

Inspection report for Acklam Children's Centre

Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	366842
Inspection dates	18- 19 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Jayne Utting HMI

Centre governance	Middlesborough Local Authority
Centre leader	Diane Chandler
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Newham Bridge Primary
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Newham Bridge School Club EY 223126

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, 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.

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, members of the advisory board and a number of partners, including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health and education professionals and representatives from Middlesbrough workforce development team.

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

Information about the centre

Acklam Children's Centre is located in the central locality of Middlesbrough. It covers two wards; Acklam and Linthorpe, each of which fall within the 70% of most deprived wards in the country. The reach population of the centre is just over 460. Recent figures show that around 25% of households are lone parents with dependent children. Estimated weekly income is significantly lower than the Middlesbrough average and the percentage of children aged nought to four living in households dependent on workless benefits is around 12%. The majority of local families are of White British heritage, although there is an increasing number of black and minority ethnic groups within the locality for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. Most children enter childcare and early education with a slightly 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 below the national average.

This phase two children's centre operates on a campus model across two primary school sites; Green Lane and Newham Bridge. The Newham Bridge site comprises a separate brick building which links directly through a door to the main school. The school at Green Lane is currently undergoing major building work and as a result, the children's centre is currently located in a temporary building within the school grounds. The centre opened in 2007 and delivers the appropriate core offer. The centre has close links with two early years and childcare provisions, Marchesi playgroup and Jack in the Box Day nursery. The centre has its own lead who is directly managed by a cluster manager for the central locality, which comprises three further children's centres. Governance arrangements are through an advisory board established in 2007 from the original stakeholder steering group.

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

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

'Friendly, welcoming, warm, life changing, essential and enjoyable,' are words used frequently by parents and carers to describe the impact Acklam Children's Centre has on their lives. The centre works hard to build up trust and respect amongst local families. The support, dedication and commitment of all centre staff and partner services ensures that outcomes for people living within this locality continue to improve.

Provision is good both in relation to the good quality activities delivered within the centre, and the outreach work carried out by health professionals and family support staff. The importance the centre gives to reaching out into the community and developing positive relationships with all users is the foundation stone of its success. Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is central to the work of the centre. 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 vulnerable families and children 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 and, increasingly,

many now have the confidence to ask for help and support before they reach a point of crisis.

A rigorous cycle of monitoring and evaluation ensures that the management team remain focussed on improving the quality and impact of the services and activities provided, demonstrating good capacity for improvement. Access to a wealth of information available through the centre's comprehensive database, greatly enhances the depth of the centre's self analysis. The senior management team realises that there is scope to develop the use of this resource further in order to fully evaluate the longer term impact of their work.

Advisory board members are fully supportive of the work of the centre and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. A well-established cycle of monitoring and evaluation ensures that planning is well targeted and that most advisory board members have the capacity to challenge the impact and progress made by the centre. However, whilst some parents have access to their own developing 'Parent Network', few take on an active role on the advisory board, which limits the extent to which they can effectively contribute to the ongoing developments of the centre. The centre is aware of this and has taken steps to address this.

Safeguarding is given the appropriate priority, with robust policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and protection of both families and staff. All staff are confident in their understanding of child protection policies and procedures and are able to identify signs, referring quickly and appropriately when necessary. This coupled with the centre's flexible approach to service delivery, ensures that the good quality support provided is responsive to the changing needs of the community, and so remains correctly targeted. Equality is promoted sensitively, with robust systems in place to identify and tackle any forms of discrimination identified at a community or multi-agency level.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Continue to develop work around participation to ensure parents are empowered to contribute to the governance of the centre through meaningful representation on the advisory board.
- Further develop and embed systems to ensure the consistent longer term evaluation of the impact of all services delivered through the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

One parent's experience, described as 'life changing; something which I build my life around so I feel less isolated', reflects the impact that Acklam Children's Centre has on the lives of many families and children within the locality it serves. Central to its success is the time taken by the dedicated staff team to secure their trust and respect, combined with well established, effective multi-agency partnerships which

together provide good quality care and support.

Partnership work, in relation to the promotion of children's and families' emotional well-being is particularly effective. The commitment of all professionals, including midwives, health visitors, family support and project workers ensures that families receive the support they need. The establishment of a number of stay and play activities, such as Jolly Jingles, Tiny Tots and Amazing Babies alleviates the sense of isolation felt by a number of mothers in the locality, providing a much needed place to meet other parents and carers and the opportunity to share experiences.

'Amazing Babies' provides a good environment for babies and their parents and carers to bond well. Children develop their play and communication skills as they explore the sound and feel of different objects in the treasure baskets, clearly delighted at the loud noises they make by banging metal spoons and pans together. Mothers are able to share stories and tips about dealing with increasingly mobile babies and several parents reported that they felt better on days when they had an activity in which to participate. Family support workers also use these well-attended groups as an opportunity to catch up with parents and carers in a relaxed, informal environment. This work, combined with the establishment of good working relationships with health professionals enables early intervention in relation to a range of issues including speech and language development, behaviour management and postnatal depression.

