

Inspection report for Eastover Children's Centre

Local authority	Somerset
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Olive Tree Nursery EY409425

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the cluster manager, the centre's senior management team, representatives of the local authority, the cluster advisory board, partnership agencies, members of staff and families using the centre.

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

Information about the centre

In January 2004 Eastover became a phase one children's centre. The centre draws users from Eastover and other parts of Bridgwater. In April 2011 the centre became part of the Sedgemoor 2 Children's Centre Cluster, which includes two other children's centres, Sydenham and Woolavington. The centre is accountable to the local authority as part of the cluster group and is governed directly by a cluster advisory board. The new cluster manager was appointed in April 2011. Since then, staffing has been restructured to work across the cluster. The lead centre officer transferred from another centre in the cluster, and has been in post since November 2011.

The Olive Tree Nursery is an independently registered childcare setting located within the children's centre site. The nursery is open during the week from 8am to 6pm for 50 weeks of the year. A maximum of 79 children may attend the nursery and after-school club at any one time. Most children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with a narrower range of skills and lower abilities than typically expected for their age.

The centre is situated in the electoral ward of Eastover. Four of the five areas within the ward are in the top 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. A much higher than average proportion of families in the local area live in workless households. In both of the last two years, over one in four children aged 0–4 live in

households dependent on workless benefits. The vast majority of the community served by the centre is from a White British heritage. A small but increasing proportion of users are from minority ethnic families, predominantly from eastern European heritage. A small but rising proportion of families speak English as an additional language.

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

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

4

Main findings

The new centre manager together with senior leaders have developed their understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and have introduced new systems and procedures. Senior leaders have produced a development plan and begun to hold regular reviews of the centre's progress in addressing weaknesses. However, key targets in the centre's plan are not informed by reliable and accurate data. There is currently little use of available data to help shape services to meet the needs of local families. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve is limited because leaders at all levels do not have robust procedures to sustain improvement and evaluate effectively the centre's impact on improving outcomes.

The centre works with health professionals to improve the health and well-being of young children and their families. However, referrals to additional support are not clearly understood by families and staff. Separate 'healthy child' and 'early intervention' meetings are a source of tension between health professionals and centre staff. Ineffective protocols to share health information and data on immunisation take-up, breastfeeding rates and smoking cessation limit the ability of services to improve outcomes.

No families from the centre's reach area sit on the advisory board and too few families contribute to the centre's governance by being members of the parents' forum. The newly formed cluster advisory board has not yet set up procedures to analyse the effectiveness and outcomes of the contracts held with other agencies and providers. The local authority does not provide the centre with sufficient challenge to address weaknesses with partner agencies and ensure high quality

integrated provision. Key weaknesses have not been resolved.

The centre is aware of the high proportion of children in the local area living in workless households. Senior leaders are developing partnerships with a number of organisations: a local college to improve the proportion of users accessing appropriate learning programmes; and Credit Union, Next Steps and Yarlington Housing to improve the quality of information, advice and guidance on accessing housing, support benefits and seeking voluntary work. However, at the time of the inspection few of these initiatives were up and running and consequently, very few families were being helped to improve their financial stability and economic well-being.

The contract with an outreach provider amounts to less than 10 hours support per week, limiting opportunities to engage those identified as most in need of support. The centre has set itself targets to increase the engagement of users that have been hard to reach. In a recent activity targeted at a deprived geographical area, the centre made contact with local residents. However, the centre has not evaluated the effectiveness of this initiative by investigating whether or not attendance of different groups has increased. Additionally, there are too few opportunities for families from vulnerable groups who are most in need of support in the reach area to make their views known. For example, despite the presence of a high proportion of teenage parents in the local area, very few currently attend the sessions held at the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure the local authority and advisory board strengthen governance arrangements to accelerate and sustain improvement by:
 - involving parents and carers in governance and encourage their more active participation in decision making
 - developing more robust procedures to manage the performance of contractual arrangements
 - clarifying referral procedures to obtain additional support and assisted childcare places across partner agencies.

- Improve the use of data and information held at local level by partners and the local authority to identify and draw in those vulnerable groups currently under-represented.

- Strengthen partnerships with health, employment advice, adult education and outreach services to improve outcomes, especially for targeted groups of users.

- Increase the proportion of vulnerable users accessing specific services and activities ensuring that support is closely matched to need.

How good are outcomes for families?

The centre's advice and regular support helps the majority of users to understand how to keep healthy. Regular baby weighing clinics monitor babies' health and support families when necessary. The centre has increased the proportion of families attending breastfeeding support sessions with evidence of a rising take up this year. Meals cooked on site enable children in the nursery setting, to eat a broad and varied diet. At snack time children prepare their own fruit which helps to develop their understanding of healthy eating. The centre runs cooking courses where children and adults develop their confidence in using a range of healthy ingredients. 'Jumping beans' music and movement sessions enhance children's physical development.

Risk assessment procedures are up to date and shared across the centre. The centre adopts a consistent approach to maintaining users' safety, and appropriately addressing hazards. Visitors and families using the centre are aware of fire emergency procedures and staff closely supervise children's arrival and departure. The large majority of families using the centre report that they feel safe and staff work with families to improve children's well-being and safety. First aid training sessions attended by a proportion of fathers and working adults help families improve their health and safety within their own homes.

