

Ferryhill – Spennymoor Children's Centre Cluster

Tudhoe Moor Nursery, Spennymoor, Durham, DL16 6EX

Inspection date 19 – 20 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The team has too little success with meeting key priority targets, such as increasing mothers taking up breastfeeding, tackling childhood obesity, smoking in pregnancy and reaching enough fathers in the area.
- Too few parents, especially those wanting to find jobs, are participating in courses or activities that help them understand their options in the world of work.
- Staff recording in case files, as well as their face-to-face practice with families, does not show a sufficiently consistent or challenging approach to parents to achieve to their best ability. Too often staff cling to a limited, traditional offer without fully exploring all avenues of support and challenge.
- Parents are not fully involved in shaping strategic decisions across the group or within the local area boards.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Leaders, managers and staff have worked tirelessly and enthusiastically to engage the most disadvantaged families. Registrations are high.
- The group has a good impact on the achievement of children and their families through its targeting of work in partnership with schools and early years partners, such as the 'Again project' and 'Chatter and Rhyme' sessions. Children are making good progress and are better prepared for school.
- The centre group helps families who are eligible to take up their free entitlement to good quality early years places. Consequently, a very large majority of eligible two-, three- and four-year-olds are accessing funded places.
- Leaders, managers and staff have developed a number of processes, such as observing of practice and file audit, that are beginning to have an impact on quality.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Tudhoe Moor Children's Centre, Middlestone Moor Children's Centre and West Cornforth Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the service manager, locality manager, the principal family worker, senior leadership team and officers from the local authority. They also held meetings with the centre group's staff, parents, members from both of the centres' advisory boards and a number of partners, including health, education and children's social care professionals.

The inspectors visited a number of sessions held across all three centres during the inspection including, 'Baby Clinic', 'Baby Explorers', 'Toddler Explorers' and 'Baby Café'. They also involved the children's centre locality manager and principal family worker in all team meetings.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, such as the centre group's self-evaluation, action plans, a sample of case studies, parent evaluations, key policies and the group's equality and safeguarding procedures, as well as a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

June Cramman Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jayne Utting	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tara Street	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Ferryhill – Spennymoor Children’s Centre Cluster formed as a children’s centre group in April 2013. It consists of three previously stand-alone children’s centres that have now merged to share services, including staff and an overall manager. Of these, Tudhoe Moor and West Cornforth are phase one centres and Middlestone Moor is a phase two. The group meets its core purpose by offering a range of services such as child health services, parenting courses, adult learning and family support. These are given to families within the dedicated children’s centre, in a range of community venues and through outreach visits within families’ homes.

The group has around 1273 children under five years old within the area, of which around half live in the 0-30% most deprived areas in the country. Within the reach area there are significant issues around unemployment, isolation, domestic violence and parenting support. The target groups identified by the centre groups are: teen parents, lone parents, fathers, children with disabilities and families eligible for the two-year-old entitlement.

