

Inspection report for Callington and Delaware Children's Centre

Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	386977
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2012
Reporting inspector	Alex Baxter

Centre leader	Nicola Murphy
Date of previous inspection	This the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's governing body, the local authority and the senior management and leadership teams. Employees of partnership agencies linking with, and visiting, the centre were consulted. Inspectors also spoke with centre staff and families using the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

The Callington Children's Centre and separately the Delaware Children's Centre were opened in 2008 as designated phase 2 local authority managed Sure Start children's centres. The centres began offering the full core offer of services in 2010 and in September 2011 were merged to become the federated Callington and Delaware Children's Centre.

Governance arrangements include an advisory board and partnership agreements with a range of representatives of the community and partner groups. The centre also works in close partnership with Callington Primary School and the Delaware Community Learning Centre to provide an additional range of services for families. Within its full core offer, and through its various partnerships across a mostly rural reach area, the Callington and Delaware Children's Centre provides early intervention support for families in greatest need and services such as health, maternity, early years education and family support, some on an outreach basis. In doing so, it serves as a hub for the local community.

Overall, the children’s centre’s reach area accommodates 1,093 children under the age of five years. The children’s centre serves a mixed community with a slightly below average level of social and economic disadvantage overall. Approximately 15% of the children under five are members of families who depend on workless benefits.

Children’s skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage generally match those expected for their age. The area served by the children’s centre is made up predominantly of families from a White British background, but the number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds is increasing.

The children’s centre offers its services from the Callington building, which is a purpose-built facility situated on a shared site with Callington Primary School. The Delaware satellite is located adjacent to Delaware Primary School and is a co-located centre integrated with Delaware Community Learning Centre. The children’s centre also provides outreach services at a few community venues within its reach area.

Over the past year there have been significant changes to the staff team as the local authority continued the restructuring of its children’s centres. During this period the centre has been supported by the local authority’s locality manager for children’s schools and families. More recently a new manager has taken up her position.

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

Callington and Delaware is a good children’s centre. A key strength is the way the manager and staff collaborate so well with the local authority, education, health and other partners. Data of families and their needs are fully shared enabling partner agencies to provide cohesive and well-directed assistance for families.

Following a year-on-year increase over the past three years, over two thirds of the families with children under five in the centre’s area are now engaging with its services. Consequently, the outcomes for families are good and improving, including for those with greatest need, and further demonstrate the centre’s good capacity for sustained improvement.

The centre's staff work well with the advisory board to manage resources and change effectively. The centre's effective self-evaluation includes the views of parents, gathered through personal contact, parents' comments boards and evaluations completed at end of sessions. Whilst these are used well to improve services, the limited representation of parents on the advisory board, and the lack of a formal parents' group, limit parents' involvement in shaping the centre's services.

Even so, the relatively newly federated centre is a welcoming place where parents are grateful for the staff's sensitive support. 'Meeting friends, sharing ideas and learning together are great for my mental health and stop me from feeling alone,' is a typical comment. As a result, parents develop self-confidence and make particularly good progress in developing their parenting skills. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage also make good progress, across all areas of their learning and development.

The centre promotes an inclusive ethos and is effective in helping an increasing number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is seen in the children's equally good achievements in personal and language development at the end of their early years education. For example, over the past two years the gap in performance between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers has narrowed from 30.9% in 2010 to 26.1% in 2011, a reduction of nearly 5%, which is better than the national and local authority averages. This improvement also reflects success in helping parents to develop their children's speaking and listening skills.

Parents talk pleasurably about how their children enjoy learning, develop socially and are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Cookery and gardening are popular sessions where parents and children are presented with practical ideas for healthy meals and lifestyles.

The centre employs good safeguarding practices, which keep parents and their children safe during centre activities and also promote safe practice at home. Centre staff also sustain strong multi-agency links to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and to protect those at risk of harm, including families affected by domestic violence. However, whilst steadily improving, partnerships are not yet as successful in reducing the number of families affected by postnatal depression and/or mental illness.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the involvement of parents and carers in the governance of the centre by raising the representation of parents on the advisory board and by re-establishing a specific parents' group, such as a Parent Development Board or Parents' Forum.
- Further develop partnerships so that the support provided for parents and carers suffering from postnatal depression and other forms of mental illness,

including, for example, by providing more physically active activities for parents as their children.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Good procedures for safeguarding children, including effective implementation of the Common Assessment Framework, help children and their parents feel safe. Regular, timely referrals from a range of providers support those considered vulnerable. Guidance to parents on how to stay safe at home from health staff and family support workers during home visits also further secures children's welfare.