Courses help parents to learn and develop their parenting skills. The proportion of children in the local area reaching expected levels in their communication, literacy, social and emotional development at the end of their Reception year dropped in 2011. However, the Early Years Advisory Service has been quick to share this data and to develop a coordinated response with children's centre teachers. Parents of children with autism living in the local area enjoy attending a neighbouring children's centre. They report that the session provides 'one of the few places that they feel confident outside their home'. The centre provides specialist training for families, local early years settings and staff from the centre and local library. This consistent approach helps children to develop early communication skills and prevents them falling behind in their development. The centre works closely with Reception teachers sharing assessments to ensure children's smooth transition.

There are limited opportunities for families to improve their economic stability. Very few families from the local area access family learning courses. The 'Make your experience count' course, run in association with adult learning, helped only a small minority of families to explore choices in work, education, training and voluntary work. However, evaluations show that these attendees gained confidence and were better prepared to return to work. The centre's administrative staff provide employment guidance by printing off the latest vacancies in the area and update the notice board. Few families are involved in making decisions or actively contribute to the governance of the centre. This omission limits the extent to which they make a positive contribution to the centre.

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	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	4
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	4

How good is the provision?

4

The centre has begun to review the range of services that it offers to more closely target those users with most need. The centre has made contact with a range of organisations to develop users' employment skills and financial stability. A 'Fit for work' course aims to improve the self-confidence and employment prospects of the small number of users attending. However, the effectiveness of this course cannot yet be evaluated. The centre has recently introduced specific activities to help users return to work, although these are currently undersubscribed. The centre manager has provided opportunities for families using the centre, to evaluate their learning and development. Their responses are being increasingly taken into account to adapt future sessions.

Provision to help children learn is well organised and involves a range of early years professionals. Improvements to the centre's reception area provide a welcome and friendly entrance. Developments to the outdoor areas for children in the nursery have provided an attractive and safe grass area. Activities located at the separate sites across the cluster provide opportunities for families to access services close to their homes. Some families using the centre enjoy good quality activities: 'Triple P' and 'PEEP' sessions are enjoyed by families including those from minority ethnic groups. The centre is working to improve the recording of users' personal development and achievements.

Partnerships between professionals, agencies and outreach organisations are variable and do not sufficiently support the most vulnerable families in the local area. Referral procedures for families to access funding for assisted childcare places for two-year-olds present barriers to effective partnership working at all levels. However, good partnerships with voluntary organisations and Women's Aid group have brought about improvements for some families. Sessions led by an enthusiastic and strongly motivated volunteer provide strong support for families experiencing domestic

violence.

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	4
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	4

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

The centre has been through an extended period without a manager and there have been a number of changes in leadership since opening. This uncertainty has affected significantly the quality of provision and management. The instigation of many procedures at the centre has been delayed: for example, the setting up of an advisory board and the collection of accurate data to effectively monitor and evaluate the work of the centre. In the absence of a manager, senior administrative staff worked hard to ensure that budgeting and financial accounting was maintained. Since their appointment in April 2011, the new centre manager and senior leaders have introduced a number of procedures and initiatives aimed at improving provision and outcomes for families.

The centre has effective procedures to check that prior to their appointment, staff are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults. Staff are trained in child protection procedures and are appropriately supervised and provided with regular opportunities to discuss individual cases. The centre has appropriate protocols in place to share safeguarding information between agencies. The centre's support for families facing challenging circumstances includes regular telephone contact; clear recording procedures; and liaison with other services. Occasionally, opportunities are missed by staff to take a more proactive role and 'go the extra mile' to improve outcomes.

The centre's promotion of equality and diversity is inadequate because the centre does not have clear information, pertinent to different user groups, to evaluate and improve their engagement. Data and information held at local level by partners and the local authority are not shared effectively to enable the centre to identify and meet the needs of different groups. A number of key partnerships with other agencies are failing to sufficiently improve outcomes, especially for more vulnerable groups of users, including some children with disabilities. Targeted sessions aimed at young parents or those in workless households have limited take-up. Referral arrangements to access additional support for families are not clearly understood. As a result, the services offered by the centre do not adequately reflect the needs of families in the area and do not provide sufficient value for money.

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	4
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	4
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	4
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	4
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	4
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	4

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

The Olive Tree Nursery Early Years Foundation Stage provision was inspected in November 2010.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Eastover Children's Centre on 11 and 12 January 2012. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection by sharing your experience of the children's centre.

Since the change in leadership the staff have begun a number of new procedures and initiatives to address areas of weakness. However, the centre's plans are not based on an accurate understanding of the needs of local families. Workers from the centre and from other agencies are not reaching a number of families in the local area who are most in need of support and guidance.

The centre helps to develop users' understanding of healthy lifestyles. Children in the nursery are helped to develop healthy eating. The centre has supported an increasing number of mothers to breastfeed their babies. However, partnership arrangements with health professionals are not working smoothly in all areas. Referral arrangements for families are confusing, particularly for parents, and so hinder their access to additional support.. Key information and data which would help to improve the centre's work are not shared.

The new advisory board has not yet established procedures to monitor the centre's performance. Despite efforts by centre staff, no parents or carers from the local area sit on the advisory board. You can do more to help your centre by giving them your ideas and opinions and by attending meetings. The local authority has been slow to set up essential systems to manage the centre and evaluate its work. We have asked it to increase its monitoring and to challenge partners to improve.

The centre has started to put in place activities and events to help you to find employment and to improve your qualifications. At the time of the inspection these activities were only helping a few families and we have asked the centre to do more to help you.

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