

Newcastle upon Tyne - Central

Families Matter, Lindfield Avenue, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, NE5 3PL

Inspection dates	3–4 June 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group is good.

- The local authority demonstrates a clear commitment to improving the lives of families with children aged under five years in the area. Senior managers use data particularly well to plan and deliver a range of good quality services. These engage and benefit the very large majority of local families, including those identified as most in need.
- Staff and volunteers are highly motivating and provide very good role models to parents and children. Parents value highly the skills of staff and there are many examples of how their advice has changed lives for the better.
- The group works particularly well with a wide range of partners such as health professionals to make sure that families that need extra help are identified and supported well. Regular meetings between professionals help to make sure the right families are getting the right service in a timely manner.
- Leadership, governance and management are good with dynamic and challenging managers. Staff are highly qualified and work well together as a team, having a good impact on improving services for families. There are very good opportunities for them to develop their skills further to meet the needs of the locality better and they are well-supported by their managers.
- Managers deploy resources well to meet needs in a time of funding cuts. They, and their partners, have used innovative and forward-thinking ideas to maintain as much activity as possible to benefit local families.
- Safeguarding practice is well established, ensuring that the safety of children is prioritised well.

It is not outstanding because:

- Not enough lone parents or fathers from the area are coming to the centres.
- In a small number of cases, some quality improvement processes are not being fully effective.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Broaden the programme content to make it more attractive to men and to lone parents with more employability-related opportunities.
- Improve further the consistency of some quality processes by:
 - ensuring closer scrutiny of case files and further developing processes to cover the few aspects of partner delivery that are not already assessed
 - provide training for the partnership board so that they are better able to provide challenge to help further improve quality.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group 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 Cowgate and Blakelaw, Fenham and North Fenham, and Woodlands Children's Centres.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority lead for children's centres, as well as members of the senior leadership team. Meetings were also held with the children's social care team, early years team, family support workers, parent participation workers, officers from the local authority and local employability/training partners. Inspectors also met health, education and early years partners, parents, volunteers, local schools, children's social care, employability and training partners and representatives from the area partnership. They looked at the centre's self-evaluation, action plans, case studies, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation. Representatives from the local authority also attended team meetings.

The inspectors visited activities jointly with the centre managers, family support workers, early years play practitioners and parent participation workers.

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

Inspection team

June Cramman, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gillian Bishop

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Pepper

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Newcastle upon Tyne - Central children's centre group consists of three centres, Cowgate and Blakelaw Sure Start, Fenham and North Fenham Sure Start and Woodlands Sure Start. Until recently, Fenham and North Fenham were two separate centres within the group but were merged under one manager as part of a service review. The group is located in the centre of Newcastle upon Tyne and includes the Blakelaw, Kenton, Fenham, Dene, North Heaton and North Jesmond wards, as well as part of the Wingrove and Westgate wards. The group is managed by the local authority together with Action for Children. It is overseen by a Sure Start lead, who works closely with the local authority's early intervention service manager. An experienced management team and operational staff based across the group's sites give further support. The centres are within a radius of five miles. The total reach population is around 3371 children aged from birth to five years with 1678 living in 30% or under most disadvantaged super output areas. Reach in the 30% and under super output areas is 85%. Worklessness in the area is an issue in Cowgate and Blakelaw with further pockets in the Fenham area. However, in the area around the Woodlands centre, unemployment is very low. Identified target groups for the area include teenage parents, children with weight problems, children with additional needs, children on child protection plans, lone parents, male carers, and those living in the lowest 30% super output areas. Whilst the majority of families are of White British heritage, there is an increasing number of families representing a range of minority ethnic groups. The group is led by Action for Children, and there is one area partnership board that oversees the running of this group. Of the individual centres in the group, two are managed by Action for Children and one is managed by Newcastle City Council. Family support work is undertaken by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority as part of a commissioned arrangement.