Staff motivate children and their parents to join in enthusiastically during sessions such as Stay and Play, Baby Bounce and Great Expectations. Parents are quite passionate when striving to become more effective parents to support their child's health and education. Within such informative and fun environments children gain confidence, behave well and enjoy learning together. As a result, children make good progress in personal and language development, as seen in data, which show a significant increase in overall attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents also make good progress as they join in and learn alongside their children, enriching their own communication skills and ability to support their children's development.

The number of families experiencing domestic violence and/or alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and childhood obesity all remains below local authority and national averages and continue to fall. The centre's services are also reducing smoking by pregnant mothers reflecting the good impact of effective partnership working in tackling the needs of the most vulnerable families in its area. However, the challenge of assisting an above average number of parents affected by postnatal depression and/or mental illness remains.

Good health outcomes are reflected in the increasing take up of parents on cookery, healthy eating, gardening and parenting courses. The productive voluntary involvement of young mothers in promoting breastfeeding is increasing the number of parents choosing to breastfeed their babies.

Parents willingly offer their ideas, talk regularly with staff and members of the advisory board and also complete evaluations of the services they attend. All of these are considered carefully by staff who, for example, have recently responded to suggestions by ordering some high chairs. However, the parents' role in the more formal decision making and governance of the centre is less developed.

The centre is also successful in supporting and raising the self-confidence of fathers, lone parents and parents and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Similarly, family support workers regularly and supportively undertake home visits to those parents, who because of disability or a lack of transport, would otherwise suffer from rural isolation. As one parent commented, reflecting the views of others, 'I really couldn't live without the children's centre support as my parents

and other friends are so far away.'

Partnerships with Jobcentre Plus staff, youth services and local employers, for example, contribute well to lower-than-average levels of unemployment and families on benefit. Good signposting to 'Links into Learning' courses and, increasing referrals to the Family Information Service also show more parents seeking advice, accessing training and gaining employment to live economically independent lives.

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	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 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	3
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Very positive relationships and consistent pastoral care is at the heart of all that the centre does. Increasing referrals, including by parents themselves, for example, through the Family Information Service, show the value placed on the centre. Strengths in the partnership working and in signposting to encourage parents to attend its groups also underpin the effective support provided for individual families.

The range of services and activities provided at the centre, and those delivered at home for those considered most vulnerable, engage families and meet their needs. Since federation, more of these services are provided closer to families, for example at Gunnislake, and this has led to more parents attending. Activities provided at both the centre's locations, such as PEEP, Family Learning Project and Stay and Play parenting courses also develop good social links and promote the emotional well-being of families, children and their parents. Gardening and indoor and outdoor play sessions also provide good opportunities for children to enjoy their learning through active play. Babies sit joyfully watching and gesturing towards each other during young parent and baby groups and children shrieked with excitement on discovering a centipede when planting daffodil bulbs during the weekly childminding session. Other well-attended sessions, such as the Baby Massage and Baby Bounce and Rhyme held at Callington Library, also promote parenting skills and children's

personal development effectively.

Good links with health and education teams ensure that children and parents with special educational needs and/or disabilities are included and fully welcomed and supported. All staff, including early years, family support and childcare specialists, are well trained, share their expertise and support the developing skills of other practitioners, for example childminders. By working together they have introduced effective assessment and evaluation procedures, including learning journals to which parental contributions are encouraged, which in turn have added to the children's increased skills across all areas of learning.

Health teams, especially midwives, work closely with family support workers to identify and target needs at an early stage so that the assistance offered is matched well to family needs. In this way, families in crisis or considered vulnerable, for example, those experiencing domestic violence, alcohol and drugs abuse or feeling isolated, are helped sensitively and effectively. This means that children's welfare is better safeguarded because parents are shown how to prepare healthy food and to keep homes safe and less prone to accidents. The centre's good 67% engagement of families in its area further demonstrates success in lifting self-esteem and developing good overall learning and progress for children and their parents.

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	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The new centre manager and staff at all levels collaborate effectively with a well-established range of multi-agency partners. Management has been particularly well supported by the locality manager for schools and families, enabling the relatively newly federated centre to emerge successfully after a period of change as a good setting. Well-formulated action plans, accurate evaluations of the impact of services on families, local authority data and annual conversation assessments have brought good provision and outcomes for parents and their children and show a good capacity for further improvement.

Teamwork with specialist partners, including through the advisory board, ensure good governance and has improved the way support is targeted to help the most vulnerable families. Those involved in governance are well aware of the need to involve parents more formally in the strategic development of the centre.

Nevertheless, the centre's annual satisfaction survey and other comments from families show a high level of satisfaction and their suggestions are used well to bring improvement. In addition, the increasing number of families aided by the centre and their good achievements further show that the centre provides good value for money. The centre manager ensures that day-to-day management arrangements are effective and sustains a welcoming, well-organised and maintained environment, which encourages families to make full use of its services.

