

# Inspection report for Sweet Peas Children's Centre

---

<b>Local authority</b>	Plymouth City Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	386954
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 February 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jonathan Palk HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Karen Murphy
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Centre address</b>	23 Brandreth Road Mannamead Plymouth PL3 5HQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01752 290559
<b>Email address</b>	sweetpeas@barnardos.org.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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.

---

**Report published:** March 2012



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080).

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2012



## 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 centre's staff, a Barnardo's strategic manager for children's centres, the local authority children's centre manager, health professionals and partners who offer services, parents and the Chair of the Advisory Board. They observed the centres work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Sweet Peas Children's Centre is an urban phase three centre situated in the neighbourhood of Mannamead and serves the areas of Compton, Hartley, Peverell and Mannamead. It is located in a single-storey building which was a former doctors' surgery. The centre is in an area of low socio-economic deprivation and was registered in March 2008 to provide family and outreach services. There are 882 families with children aged nought to five in the centre's reach area. Seven per cent of families within the local area are on workless benefits and five per cent are lone parent families. These are both lower than average. A small, four per cent, but increasing proportion, of users speak English as an additional language. Typically, children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills expected for their age, particularly in relation to their communication, language and literacy skills.

In July 2011 the local authority delegated responsibility for the management of the children's centre to Barnardo's. The partnership advisory board is made up of a cross-section of professionals and parents. It is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. At the time of this inspection the centre manager was absent due to illness and a Barnardo's strategic manager was providing support for the centre.

## 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

3

## Main findings

Sweet Peas Children's Centre's overall effectiveness is inadequate. The centre is not serving children and families in its reach area as well as it should. A lack of effective mechanisms over the last two years, has led to the centre's unreliable understanding of the needs of those it serves. Leaders and managers have made insufficient use of available data about families' circumstances to develop effectively the centre's role in the community. Systems for collecting data and monitoring the centre's impact on outcomes for families and children have not been sufficiently rigorous to sustain drive and direction.

Arrangements for holding the centre to account are rapidly improving and provide the centre with a satisfactory capacity to improve. The recent support provided by an experienced children's centre manager and the establishment of quarterly monitoring by the local authority has resulted in the speedy implementation of evaluation systems and procedures. This, combined with a training programme for staff to improve their skills in managing data and working with families to appraise their needs, has already resulted in more users accessing the 'let's get physical' activities.

The centre staff work well as a team. Partners and users find the centre both friendly and supportive. They can speak openly and know that the staff will listen and advise. There are many examples of partnerships providing support for families, particularly in the area of health and safety. This support is helping to secure satisfactory outcomes in these areas of the centre's work.

The centre's arrangements for keeping children safe and free from harm are satisfactory. The centre has established contact with a wide range of service providers to support families in need. Links between the outreach family support worker and the health visitors, based on site, are informal but effective. Both work closely to support families, some of whom are in vulnerable circumstances. The centre's work in reaching out to families and users who do not attend the centre or draw on its services is limited because of lack of timely information. Partnership

arrangements, while satisfactory in supporting those with child protection plans, are of only limited effectiveness in developing services to improve all outcomes. The local authority is establishing protocols for sharing relevant health and school-level information to ensure the centre better understands and meets the needs of families in the reach area.

The advisory board members are becoming involved in the centre's self-evaluation through their contribution to the action plan. This has identified the appropriate priorities, but still lacks specifically focused and measurable targets that will serve to sharpen up the challenge they provide to the centre's manager.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve the use and timeliness of data and information held at a local level, by partners and the local authority, to identify, target and support the groups in the reach area that are not currently engaged.
- Increase the range and effectiveness of services and activities to enhance outcomes for the families who are most in need.
- Strengthen the role of the advisory board in driving improvement and measuring the success of the centre by clearly identifying targets in its action plans.
- Improve the strategies for engaging those within the vulnerable groups who are not currently accessing the centre by for example strengthening partnerships with private and voluntary independent early years providers.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>4</b>
----------

There are some examples of improved outcomes for families using the centre. However, the centre is not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and those groups excluded from its services.

