

Inspection report for Biddick Hall and Whiteleas

Local authority	South Tyneside
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Biddick Hall Infant's School 108682
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Biddick Hall and Whiteleas Children's Centre EY382519

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.

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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.

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one 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, education and children's social care professionals and representatives from Adult and Community Learning. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Biddick Hall and Whiteleas Children's Centre is located in the Biddick and All Saints Wards and is approximately three and a half miles south west of South Shields town centre. The reach population of the centre is 845 children aged birth to 4 years. Recent figures show that just over one fifth (21.5%) of households are lone parents with dependent children. Estimated weekly income is significantly lower than the South Tyneside average and the percentage of children aged birth to 4 living in households dependent on workless benefits is around 38%. The majority of local families are of White British heritage.

Most children enter early years provision with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than expected for their age. The proportion of disabled children and those with special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational need, is above average.

Biddick Hall and Whiteleas is a phase one children's centre offering the full core purpose. It is situated in the grounds of Biddick Hall Infants School. The centre is currently undergoing a review which proposes the merger of this centre with All Saints Children's Centre. Under the new proposal, All Saints would be the hub with Biddick Hall as its satellite to deliver the full core purpose across a combined reach of 1600 children aged nought to four years. There is currently an advisory board for the cluster of All Saints, Riverside, Marine Park and

Biddick Hall Children’s Centres. The centre hosts a full-time day care provision for children from birth to school age. Under the new structure, the day care will offer a reduced number of places for children aged two-to-five years.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Biddick Hall and Whiteleas Children’s Centre provides good support to children and families locally, particularly those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. “I would not be the person I am today without the support and help I have received from Sure Start” was a typical comment made to inspectors. The centre’s commitment to reaching out into the community to support those families in most need of intervention and support is commendable and has had a significant impact on ensuring the safety and well-being of local children and their families. This combined with timely care, guidance and support ensures the centre is viewed locally as a ‘place of safety’. The centre rightly gives a high priority to all aspects of safeguarding, safer recruitment and child protection. As a result this area of the centre work is of good quality. The combined actions taken to improve outcomes for children in relation to learning and development are good. The proportion of children achieving at expected levels has improved at a greater rate than that for South Tyneside as a whole and is now close to the authority average at 48.1%. However, the centre is aware that more needs to be done to increase the proportion of mothers’ breastfeeding and to reduce obesity.

The close and effective working partnerships that have been established between the centre and their health and social care colleagues has secured much improved outcomes for a number of children placed on the child protection register. It has also ensured that the centre continues to meet its own key priority to reduce the number of children entering the care system. The centre’s outreach work has a clear focus on improving the personal development and well-being of families. This is supported by a clear progression route from targeted services onto universal provision. However, the centre’s provision for learning and development in relation to educational development is not as well established. Support is less individualised and targets for improvement are not always sufficiently detailed to ensure

that a greater number of adults gain the qualifications that will enable them to improve their economic stability.

The senior management team are resolute in their determination to improve the impact of the centre's work across the community and this is clearly evidenced in the wide range of activities that families can now access. Through knowing the community well and having a good understanding of the strengths and gaps in service provision, leaders have ensured that support for specific target groups, including fathers, families from workless households and teenage parents has improved and resulted in increased engagement. This detailed and accurate analysis of need is the result of a range of rigorous monitoring activities which inform on-going development planning. As a result the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good. The management team are aware that this level of sophisticated monitoring and evaluation is yet to be consistently applied to some group activities. At times, this prevents the centre from securing more rapid improvement across some outcome areas. Whilst there are many opportunities for parents to evaluate their experiences across a range of centre activities, the centre needs to develop participation work further and empower more local parents to contribute meaningfully to the governance of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the economic stability and independence of families locally by:
 - Identifying clear, achievable learning goals for individual adults which build upon their prior learning and supports them to move forward into employment and/or further education
 - Extending the good practice seen in outreach work to the planning and evaluation of some group activities, so that the progress of families and individuals is both accelerated and clearly evidenced.
- Build upon the centre's work in relation to participation to empower more parents to take a meaningful role in the governance of the centre.
- Develop further existing close working partnerships, particularly with health professionals, to ensure the centre contributes to meeting the Local Authority's strategic priorities of reducing obesity and improving breastfeeding rates.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents told us that the support given to them to improve their emotional health and personal well-being has been 'life changing' and enabled them to 'get my life and family back' and 'enjoy my children.' A close working partnership with health professionals has ensured a steady improvement in breastfeeding rates over the past three years. However, the percentage of mothers choosing to breastfeed their children beyond six to eight weeks is still low at 14%. The outreach team incorporate a range of fun, physical activities into their

programme, including 'Jumping Jacks' and the popular 'Spooky Walk.' However, whilst evaluations are beginning to show an improvement in families understanding of how to keep themselves healthy, obesity rates amongst Reception Year children in the reach area remain above the South Tyneside average at 13.2%.

