

Inspection report for Little Folly Children's Centre

Local authority	Wiltshire
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Date of previous inspection	NA
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	South Hills Nursery (Salisbury)

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 centre leader, the head of the Salisbury cluster of children's centres, the chair of the advisory group, one of Spurgeon's senior leaders, the local authority, partnership agencies, members of staff and families using the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre and the wider community.

Information about the centre

Little Folly Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre serving an area in the north west of Salisbury. It was designated and began operating in 2008. It offers a range of services, including health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. The children's centre consists of two separate buildings which are five minutes walk apart. Activities are provided in these buildings and at another venue in the community. The centre is located in an area that falls within the 20% most deprived parts of the country; some areas within its catchment area are more affluent. The proportions of young children who live in workless households or who are dependent on benefits are above those typically seen, particularly in the area around the centre.

The children's centre is now run by Spurgeons, a children's charity, on behalf of the local authority. The centre works closely with other children's centres in Salisbury, which are also run by Spurgeons. The population is mostly White British, with smaller percentages of other ethnic groups; some speak English as an additional language. The levels of children's skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are below those typically seen nationally.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Little Folly Children's Centre is providing a satisfactory service for families in the reach area. Its effectiveness has improved over the past year and a number of aspects of the centre's work are now good.

The way in which staff keep children and families safe and the quality of care, guidance and support that they provide are particular strengths. As a result, families' outcomes for staying safe are good; other outcomes are satisfactory. Those who are most in need receive carefully targeted, individualised support to help them to resolve their problems. Safeguarding is given a very high priority and systems and procedures are clear, detailed and rigorously applied.

Staff are committed to ensuring that the centre is as inclusive as possible. The participation rates of some key target groups, for example lone parents, have increased significantly over the past year; families who attend the centre are primarily from the most disadvantaged parts of the reach area. Parents and carers who do use the centre's services report very high levels of satisfaction. They say how friendly and welcoming staff are. However, while the number of families registered with the centre has increased over the past year, it is still relatively low. The proportion of these families that engage with the centre's activities is also low, although it is rising.

A range of useful family learning opportunities are in place. Opportunities to follow cooking courses are particularly popular and well received. The wider support that the centre provides for families' economic and social well-being is less well developed. While some adults are helped to seek employment, work as volunteers or undergo training, much more could be done.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. They recognise the need to increase the number of families who benefit from the centre's services. The centre's staff and its partners, in particular parents and carers, play a limited role in influencing and evaluating the centre's work and direction. The

capacity for further improvement is satisfactory; it is strengthening as a result of the improvements that have been made over the past year.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families who engage with the centre's activities and services.
- Increase the role that parents and carers play in the governance of the centre so that they have more opportunities to influence the direction of service development.
- Increase the contribution that the centre makes to families' economic and social well-being by:
 - increasing the support available to adults to help them to undergo training and enter employment
 - increasing opportunities for adults to work as volunteers.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

A range of family learning opportunities in cooking is a particular strength of the centre's work; a number of adults have progressed through a series of courses to achieve a certificate in food hygiene. Healthy snacks are provided in 'stay and play' sessions and children learn about good food hygiene as they help adults to clear up. However, the proportion of young children in the reach area who are obese or overweight is above average. The rates of breastfeeding in the most disadvantaged parts of the reach area are low, although work is being done to provide additional peer support from a number of trained volunteers.

The intensive support provided by outreach workers helps to ensure that children who are potentially at risk are kept safe. They have, for example, worked very closely with a number of families who have experienced domestic violence, with very positive results. Recent work with teenage mothers and fathers has helped to ensure that they know how to keep their babies safe. Staff work well with those who are looked after, or subject to child protection plans or the Common Assessment Framework process.

Attainment of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage dipped slightly last year and was below average. There is a slightly larger-than-average gap between the attainment of the lowest 20% and other children, but it is closing. Data about Early Years Foundation Stage attainment are currently limited and this makes it difficult for staff to know where they need to target their efforts to make improvements. A range of useful family learning opportunities are available. A number of parents and carers have benefited from valuable parenting training courses.

Staff do listen to and take note of the views and suggestions of parents and carers; some users are involved with the parent forum. However, such opportunities are limited and few parents and carers are involved.

Some families have improved their economic position as a result of the centre's work. For example, a small number of people have worked as volunteers at the centre, ultimately progressing to paid employment. Others have benefited from informal support from outreach workers when seeking employment or training. However, more could be done to help adults to progress to training or employment and gain valuable experience through voluntary work.

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	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	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	3

How good is the provision?