Children make satisfactory progress in their learning and development in relation to their starting points. Initiatives such as story telling and activities encouraging spoken communication are helping to address weaker aspects of children's average language competency. Parents attending courses in parenting skills agree that the centre helps their confidence and pleasure in playing with their children. They are very clear about the benefits of 'starting early', joining in with the ante-natal programme that offers a chance for mothers and fathers to talk to 'the bump'. The proportion of children in the local area reaching expected levels in their communication, language, social and emotional development at the end of their Reception year is in line with both national and local authority averages but

improvement rates are not as good as the local authority's overall. However, the gaps between the children with the lowest attainment and those with average attainment by the age of five are disproportionately wider in some areas of the centre's reach. The early years advisory service is beginning to work with the centre to look at ways it can obtain and respond to up-to-date information from local schools. Valuable opportunities to address language, social and emotional skills are provided in sessions such as singing time, baby talk and talk and tumble. These sessions also promote social cohesion within the centre and a number of parents and carers say they have built lasting friendships from these sessions.

Mothers in the breastfeeding group find it 'very supportive and encouraging' and many mothers attending continue to breastfeed their babies after six months. Parents and children benefit from healthy eating courses and healthy snacks prepared at the centre. Through the good links with the on-site health visitors, the centre can point to individual successes with families made vulnerable by their circumstances. Parents who are experiencing change or difficulties benefit from the family support worker involvement in boosting their confidence, developing their parenting skills and improving relationships.

The centre contributes effectively with other agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children and families. Staff are alert to safety concerns and keeping children safe from harm. Safeguarding training is provided for all staff. The full-time family support worker contributes appropriately in supporting families where the Common Assessment Framework is used. Several families have benefited from advice on improving safety in the home, for example by home safety assessments, visits from the fire brigade organised by the centre or first aid courses.

There are limited opportunities for families to improve their economic stability. The centre encourages volunteers but at present those working in the centre do not have young families. Jobcentre Plus provides weekly updates on vacancies city wide and will help families requiring childcare arrangements to support them returning to work. There is little other signposting and links with key partners are lacking, despite the proximity to large employers such as the hospital and university.

There is lack of involvement by parents in the day-to-day management of the service. Play leaders do not encourage parents to organise activities and often dominate the selection and tidying of resources. Ideas are now being sought systematically but parents are unclear how this process will enable them to make a positive contribution to the centre's development.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for families*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>

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

### **How good is the provision?**

<b>4</b>
----------

Centre leaders are only just beginning to collect and rigorously analyse data to identify the needs of their local community and develop targeted services to meet these needs. As a consequence, there are gaps in provision for developing users' employment skills and financial stability, and services to support young mothers and those at risk of isolation. The centre has maintained useful contact with a range of services, and frequently directs families to the support and help they need. However, these actions have not been evaluated to inform plans for future improved provision.

Centre staff make appropriate use of the partnerships with the health visitors to ensure users access effective care, guidance and support. The assessment of needs and the tracking of progress for families receiving one-to-one targeted support are satisfactory. Case studies show how staff support them through difficult times and how their lives would be very different without the centre's help. Risk assessments are up to date and shared between all those using the centre. Staff are alert to safety concerns and keeping children safe from harm.

The centre makes the best of its available space and resources to provide universal services around health and early learning, but it is not providing sufficient targeted services for vulnerable families. Professionals working with the centre have anecdotal evidence that the number of families in receipt of benefit or living in workless households is increasing. At the time of the inspection there were very few initiatives evident to help these families improve their financial stability and economic well-being.

In the past there has been a parents' forum but this has lapsed. Two parents from the centre's reach sit on the advisory board and can point to examples of where they have had an impact on the community through the centre's activities. The centre's main area is welcoming and friendly and resources are of good quality. However, the centre has been insufficiently creative in seeking ways to engage with users who have been hard to reach.