An effective working partnership between the local authority's family support team and the centre's Reaching Families and Vulnerable Families coordinators has had a significant impact on the centre's ability to effectively safeguard local children and families. Outreach officers sensitively support these families to deal with and successfully overcome a range of significant issues including domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse and improving home safety. This has enabled many to better understand how to keep themselves and their children safe. The centre are actively engaged with the families of all those subject to a child protection plan and can clearly demonstrate improved outcomes for them. Those subject to Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are also well supported.

The extent to which all children enjoy and achieve is good. As a result an increasing proportion now start school with a range of skills and abilities typical for their age. The work of the centre's quality co-ordinator has secured much improved links with local childcare providers, including the sponsored childminding network. This has ensured an improvement in the quality of early years provision locally and enabled the centre to work flexibly in its delivery of the two year old pilot scheme.

Parents have a voice within the centre. There is an active 'Parents Network' and members are committed to finding ways to ensure they are able to represent the views of the wider community. A number of parents have set up their own groups, including applying for local community grants to ensure on-going sustainability. The centre's advisory board includes representation from some parents, but there is work to do to build upon this further so that more local parents feel empowered to engage meaningfully in the governance of the centre and to participate in key decision making at this level.

The centre's focus on raising self-esteem and confidence has empowered a growing number of parents to take steps back into training and employment. For example, one parent having completed a number of courses through the centre, including a volunteer course, now helps out in the community café. A satisfactory range of courses such as 'Effective Parenting' and 'Confidence Building' as well as basic skills courses such as English and maths have also enabled a small number of parents, including some lone parents, to gain accreditations. However, whilst the centre can demonstrate some success in relation to supporting parents back into employment, take-up rates for adult learning activities are currently only satisfactory.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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.	3

How good is the provision?

2

A wide range of services and activities are delivered across the reach area and these reflect the unique and diverse needs of the local community. Effective partnerships have been established with the family support team, health professionals, local police and housing, with regular meetings enabling the centre to better assess the needs of local families, particularly those whose circumstances that make them the most vulnerable members of its community.

Parents told us of the life changing support they had received and the confidence they had gained, enabling them to move forward successfully. 'I owe them my family', said one mum, whilst another spoke of being more confident to set boundaries and relate to her children. Practitioners engage sensitively with families to help them overcome any anxieties and parents are clearly at home in the welcoming, safe and comfortable surroundings.

Home visits from family support workers have been a first vital step for many parents, securing their engagement with support services, sometimes for the first time. Parents are sensitively supported to become more independent and provided with the skills to take decisions and make choices for themselves. The level of personal support received by families is greatly appreciated and has contributed to the genuine sense of trust in and respect for staff. The centre continually evaluates its range of good quality provision and ensures that activities are well located and effectively engage the majority of target groups.

Provision to help children learn and develop is good and helps to ensure that their achievements and aspirations are raised. Parents say that they feel empowered and comment on the real difference the centre has made to their own confidence and personal development. However, the provision of individualised support to promote progression onto further education and training is less well developed for adults accessing the centre.

Through effective multi-agency working, the centre ensures that families receive sensitive, individualised and tailored care, guidance and support. This is particularly demonstrated through the shared actions taken to involve and improve outcomes for disabled children and

those with special educational needs. Relevant external agencies including physiotherapists and the speech and language therapy team are able to work with children at the centre. This has improved communication and reduced the travel burden for parents. Staff demonstrate a wide breadth of knowledge on a range of topics including smoking cessation, infant feeding and weaning. This combined with the availability of high quality literature ensures that families have access to good quality information and advice.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Despite the implementation of a significant restructure across all children centre provision locally, staff remain committed to improving the life chances of all families locally. The local authority plays an active role in overseeing the centre's performance, providing challenge through regular meetings with the manager for children's centres and childcare services, as well as a formal annual conversation. Staff are supported through regular supervision and the implementation of personal development plans which ensure a coordinated approach to training and continuous professional development. The priorities of the centre are clearly reflected in these plans, with personal targets set in relation to the achievement of them. This ensures staff have a clear understanding of their role in relation to effecting future planning and improving outcomes for families.

