asked the centre manager to choose just a few areas of work to focus on particularly so the centre can assess even more clearly how well its services and activities are making a difference for you.

Thank you to everyone who took time to come and speak with us or provided information for us. We are very grateful for your involvement in the inspection and 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).