Early years provision is provided through a number of early years settings, school nursery classes and childminders located within the locality. Some children enter early education with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those typical for their age in communication and language and personal, social and emotional development. The proportion of disabled children and those with special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average. The primary schools and nearby early years settings were not part of this inspection as they are inspected separately. Inspection reports for these settings may be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Overall, the locality group has registered and actively engaged the very large majority of its children aged under five years. Managers, staff and partners use data and local knowledge extremely well to target families from the most deprived areas, those hardest to reach or less likely to engage with activities, as well as families expecting children. As a result, the children's centre group successfully engages the very large majority of families residing in these more needy areas.
- Good strategies are in place to engage families who would otherwise be unlikely to continue to participate, for example, a 'we missed you' card is sent in the post to them. Alternately, members of staff follow up non-attendance with a sensitive telephone call. As a result, most children of families from targeted groups take up funded early education places.
- The group's successful multi-agency approach to referral and assessment of need ensures families are provided with a team of professionals around the family, including family support. As a result, families enjoy good improvements in life styles and circumstances. This is particularly so for families at risk of, or experiencing, domestic violence, where one-to-one delivery of structured parenting programmes that specifically tackle the issue of domestic abuse, has a strong, positive impact.
- Outreach provision is well developed across all three children's centres and communities and is used flexibly to engage families. There is a very good balance between services open to all families and those targeted at key target groups such as children with special educational needs. Consequently, the group provides a good range of early childhood services and activities that have a good impact on families' lifestyles, safety and life chances.
- Lone parents and fathers are not participating in activities as well as other target groups. This prevents these parents from benefitting from programmes and sessions that could increase their employability, or give them very useful benefit advice, particularly at a time when changes in the benefits system could potentially affect them the most.
- Referrals, universal services, observations and assessments are used effectively to identify needs and match families to services and give good support. Good assessment of children generally leads to early referral to specialist services particularly for speech and language support.
- Careful assessment of two-year olds, close tracking and partnerships with private childcare providers ensures children attend good quality provision regularly. As a result, most children with whom the centre has worked are starting school more ready to engage in learning.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Very effective partnership working, together with a particularly good understanding of the needs of the local area, has led to good planning of services for all families in the area. This is true for both activities that are open to all families as well as those more specialist, targeted services. The range of activities and services across all three centres is good and meets the needs of families well.
- The qualified teachers in the group provide very effective support, advice and training that is improving the quality of linked early year's provision in the local area including support for some childminders. Practitioners appreciate the feedback they gain and are actively using this to improve their practice further. Nearly all children use early years settings, primary schools or childminder services that have been judged good or better in their most recent inspections.
- Activities are well-planned and organised for children and contribute very well to the development of their skills, particularly in relation to language and communication skills. Staff are highly skilled, using, for example, Makaton sign language in most sessions to reinforce understanding.
- Planning, observation, assessment of progress and tracking are effective and demonstrate a clear focus on improving outcomes and reducing inequalities for a majority of young children and targeted families. Clear procedures are in place to track children's progress and tackle any identified issues that could delay good learning development.
- Partnership working and data sharing with health are very strong. Health partners have specific targets and a good understanding of health issues in the reach area. For example, although data on breastfeeding at six to eight weeks across the reach are above national averages, partners have developed an action plan to raise this even further and challenge the very strong bottle-feeding

culture that remains in particular parts of the reach.

- The group has good volunteer opportunities throughout the provision and provides good training, support and development for parents to gain skills, help the community and progress to further education and to jobs. An accredited volunteer project is particularly good in widening parents' skills, knowledge and attitudes to enable them to support other vulnerable families as well as progressing in their own careers.
- Parents benefit from a good range of well-organised activities to help them improve their own skills. They benefit well from a range of parenting courses, family learning, literacy, numeracy and language courses as well as some job-specific courses such as customer service qualifications. They have good access to information in welfare rights sessions and 'drop-in' jobsearch sessions. However, programmes to develop employability still require some improvement.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The local authority provides a clear lead to managers and staff in the group, challenging them well to improve provision and reduce inequalities. Managers are dynamic and skilful, providing highly effective leadership. Together, the local authority and managers identify specific priorities based on a very good understanding of the locality and the centres in the group, focussing down to very detailed targets and action-planning in each. Managers use data extremely well to do this.
- The partnership board is inclusive of local people, parents and professionals from both the voluntary and statutory sector. It is well established and plays a key role in informing the group and officers of the needs of the community. However, it does not always provide enough challenge to managers to help them further improve.
- Staff are highly enthusiastic, motivating and offer very good role models to parents and children. They are highly qualified and take part in a wide range of training that is well matched to the widening needs of their job roles. Staff feel well-supported and highly valued. Senior leaders monitor the quality of the group's activities delivered by their own staff and commissioned services. However, a small minority of partners' work is not yet covered by these quality arrangements.
- Managers and staff are very effective and innovative in their deployment of resources across the group. Funding is targeted well to ensure those most in need gain most monies. The group works very well with partners to ensure that the central provision is augmented by partner-delivered services. Managers are working very well with partners to bid for extra funding and to develop self-sustaining activities.
- Parents value the work of the group highly. They give feedback through a range of measures both informal and formal and this is used well for improvement. When two children's centres merged recently in Fenham, parents were widely consulted and included in the discussions and decisions. The group has one area partnership board on which the vice-chair is a parent and in which parents' views are well considered.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and implemented well. All staff are highly aware of what to do if there is a concern about a child's well-being or safety. Strong relations with social services and health colleagues ensure close joint working and information-sharing. A named social worker is in place.
- The use of the local common assessment process is well established in the area. The focus by leaders on improving the quality of this process, and indeed on all families' case files, has had a very positive impact. However, the monitoring process implemented by managers, in a very few cases, does not yet fully identify errors and omissions in recording.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80126
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	442722
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3371
Centre leader	Susan Ley
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0191 214 2460
Email address	susan.ley@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 23042 Cowgate and Blakelaw Children's Centre
- 21157 Fenham and North Fenham Children's Centre
- 23070 Woodlands Children's Centre

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