A very large majority of families within the area are White British heritage, with a very small black and minority ethnic community. Housing is mainly social or private rental with some stark differences between areas of affluence and, by contrast, areas of high deprivation. Levels of unemployment are high. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills below those typical for their age. There are links to four primary schools and childcare provision is delivered by Rainbow Daycare and Jack-in-the-Box Nursery. These are subject to separate inspection arrangements and the reports are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Governance of the centre group is provided by Durham local authority, specifically the One Point Service. The centres have two advisory boards, one covering the reach of Tudhoe and Middlestone Centres and the other the West Cornforth area.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Develop detailed and specific plans with partners to tackle key priority groups, like reaching fathers, increasing breast-feeding rates, lowering obesity rates and tackling smoking in pregnancy as a matter of urgency. Ensure that data are shared to enable staff and managers to evaluate what strategies are most effective and can then be replicated.
- Develop comprehensive strategic and operational partnerships that prioritise the worklessness agenda. Ensure that all partners take an active role in the plans and are held to challenging key performance measures to ensure that objectives are fully met. Set targets over the next two years that demonstrate significant improvement in adults attending courses, achieving qualifications, going into jobs and gaining skills through volunteering.
- Identify wider strategies to gain further parental involvement in the work of the children’s centre group. Consider training individuals in the role of the advisory board so that they have more confidence in their roles. Use new technology to better effect to gain parents’ views on specific issues and use this to improve and develop provision.
- Review current practice around case file management and recording as well as staff interactions with parents to identify weak practice. Implement revisions to paperwork to enable staff to have a more consistent approach. Develop further targeted staff training that helps them to better understand the wide range of issues that adults face and how to give greater challenge to move them on.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Centre leaders have a good understanding of the needs of families living in the locality. This is informed by the centre's own activities, and the much improved quality of data provided by the local authority in close partnership with health. As a result, the very large majority of families are registered with the centre and the majority engage in at least one activity.
- Despite this overall figure, participation rates between centres and across activities are variable. The centre has not focused sufficiently on monitoring this in order to identify those families who do not attend services or who fail to participate regularly. This affects their ability to demonstrate meaningful, sustained engagement in some centre activities.
- Family outreach workers have been proactive in going out to local community groups, into people's homes and developing good links with schools. This partnership has been particularly effective in helping children identified as having poorer communication and language skills. This outreach and partnership work, combined with their sensitive approach and breadth of knowledge, has been key to ensuring the participation of some very difficult-to-engage families.
- Through effective consultation, outreach work and some strong local partnerships, centre staff are working with the large majority of young parents, children with disabilities and families from black and minority ethnic groups. However, other partnerships designed to increase the engagement of fathers and workless parents in activities and services focused on improving their economic stability and independence are less well developed.
- The uptake of free entitlement to early education for two-, three- and four-year-olds is good. The centre has been proactive in identifying those families who are eligible for two-year old funding, resulting in an uptake of 83%. Early years staff have worked closely with local private, voluntary and independent settings in order to improve the quality of their provision, enabling them to extend and offer more places specifically for the most vulnerable two-year-olds.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre group provides a good range of universal and targeted activities and resources for those who attend. However, the low number of families from a minority of target groups engaging with the centre group reduces its overall impact on improving outcomes for children and on reducing inequalities and improving life chances.
- Parents using the centre group are happy with the services and support provided by centre staff. Parents told inspectors how they could always ask for help and advice about most things and especially in times of crisis. They were particularly complimentary with regard to staff being non-judgmental and friendly, whatever the circumstances. They feel less isolated or vulnerable because of the support. One-to-one support in West Cornforth area for families in need is particularly positive.
- Partnerships with most local schools and early years settings are good and help the children using the centre to make good educational progress. Sessions to boost children's development, such as the 'Again project' and 'Chatter and Rhyme', have a good impact on improving their communication and vocabulary skills. One-to-one speech and language support by family workers reinforces this learning. The achievement gap is narrowing and children are better prepared for school.
- Not enough parents attend adult education or activities, including volunteering, that increases their chances of gaining qualifications or gaining work. Those parents who attend adult education classes generally achieve and progress well, however, too few parents across the area access this provision. Additionally, the centre does not support enough parents to help them to gain a good understanding of their children's development, or how to support their child's learning at home.
- Health outcomes, such as childhood obesity, breastfeeding rates and smoking in pregnancy are low, despite an appropriate drive to promote healthy lifestyles throughout all centre activities.

For instance, staff develop parents' awareness of healthy diets through sessions, such as 'Health Cooking on a Budget'. However, this is having limited impact, with obesity levels in reception age children that are currently higher than both the local and national averages.

- The quality of case files varies too much between centres and practitioners. Some are well detailed with a good depth of knowledge of the families and the actions taken. However, others contain too little information, are not always organised well and too often outline actions that are not specific to the needs of the family or appear to have little challenge or impact on the parents. Allied to this, staff face-to-face interaction with parents is not always sufficiently challenging or direct to change or improve their behaviour.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders, managers and staff have a shared vision about improving provision for children and families. Staff are highly enthusiastic and motivated, highly committed to the families in the area. They understand their area well and use this information effectively to target families most in need of support. They are now registering a large majority of families in the area and are continually improving their practice in improving sustained outcomes for them.
- The local authority sees children's centres as a key community hub around which it is building good partnerships to deliver integrated services. Officers are now much more 'visible' in the children's centre group and have been instrumental in providing training and support. Monitoring is regular, effective and supportive with the annual conversation being a good tool to challenge self-evaluation judgements. Improving quality is a key focus with officers and staff developing clear processes, such as file audit and observing sessions, to improve practice.
- The collation and use of data are much improved and the group now has a sound understanding of how many families they reach in the area and are gaining an ever-increasing understanding of the impact of their actions. The group is benefitting from recent developments with regard to formal agreements for sharing information between their health partners and themselves, although the full impact of this is yet to be seen. The use of data for the setting of appropriate targets is not yet fully developed and is not always allowing the team to evaluate practice fully.
- The local advisory boards consist of a good mix of professionals with a good understanding of the local area and with a high commitment to developing provision that really meets local needs. However, there are too few parent representatives or men on the boards to inform local or strategic planning.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are comprehensive and generally effectively implemented. Staff use Pre- and Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes appropriately. Partnerships with health workers are effective, although in some cases with social workers it is not always clear that staff are following shared processes. E-safety is not always well-promoted.
- Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, particularly in working with children. Staff development and support is effective for the most part, although staff are not always sufficiently trained to deal with challenging adults' behaviour or attitudes. Staff are motivated and feel well supported.
- Parents share their views of provision through evaluations of sessions and activities, through one-to-one talks with staff, by use of 'stick it' notes on notice boards and suggestion boxes. Individual parents comment favourably on gaining resources, such as painting and creative play materials through this consultation. However, although there are methods to gather wider community views on improvement of provision, it is unclear what impact this is having to change traditional ways of working.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's Centre Group details

Unique reference number	80228
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	430091
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1273
Group manager	Sue Burbage
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	03000 267 488
Email address	sue.burbage@durham.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 23360 Tudhoe Moor CC
- URN 21998 Middlestone Moor CC
- URN 23498 West Cornforth CC

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