The centre's management team have made a noticeable commitment to developing systems for monitoring and evaluation. Delivery plans are based on a sound analysis of need and reflect an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. The quality of planning and evaluation for outreach work is highly sophisticated, particularly in relation to the on-going monitoring of individual case files. However, this good practice is not consistently applied to some group activities. On occasion, group planning is too generic or targets are not sufficiently individualised to enable staff to evidence or secure rapid progress, particularly in relation to improving economic stability.

The centre promotes equality, tackles discrimination and celebrates diversity effectively. Activities are provided to support community cohesion and have been successful in uniting previously separate areas of the local reach. This concerted action to improve the life chances of all has ensured the engagement of some groups who may previously have chosen not to access the centre's services, including those in workless households, teenage

parents and some dads. Safeguarding is given the highest priority and recruitment and vetting procedures are robust.

Resources are managed well and used to best effect within this community. Partnership working stretches resources well and has had a positive impact in securing good and improving outcomes for families locally. Outreach work and well-attended events in local communities has extended the reach and impact of work of the centre successfully. Many more parents and children are using the centre as a result, particularly those in most need of intervention and support. As a result, the centre provides good value for money.

There is clear evidence that the centre is taking action to increase parents' involvement and that of the wider community. Parents appreciate the opportunity to help shape services both through regular evaluations of activities and through consultation on wider issues such as the recent re-structuring of children's centre provision. A large majority of parents report that they are very satisfied with the work of the centre and feel that support and activities provided have met their needs well, as one parent commented, 'there's no problem that this centre can't help you overcome, I'd have stayed forgotten without them.'

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
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.	2

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

Biddick Hall and Whiteleas Children's Centre hosts a full time day care provision for children aged birth to school age. Three local primary schools, Biddick Hall Infants, Forest View and St Oswald's Roman Catholic Primary, 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 this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Biddick Hall and Whiteleas centre on 31 October and 1 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Your children's centre provides good support to your community, delivering good quality services that enhance the lives of you and your children. The motivated and dedicated staff are led by a management team who are fully committed to ensure you all have every opportunity to move forward in your lives. You told us how everyone is made welcome in the centre, staff are non-judgemental and can help you no matter how huge problems appear – we agree with you completely.

The centre is focussed on ensuring that families and children in your community remain safe. There are clear procedures to ensure this happens and these are well understood and consistently implemented by staff. Centre staff and partners work together well, to ensure all families, but particularly those of you with circumstances make you potentially vulnerable, receive the correct services to meet your unique needs. You told inspectors how the centre is a lifeline especially when times get tough. Staff work extremely hard to improve your understanding of how to keep your children and families safe and this has included helping some of you to manage your children's behaviour better or helping you to access equipment such as safety gates to make sure children stay safe in the home.

Although outcomes for children and families are good overall those for health and economic well-being are satisfactory. We know outreach workers pass on information about the importance of leading healthy lifestyles and ensuring children get the best start in life. However, too few mums are choosing to continue breastfeeding their babies and the number of children in Reception Year who are overweight continues to increase. We have asked the children's centre to work to improve this. In addition, whilst a small number of you have successfully completed a range of training courses, we have asked the centre to support more of you to achieve this and take advantage of the good opportunities available.

We found that those people in charge of the centre are doing a good job. Managers, together with staff, are constantly looking at ways to develop the services they offer to you. The centre has access to lots of detailed information to help them plan and evaluate activities. We have asked them to develop this further in relation to the way it plans for and evaluates some of its group activities in order to improve this provision even further. The centre continues to try and increase the involvement and influence of you as parents. One such way is through your active participation in the work of the advisory board. We hope that this is something which more of you might be interested in becoming involved in.

We thoroughly enjoyed our time at your centre and believe it will continue to go from strength to strength. We really appreciated you coming to talk to us and wish you every success for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.