

Inspection report for Four Acres Children's Centre

Local authority	Bristol
Inspection number	383442
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Centre leader	April Pye
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Linked school if applicable	Four Acres Primary School
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.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, members of the governing body, parents and carers, project workers, the local authority officer with responsibility for the centre and the headteacher of the linked primary school.

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

Information about the centre

Four Acres Children's Centre opened in 2007 and is located in the same building as Four Acres Primary School. It is a phase one children's centre providing the full core offer of services. A multi-agency team which includes health visitors, midwives, speech and language therapists, a family support worker and an advice and support counsellor are available through the centre. The centre management arrangements were changed in 2008, with responsibility for governance being delegated to the governing body of the linked school and the daily organisation to a centre manager. The centre serves areas that are amongst the most deprived 10% in England, with most families being from White British heritage. There are high levels of unemployment in the area, again amongst the most deprived 10% for employment deprivation in England, with the number of families receiving benefits above the national average. Children's skills and abilities on entry to pre-school provision for three to five years are well below the levels expected for their age.

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

Four Acres meets the needs of families and provides good support to children and families consistently well, especially in time of crisis. This is due to strong multi-agency partnerships that work effectively together in meeting the needs of families. Outcomes are good because the centre provides a good range of services that are effectively raising the knowledge of parents and carers about healthy lifestyles and keeping their children safe. Parents and carers really appreciate the welcome provided by staff and, throughout the inspection, families were keen to share their experiences of how provision had been of benefit to them, in some cases transforming their lives.

Support for breastfeeding mothers through a 'BABES' group is good and as a result, from a low starting point, the number of children being breastfed at six to eight weeks has risen over time to being broadly in line with that expected locally. A reflection of the success is that a number of parents are now training to be breastfeeding peer supporters.

Through working with other local agencies and schools, the centre encourages parents and carers to participate in adult learning, especially in developing their basic English and mathematical skills. For example, a course on 'Magic Maths' was organised and two parents and carers who attended went forward to gain formal qualifications. During the past year 17 parents and carers from different groups, including lone parents, those from ethnic minorities and workless households, accessed and attended learning courses. However, opportunities are missed to use data to assess the impact this service has on the improving the economic well-being of different groups.

The centre is particularly successful at helping parents and carers develop their parenting skills. A 'Forest School' group was organised and designed to show parents and carers a range of easily accessible and enjoyable activities that allowed them to build stronger relationships with their children and develop their children's language and communication skills. This was particularly effective in supporting disabled children and those with special needs and shows the centre's good commitment

to promoting equality and diversity.

The centre is well led by senior staff and consequently morale is high and relationships between staff and families are good. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on feedback from families and interpretation of data to show the overall difference that services are making to the lives of families. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to fully analyse data available to show the impact of services on the different groups of users. As a result of identifying children's needs the centre has focused on developing their initial communication, language and literacy skills. This has had a positive impact on narrowing the skills gap between children with speech and language or behavioural, social or emotional difficulties and those with special educational needs or disabilities, and other groups of children entering pre-school provision. This clearly demonstrates the centre's good capacity to improve. Approximately 75% of children in the reach area are registered with the centre and leaders have used data to evidence that an increasing number of families are engaging with the centre, including outreach work. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to analyse the available data to fully identify areas where outreach activities would be most beneficial for different groups of users who may find accessing the centre difficult.

There are clear arrangements for the governance and accountability of the centre through the governing body of the linked school, resulting in the centre's leadership team being effectively supported and challenged over time. While there are proposed changes to the governance of the centre and procedures for users to voice their views, not all partners are formally involved in decision making. However, the centre does regularly seek and take account of the views of users and invites them to evaluate the services they receive. This is then taken into account when planning further provision.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the involvement of parents and carers in decision making and governance so as to ensure that the views and needs of all groups are taken into account by:
 - ensuring the new management committee is quickly embedded, with an increased representation from parents and carers groups
 - ensuring there is a formal procedure for parents and carers to express their views about their needs and the provision offered by the centre.

- Improve the use of external data to:
 - enhance the assessment of the impact of services on the different groups of parents and carers both inside and outside the reach area to further inform and adapt services
 - further inform outreach activities and identify areas in which they would be most effective in meeting the needs of different groups of users.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families respond well to the centre's promotion of healthy lifestyles, especially in the cookery classes. The success of these sessions is shown by the demand from families for them to be extended to also run in another nearby school. Lunches are prepared daily on site and provide children with nutritious and enjoyable meals. There are also plenty of well-equipped outdoor learning spaces in which children can develop their physical skills. The impact can be seen in the centre data showing that obesity in early childhood in the reach area is gradually being reduced.

The centre's partnership with other agencies to ensure the safety of children is good. There is strong evidence in case studies seen that staff have a good understanding of how the common assessment framework helps ensure that those most at risk receive well-targeted support at an early age.

The centre is especially successful at improving the emotional well-being of families, particularly lone parents and carers, and can point to examples of individual cases that have benefited from family support in resolving debt problems and issues surrounding domestic violence. Advice is also given to parents and carers on safety in the home and the centre is responding effectively to users' requests and running a course on paediatric first aid. Parents and carers are well supported in making decisions about undertaking training or gaining employment. Good advice is provided by the childcare advice and information worker on accessing entitlements to tax credits or childcare.