Staff communicate well with parents and provide a wealth of useful information about health, child care, education and job opportunities. Staff are particularly helpful in providing confidential advice and in signposting parents to other specialists. As a result, vulnerable families such as young or lone parents and families from minority ethnic backgrounds are well supported. As one parent remarked, typically reflecting the views of others, 'Staff are always willing to talk and do their best for us.'

Safeguarding is given high priority. Safe recruitment practices are effective and ensure all adults working with children are suitable. Family workers carry out risk assessments to ensure the centre is a safe place. Through intervention and support programmes, staff help parents keep their children safe. As a result, case studies show good outcomes for children on child protection plans.

The promotion of equality and diversity and inclusive practice, especially for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is at the forefront of the centre's vision. Specialists in these aspects and in others, such as occupational and speech and language therapists, either visit the centre's locations or readily respond to referrals by offering support at other venues. Their guidance helps children overcome barriers to learning and to make the good progress seen in the narrowing achievement gap with other children.

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 secure 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	3

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

This inspection took account of the children’s skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage obtained from the inspection findings of the section 5 inspection of Callington Primary School, which took place on 18 and 19 January 2011 and from more recent data, including of the children now attending the school. This inspection took account of the local authority’s Early Years Foundation Stage data across the area served by the centre. It also included an evaluation of the breadth of the centre’s partnership arrangements, including with local authority’s specialist services, the privately run pre-school at Delaware and the Delaware Community Learning Centre.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Callington and Delaware Children’s Centre on 24 and 25 January 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. We would like to thank you for allowing us to join with you during some of your sessions and for sparing the time to talk with us about the centre and its activities.

Callington and Delaware is a centre that continues to improve. The new manager, with your help, seeks to bring fresh ideas to build on the good work of her predecessor. We found that the staff of the centre have particularly good links with other service providers and share a clear determination to meet the needs of the families that need most support.

The management of the centre has experienced some change over the past year, but by sustaining a positive rate of improvement has secured good quality provision. This stems from the good work of the manager supported well by the local authority, especially the locality manager for schools and families, and strong partnerships with other providers across the Callington and Delaware area.

The centre has a good track record of engaging with families in its area. Over the past year, the centre has been particularly successful in increasing the number of families accessing its services, including those families who need help the most. It has achieved this by working very closely with local authority, health, education and other specialist agencies to identify and respond to your needs at an earlier stage. In addition, the centre manager, staff and members of the advisory board have also used their local knowledge and extended their understanding of your needs by responding to your suggestions. As a result, following the merging of the two centres last year, some support groups have been placed more conveniently closer to families in need, for example at Callington Library, the Delaware site and at Gunnislake, and this has lifted attendance rates.

We very much enjoyed observing some of these sessions and others such as Stay and Play, Baby Bounce and Little Gardeners, where enjoyment, new learning and making friends were a joy to see. We were also pleased to meet a few dads who told us about the well-attended Saturday gardening and craft-making sessions for dads and their children and the visits to Trethorne Leisure Park. The popularity of these events is such that some of you are now hoping that the centre will provide you with just as much physical activity as your children happily experience.

You told us too about how the centre has lifted your confidence, and by developing your parenting skills has enabled you to educate and engage more happily with your children and keep them healthy and safe. Many of you are also particularly pleased because you are now helping your children to be better prepared for school. We found that this is quickening their progress once they start school, especially those who don't find learning easy.

All the parents we spoke to told us that they felt very welcomed on arrival and very safe during their time at the centre. A few parents, including one who contacted us by e-mail, expressed much gratitude for the help received from caring centre staff, 'just when they needed it the most!' Our further enquiries also showed that the centre's effective collaboration with health and local authority staff, for example, when implementing the Common Assessment Framework processes, is keeping children safe and providing timely and valuable support for parents in need.

You also told us how you make your views known to staff at the centre, by answering their questions, completing evaluations and check lists at the end of a series of activities and by writing suggestions on the whiteboards displayed in both the centre's facilities. We noted, for example, that you are pleased by the way staff respond, for example by providing more support for young mothers and additional baby signing courses. However, the centre has identified, and we agree, that not enough parents are involved in the formal governance of the centre. Therefore, the first aspect that we identify for improvement is to increase the number of parents on the advisory board and to set up a specific parents' group so that you can contribute more effectively to the development of the centre and help in ensuring that all those in greatest need are fully supported. Even though the centre, with good assistance from health partners, is also helping more parents experiencing postnatal depression

and/or other forms of mental illness, our second area for improvement is to make sure that all such families are fully supported including, for example, through more stimulating physical activities for parents.

Thank you again for your help.

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