The centre promotes purposeful learning which is having a positive impact on outcomes for the families that attend. For example, jointly run courses with other

children centres help parents to manage their children’s behaviour and develop parenting skills. The centre has led several initiatives to promote children’s early communication and language skills. Activities for babies and young children are well organised and adequately planned to take account of the children’s different stages of development. The sessions support children’s learning and promote valuable interaction between babies, children and parents but outcomes are infrequently evaluated. The play leaders miss opportunities to celebrate users’ achievements to enable them to recognise and share their own successes.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>3</b>
----------

Although much of the universal service provision and family support work is effective the centre does not provide adequate value for money. The lack of effective leadership and management in the past two years has limited the extent to which the centre has reached the most vulnerable and excluded groups in order to make a difference to their lives. As a result the centre cannot be sure that it is fully meeting the range of users’ needs in its reach area. Current evaluation at the end of sessions is now gauging parents’ and users’ responses to services. This information is now used to identify priorities and set targets. The centre manager has not been sufficiently proactive in seeking reliable and up-to-date information about families in its reach area from its partners, relying too much on a small group of users to shape its services. The advisory board has also not challenged this information or pooled its expertise to ensure mechanisms are in place to check on the impact of what is being provided. These important aspects of ensuring equality and demonstrating commitment to inclusion are not met adequately.

The strategic manager has, however, achieved a considerable amount in a short time. Systems are now in place to enable staff and leaders to evaluate the suitability and quality of the services they offer. For example, pre- and post-evaluations are carried out for many of the centre’s activities to evaluate their impact. The centre canvasses the views of parents, partners and the wider community in order to identify ways in which it can move services forward. An action plan and staff training are now in place, and draw on the expertise of Barnardo’s staff. The advisory board is in a stronger position to provide challenge, having re-established its role and responsibilities in respect of local and city-wide initiatives. All these initiatives are



appropriate and positive, and will support service delivery further.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Procedures ensure staff suitability and agreements exist with partner agencies to ensure those who work within the centre are suitable to do so. Suitable recruitment procedures are implemented and centre leaders ensure staff's ongoing suitability by regularly updating Criminal Records Bureau checks. Risk assessments of both the environment and activities are carried out to ensure the safety of staff, parents and children.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

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

Not applicable

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Sweet Peas Children's Centre on 8 and 9 February 2012. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

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

The centre is aware of its shortcomings and your local authority has known for some time that it has not been successful at working with all of those most in need in the area. Managers are finding better ways of gathering information from you. This information helps managers to check which activities are popular and plan improvements. There are a large number of families who do not attend the centre after their initial visits for health checks. We have asked the centre to find ways to understand these families' needs better and act on this information to support them.

Inspectors believe recent changes at the centre will help the staff meet its aims. One of these is to train staff in managing the information available to the centre from other partners, such as health services, Jobcentre Plus, the local playgroups and the schools. This is at a very early stage and understandably has not yet had time to bear fruit. We have asked the advisory board to take on more of a role in planning more targeted services for families and checking on the centre's impact.

You were quick to tell us that you value and appreciate the friendly and considerate approach of all of the staff. You explained how they listened to your ideas and were quick to act on your concerns. The Twins Club is a good example of this. You are encouraged to raise funds for the centre and so help it provide for those families experiencing sudden changes in fortune in your area. The additional equipment for the chill 'n' thrill room you helped purchase is providing further opportunities for families to enjoy discovery with their child. The centre successfully encourages you to volunteer to help run sessions and take part in training courses or gain qualifications. We know that families have taken steps to make their houses safer and you appreciate the support the centre gives for healthier lifestyles by offering fresh fruit at snack times and a tumbling session each week. These are good things that happen at the centre and there are many more that you agree enhance your families' lives. But we are concerned that these enjoyable and beneficial activities are not being accessed by those who may be reluctant or nervous about coming to the centre. The team knows that there are some families who feel isolated or are going through difficult financial times. The leadership has been unable to cater for them as effectively as they would like. In part this is because information is not being gathered about the needs of the families in the area, nor is it analysed effectively so that the required services can be put in place. We know this may prove difficult with the small staff team but it is the responsibility of the advisory board to play a stronger role in driving this improvement.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).