A continued focus on the promotion of issues around child safety, combined with productive working partnerships with the local fire service ensures families receive appropriate support and advice in relation to reducing accidents in the home. All parents and carers receive an informative safe parenting handbook and are offered a home visit at registration. During these visits, staff take time to offer practical advice about potential dangers in the home and inform parents and carers of how to minimise these, including signposting to low-cost safety equipment schemes. Effective multi-agency support ensures that children subject to a child protection plan or common assessment framework processes are well supported. Robust procedures and effective protocols between relevant agencies ensure that appropriate information is shared between professionals, with care packages identified to meet need in a consistent and rigorous manner. Effective procedures are in place to ensure the progress of these families is closely monitored, with continued engagement with the children's centre often providing a safety net following more intensive intervention. The effectiveness of this approach is reflected in a reduction in the number of re-referral rates across the authority.

The achievement of children at the end of the Foundation Stage continues to improve, particularly in relation to their personal, social and emotional development as well as communication, language and literacy skills. The centre staff work closely with the well-established local private and voluntary sector childcare providers, ensuring the continued quality of service provision. In particular, the close working relationship established with the local workforce development team has had a significant impact on the training and advice available to childminders within the locality, many of whom have now completed higher level qualifications.

Most parents feel that they have a voice within the centre which is listened to and as a result services provided meet their specific needs. For example, the timing of the Jolly Jingles group was changed to enable parents to collect older siblings from school. However, there is limited opportunity for them to engage meaningfully in the governance of the centre and to participate in key decision making.

Although the number of children living in workless households within the Acklam locality is quite small, there are some good examples of how the centre has helped parents into learning, training and employment. Some parents, having undertaken the centre's comprehensive volunteer training program, felt empowered to pursue further training opportunities and two have now secured employment. One mother stated that the centre had enabled her to get her life back on track and that she now felt more confident about the future both for herself and her children. In partnership with adult education, the centre also runs a number of accredited courses including first aid, ICT and healthy lifestyle training. Those families facing financial difficulties, particularly as a result of redundancy are directed to local partner agencies, receiving timely support and advice to help them maintain financial stability.

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	3
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

All centre staff and partners share a good understanding of the particular issues and challenges facing centre users in this locality. As a result, support is well targeted for local children and families, helping them to make the best of those opportunities available. The centre can identify many examples where families have been supported, helping them to re-engage in everyday life and enjoy their families and home life again. The dedication and commitment of all involved in the centre, ensures a continued focus on community development and engagement, enabling them to be responsive to the specific needs of this community. For example,

activities have been marketed to encourage grandparents to attend, as they often provide the childcare for working families locally. This is also reflected in the work of the male engagement worker who encourages granddads to join activities as well as those dad's whose shift patterns of work mean that on occasion they too can bring their children to activities.

Effective partnerships with local professionals means that the assessment of individual cases is robust and the common assessment framework is successfully implemented ensuring teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need. The role of the children's centre in the establishment of effective exit strategies is improving, ensuring parents can build their confidence and parenting skills. Any targeted support offered is tailored to the individual needs of the family. For those parents who are not confident using services at the centre, home visits provide opportunities for outreach work to take place. Continued investment in the professional development of staff means that family support workers are multi-skilled and so able to use their eclectic knowledge of resources such as 'Triple P' and 'Portage' to provide appropriate support for parents.

The shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are a strength of the centre. A close effective working partnership has been established between all relevant external agencies and the centre's family support team. This ensures the provision of streamlined individualised packages of support. The centre also works in partnership with the local speech and language therapy unit offering the Early Bird programme to parents of children under four with a diagnosis of an Autistic spectrum disorder. This provides parents with the support and empowerment necessary to facilitate their child's ongoing development and often pre-empts more intense intervention at a later stage.

Good quality early years provision also ensures that the achievement and aspirations of children are raised. Whilst not directly linked to this centre, the early years educator has delivered training to all staff in order to develop their knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This ensures that project workers are able to integrate the Early Years Foundation Stage into all aspects of their work, ensuring that children are well prepared when they start school. A further programme 'Starting Nursery', which runs jointly with the parent support advisors from the local primary school, further supports parents and children with the challenge of transition into school and nursery.

Evaluations from individual parents about the quality of support highlight the difference the work of the centre has made to their own and their children's development and well-being. One parent described her experience of a family support program as having been 'essential to enabling her to regain control of family life', another stated that without the activities she 'would see no-one all day and be totally isolated'.