3

Families are provided with good care, guidance and support. Those with acute or particularly significant needs are provided with extensive and valuable assistance through the centre's outreach programme. Close links with local charities help staff to provide additional advice and support for families facing financial difficulties; they use their detailed understanding of the needs of each family to select the particular charity that is best placed to provide the most appropriate support. Parents and carers recognise and appreciate the quality of the support that staff provide: 'It's like having another family' and 'The door is always open' were comments made by two.

Decisions about which groups, activities or services to set up are well considered. Changes are made when groups are not meeting families' needs or reaching target groups. As a result, the proportions of people that the centre works with are increasing, although they are still low. Some parents and carers said that they were not always aware of the activities and services that are offered by the centre.

The centre offers useful learning and development opportunities for children and families through a number of its activities, including the popular 'messy play' sessions. Learning and development opportunities for adults are more limited. Opportunities are missed to support adults who would benefit from learning and training; a number of centre users said that they would like to see more adult learning opportunities. A recent initiative has been the introduction of a popular English for speakers of other languages course, developed in collaboration with a number of local partners.

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	3
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?

3

The centre now has a clear direction and a renewed purpose. Spurgeons is aspirational for the centre and for what it will achieve for local families. Centre staff are committed to providing a high-quality service. There are clear lines of accountability for staff. Outreach workers benefit from peer group supervision from a trained social worker. Leaders recognised that the advisory group had narrow membership and was playing only a limited role in providing support and challenge to staff. The group was relaunched in January with a much wider membership. The advisory group now has a new chair and, although the new body is at an early stage of development, plans for the future are well considered and ambitious.

The centre leader, the head of the cluster of children's centres, the local authority and Spurgeons have a realistic understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. However, at the moment senior staff are the ones mainly responsible for reviewing and evaluating the centre's work. Centre staff seek users' views on the quality of the services they engage; those that use the centre report high levels of satisfaction. However, the extent to which parents and carers are involved in influencing and reviewing what the centre offers is limited. Although a parents' forum is in place, it is small and parents and carers have only limited representation on the advisory board.

Centre staff work hard to ensure that their services are as inclusive as possible. Many parents and carers talked about their friendly and welcoming approach. Some of the centre's activities take place at venues around the reach area to ensure that everyone can gain easy access, including children or parents and carers with disabilities. Staff recognise that it is easier for some families to attend sessions at

other centres in the cluster, so complementary provision is now being developed and staff are tracking attendance at the other children’s centres.

Good procedures are in place for safeguarding. Staff receive a range of relevant training. Spurgeons has established clear and rigorous procedures and policies which cover both centre staff and their partners. Practice is monitored carefully and cases are reviewed and discussed to ensure that any lessons are learned and improvements made. Robust procedures are in place to ensure that those who work with the children and their families are suitable to do so.

The centre’s partnerships with key agencies have improved significantly over the past year. Partnership agreements have been established to clarify everyone’s understanding and expectations. These improvements in partnership work are helping to provide additional opportunities for families and are leading to improvements in their outcomes. For example, the centre now works much more closely with its linked nursery partner. This has supported some useful joint work on the development of children’s speaking and listening skills.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. What the centre offers is well received and targeted towards those most in need. However, the numbers of families who are benefiting from services, while increasing, remain relatively low.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
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	3
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

An inspection of the registered Early Years Foundation Stage and registered childcare provision linked to the centre was carried out in June 2010, under Sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006. The outcome was good. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Little Folly Children's Centre on 22 and 23 February 2012. The views of families were an important part of the inspection, so thank you to those of you who took the time to speak to us. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre has improved over the past year and has a number of strengths. One of these is the care, guidance and support that staff provide for families. Many parents and carers that we spoke to said how caring and supportive staff are. Staff also do everything that they can to make sure that you and your children remain safe. They are well trained in how to protect children. The centre has rigorous procedures in place and the centre leader has done the checks necessary to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable.

Staff are committed to improving the lives of families in the area. Partnerships with other professionals and organisations are improving. Families that use the centre appreciate what it offers and are positive about the quality of services. Many of you have benefited from the groups that the centre runs, or from more intensive support from one of the outreach workers. However, at the moment too few families take up what the centre is offering. The number of people at sessions can be small and some parents and carers that we spoke to were not aware of everything that was on offer. The number of families involved is increasing, but it is still low.

There are some useful learning opportunities for children and families. Many of you have benefited from the wide range of courses about food and cooking. However, we think that more could be done to help you gain valuable training and experience. We have asked staff to provide you with more opportunities to work as volunteers and more support to get into employment or training.

Staff have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and what they need to do to improve services further. The centre's advisory group has just been relaunched and has made a good start. You have some opportunities to share your views with staff about the services that the centre offers. However, at the moment these opportunities are too limited and we have asked staff to increase them.

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