Children make good progress in their personal and social skills as well in their communication, language and literacy and mathematical skills. Assessments show that the different groups of children, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, who have accessed the provision of the centre enter Nursery with often better skills and abilities than other similar groups who have not attended. This effectively helps to close the gap in the achievement between the different groups, especially the more vulnerable and looked after children. Parents and carers also enjoy and achieve well as they benefit from opportunities to develop their basic skills, for example in cooking, and engage in activities that promote their social well-being as well as their parenting skills.

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

Centre staff liaise well with other professional partners to identify and assess those children and families who are most at risk. Formal assessment arrangements are effectively used, such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to ensure all partners are involved. However, assessments also include talking to parents and carers and monitoring the progress of children in the different activities they undertake during the day. The findings are used to ensure good multi-agency working is effective in providing interventions that are targeted appropriately. Case studies show that individual education plans for disabled pupils and those with special needs and vulnerable children subject to a protection plan are very thorough, effectively monitored, reviewed and implemented. Several parents and carers who have children with disabilities and special needs said very clearly that the provision provided by the centre had made a real difference to their children, especially in developing their self-confidence and independence.

Care, guidance and support are good. Evidence given from case studies shows that sensitive and tailored support is provided to meet individual needs, with multi-agency working being especially effective when dealing with cases of domestic violence. Crisis intervention is particularly good, especially for families of looked-after children, and parents and carers stated that the counselling and support given was extremely helpful and welcomed.

Achievement is celebrated throughout the centre and there are photographs which display the participation of children and families in a variety of activities and fun days such as the 'Parent Craft' group. Parents and carers also appreciate the 'Learning Journals' that staff produce which celebrate, often through photographs and children's drawings, individual children's achievements.

Activities and services are of good quality and are adapted to meet the needs of families. For example, the 'Stay and Play' group introduces parents and carers to activities that can be done at home to support children's development, leading to good early learning outcomes. Also, cookery classes give parents and carers ideas for preparing simple meals that promote a healthy diet for children at home. There is good delivery of childcare services on site to enable parents and carers to access other services, with a child-minder network meeting regularly at the centre. While numbers registered at the centre are high, participation rates can vary and the centre is aware that despite imaginative efforts to publicise its service, some vulnerable families may be missing out on provision that could improve their lives.

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 centre is managed very efficiently by senior leaders on a daily basis. There are good performance management systems operating at all levels that include plans to meet the professional development needs of individual staff. There is a shared commitment from all staff to making a real difference to the lives of children and families in the local community. Consequently, centre and outside partner staff work effectively as a team to deliver services that meet users' needs. Senior staff and the governing body have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. While there is an action plan that identifies areas for improvement, it is not always sufficiently precise enough in stating who is responsible for managing changes and timescales for their implementation. Governance and accountability arrangements are currently under review and the present governing body acknowledge that greater representation from different partners and parents and carers is required. However, the governing body provide a good level of challenge and support and, along with senior leaders and staff, are ambitious for the centre's work and further improvement.

The arrangements for safeguarding are well established. Staff are well trained in child protection procedures, with all staff fully vetted through the Criminal Records Bureau before working in the centre. There are effective procedures used by all agencies to share concerns and record information in order to provide appropriate intervention where necessary, especially in supporting the emotional health and well-being of children and families.

Equality and diversity are effectively promoted in frontline services and this is supported by policies and procedures to promote equal opportunities. Children who have behavioural or special educational needs or disabilities are fully included and supported in activities. Parents and carers gave practical examples of where staff had provided their children who have a particular need with specialist cutlery and equipment in order to support their learning and development.

Overall outcomes are good and consequently value for money is good.

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	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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Four Acres Centre on 28–29 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to talk to us and give your opinions about the service you and your children receive from the centre.

Centre staff work hard as a team to provide a good range of courses and activities to serve the children and families in the community. Together they use a wide range of other agencies such as health visitors, adult learning, and adult support and advice, information and guidance workers to make sure children and families are well supported. Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors told us how well they get on with staff and that everyone is made to feel welcome at the centre. They appreciate the guidance, advice and support which is given, especially when experiencing problems. Also, they valued the services provided by the centre and felt that using these services had made a real difference to their lives. Evidence from the primary

school's assessments showed that children who had attended activities in the centre had benefited significantly and were making at least good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes.

We also heard from parents and carers and saw from feedback forms that the centre asks for your opinions about the courses provided. We think the staff do this well and use the feedback to plan further activities. However, staff miss opportunities to use other information, such as data from the local authority, to measure the difference that services are making to the lives of different children and families. Also, this type of information is not fully used in developing services that could be delivered to families that find accessing the centre difficult. We have asked the centre leader's to improve this.

Parents and carers also told us that they felt their children were safe in the centre and that they had full confidence in the staff to deal with any of their concerns. Inspectors agree with this as all staff are vetted before working in the centre, and the arrangements to keep children and families safe are judged to be good.

The centre is governed by the governing body of Four Acres Primary School, and they provide good support for the centre. However, there are not sufficient members of the different agencies and parents and carers involved in the decision making about the centre's work. Also, the formal arrangements for parents and carers to give their opinions are underdeveloped. While changes are in the early stages of being planned, we have asked the governing body to improve this.

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