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

The centre's management team, advisory board and partners have a clear focus on improvement and roles and responsibilities are clearly set out and understood. The local authority, in particular, provides robust challenges to the manager and her team through quarterly performance clinics, attendance at scrutiny committees and the 'annual conversation'. There is a coherent link between the Children's Trust, Children and Young People's Plan, and the centre's action plan and as a result, the centre's priorities link effectively to those of the wider area. The local authority service manager and the locality cluster manager continue to work hard to ensure that the profile of the children's centre is raised through representation on a range of local strategic partnerships.

Rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures ensure that all staff and partners continually seek to improve their practice. The local authority works effectively to develop a highly comprehensive data system and each centre receives regular updates in relation to their performance against national indicators. This has provided a wealth of information which the centre uses to inform ongoing planning. A key strength of this data system are the tracking procedures which enable staff to monitor the attendance of specific target groups including young mums, dads, those from workless households and lone parents. This helps to ensure equality of opportunity and enables the centre to identify both the impact of any targeted intervention work as well as potential barriers to access. The views of parents and users are also collected through evaluations of individual activities and interventions in order to check quality and usefulness and to inform the future planning of provision. The centre recognises the need to extend these systems further in order to track the ongoing progress of families and individuals throughout their time with the centre. As a result, the centre is currently less able to monitor and evaluate the longer term impact of the services it delivers.

The dedication of all staff and partners within the centre is good and this is driven in part by the leadership team's determination to improve outcomes for families locally. The performance management of staff is robust and arrangements for appraisal and

supervision are thorough and used to plan training and support staff development. As a result, well-skilled and knowledgeable staff have the confidence to identify needs and issues facing families at the earliest opportunity. All have an in-depth knowledge of policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding children and are confident to follow these as required. This combined with effective partnership working ensures that the centre is able to provide timely packages of integrated support, often preventing situations escalating into crisis. Robust arrangements are in place to ensure that all staff and other professionals who deliver services through the centre are suitable to do so.

A commitment to the inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the centre's vision. Centre staff have detailed knowledge and understanding of their locality, the depth of which ensures they are aware of how that demographic is changing, reshaping provision as appropriate to reflect this. For example, the centre has run additional ESOL courses at the Green Lane site in order to support an increasing number of families locally for whom English is not their first language.

Resources are used and managed effectively to meet the needs of families and children in the community. The centre manager works closely with the finance team within the local authority, ensuring budget allocations are aligned to ongoing priorities and remain responsive to the changing priorities and needs within the local community. Staff are well deployed and utilised ensuring good value for money, the centre and cluster managers remaining acutely aware of the need to ensure the long term sustainability of the centre.

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	3
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 range of provision	2
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

There are two private sector childcare settings within the Acklam Children's Centre area. These are Marchesi Playgroup and Jack in the Box Day Nursery. Two local primary schools; Green Lane and Newham Bridge, 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.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Acklam Children's Centre on 18-19 January 2011. 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 families who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and to those of you who feel isolated at home. The quality of care, guidance and support offered by those staff who work with you is also good and you told us that you have especially appreciated support for behaviour management and establishing effective feeding and sleep routines with young babies. In particular, activities and provision for children before they start school is improving across the area and your children are doing better as a result, especially in regard to making friends and developing speaking, listening and reading skills.

The children's 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 encouraging families to live healthier lifestyles through the provision of activities such as Leaps and Bounds which encourage exercise in young children, as well as through the promotion of national strategies such as Change4Life.

Parents 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 told us that staff listen to them and 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 also found that action was taken quickly and that different people and organisations worked well as a team to support both children and

families. However, there are some people who live in your area who do not currently use these facilities. So, the staff at your children's centre are developing ways to encourage more families to use the groups and activities they provide, so that they can all benefit, if they wish from the good support available.

We found that services worked well together as a team to provide help and support to families where a child has a special educational need and/or disability and for parents of babies and very young children. In particular activities such as Tiny Tots, Jolly Jingles and baby massage are well attended. Parents said they really appreciated the support of the family support workers and could give lots of examples of how their advice had made a difference to their lives. For example, one mum had received really beneficial advice and guidance about behaviour management, whilst others really valued having someone to attend group activities with for the first time. A lot of parents, especially those who are bringing up children on their own and those on maternity leave, told us that they felt really happy on the days when they had an activity to go to and had made new friends through the groups at the centre.

We found that those people in charge of the children's centre are doing a good job. Managers together with partners and other staff have worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. We know that everyone who works with Acklam 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 range of activities on offer as well as the increasing number of you who attend them. Managers know there is still more to do if they are to really get to know the needs of everyone in your community, and 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 properly understand how well they are doing in improving the lives of you and your family in the longer term is limited. We know that it will take time for these things to be established but 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 some of you have used the 'Parents Network' to influence and change the way some services are delivered. However, the centre needs to increase the involvement and influence of you as parents in their work. We hope that this is something you might be interested in becoming a part of.

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.