

Inspection report for South Portslade Children's Centre

Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	386941
Inspection dates	8–9 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Kenneth Jones HMI

Centre leader	Martina O'Leary
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	South Portslade Children's Centre South Portslade Library 233 Old Shoreham Road Portslade Brighton BN41 1XR
Telephone number	01273 296914
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	

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.

Report published: March 2012



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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 management team, representatives from the local authority, health professionals, chair of the advisory group, frontline staff, parents and partner agencies.

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

Information about the centre

South Portslade Children's Centre is a phase-two, purpose-built, extension of South Portslade Library and was designated in February 2008. There are 700 children under five years of age living in the reach area and the centre is in contact with all families to differing degrees, depending on needs. Levels of deprivation are not particularly high at amongst the 70% most disadvantaged in the country, although a higher proportion of children than the city average receive targeted additional support and 23% of children live in poverty. Ethnic diversity is relatively low, with 76.9% of the population of White British heritage. Unemployment levels are lower than the national average, as is the number of families in receipt of family tax credit.

The centre operates as a health-led model with governance provided by the local authority and the Primary Care Trust through a Section 75 agreement. The centre is small in size as it was planned and designed to function as a gateway to the full offer at North Portslade Children's Centre, thus ensuring a full range of services. Professionals and managers work across both centres and others. The centre does not provide integrated childcare as the area is served well by the private providers. The proportion of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage working at the expected levels for their age is above the national average and at the local authority average. An advisory group includes representation from parents, partner agencies, the local authority, stakeholders and multi-disciplinary professionals. The group supports both the South and North Portslade children's centres.

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

1

Main findings

South Portslade Children's Centre provides excellent care, guidance and support for children and their families, and provision is good overall. Parents speak highly of the centre and one described it as 'fantastic'. The centre reaches all families in the area and is having a significant impact on outcomes, which are at least good, and outstanding for health and staying safe. The leadership and management of the centre are outstanding. Outcomes of interventions are monitored carefully and self-assessment is rigorous, as is the setting of clear objectives and targets for improvement. Resources are targeted to families in need of support exceptionally well and, with outcomes already outstanding in some areas and good and improving in the remainder, capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

The health-led model is highly effective in engaging with families, and support needs are identified early through assessments carried out by health visitors who see all families within two weeks of birth. Partnership working is excellent and interventions are targeted well where there are concerns about a child's development or welfare, or about parenting skills. Child protection arrangements are implemented rigorously and use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to provide enhanced support is well embedded and highly effective. Numbers of children who are subject to protection plans and children receiving support through CAF have reduced.

Health services are very well coordinated and health outcomes are outstanding. As a result of the excellent support provided by the centre, 81.6% of mothers initiate and continue to breast feed. Physical activity and healthy eating are promoted very well both at home and at the centre. Children at risk of obesity are identified early by health visitors and obesity rates have halved over four years and continue to fall. The emotional health of families is improving through the targeted and accessible support for sufferers of post-natal depression.

The centre has been successful in embedding the Early Years Foundation Stage framework across centre- and home-based activities and this is increasingly effective

in improving the development of children requiring additional support. Vulnerable two-year-olds benefit from placements in good or better nurseries or play groups. Children's levels of development at entry to school for the reach area of the centre are higher than the England average, and the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and their peers is narrowing.

Relationships between staff and families are good and parents are increasingly contributing ideas to help develop the centre both directly and through 'Parent Voice'. Numbers of parents undertaking volunteering roles are comparatively low but improving. Opportunities for parents to improve their self-esteem and develop the skills needed for employment are good and include links with training providers and the local college. While good progress is being made in developing the well-being of targeted parents, fewer take advantage of opportunities to gain qualifications.

Staff are well trained, effectively supervised and highly committed to meeting the needs of all families in the reach area. Self-assessment is rigorous and data and feedback from service users are used well by managers to set clear priorities. Partnership working is excellent, enabling interventions to be targeted and evaluated appropriately, resulting in highly effective use of resources. Arrangements for governance and accountability are clear and the Advisory Group provides appropriate challenge and support. Equality and diversity are promoted well and are supported by the centre's relentless focus on individual families and early engagement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of parents engaged in training and development opportunities so that they improve their employment skills and gain qualifications.
- Ensure that more parents become involved in the work of the centre through volunteering.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes are at least good, and are outstanding for health and staying safe, which have been prioritised by the centre. Targeted actions, including specialist support at home provided by midwives, health visitors, early years visitors and other professionals, are particularly effective in promoting healthy living and improving health outcomes. Far more mothers initiate and continue to breast feed than for the country overall. Physical activity and healthy eating are promoted very well. Children at risk of obesity are identified early by health visitors and families supported to adopt healthy routines, undertake exercise and prepare healthy and nutritious meals. Children and parents are encouraged to try different foods and excellent use is made of the attractive play areas and gardens to enhance physical development. One parent explained how her child 'had grown in confidence and would now try new foods and is eating well'. The emotional health of families is improving through the

targeted and accessible support for sufferers of post-natal depression. Mothers who are isolated and suffering from depression are supported through home visits and are then able to join groups at the centre and make friends.

The safety of children is given upmost priority by the centre. Early identification of children who are vulnerable, rigorous monitoring of families and comprehensive preventative work by centre staff are resulting in decreasing numbers of children requiring child protection plans and a reduction in the number requiring support through the Common Assessment Framework. One mother described how the centre had been a 'lifeline to her and her family when she had to undergo medical treatment'. The centre works well with other agencies to help those at risk of domestic abuse. Families are supported well to ensure their homes are safe for children through home visits, are provided with equipment by Safety Net when necessary and receive good advice on how to minimise risks to their children as they grow and develop. Numbers of children having accidents and sustaining injuries are reducing.

Parents are helped well to improve their parenting skills both at home and at the centre and parents who spoke to inspectors explained they would come to the centre with any issue which concerned them. Parenting programmes and baby massage groups are well attended and appreciated by parents. Stay and Play sessions and targeted family learning groups are helping parents promote children's learning through play, and children observed by inspectors played together happily, were well behaved and immediately tidied away their toys when asked to do so. Centre staff have been successful in embedding the Early Years Foundation Stage framework across centre- and home-based activities and this is increasingly effective in improving the learning and development of vulnerable children identified by health visitors and early years visitors as requiring additional support.

Children and adults are developing positive relationships well. Parents are increasingly contributing to governance through the advisory board and are good in responding to evaluations of activities and interventions and questionnaires. As a result of their feedback, for example, more activities are provided during school holidays. Through their early contact with families, health visitors are very effective in identifying those who need help with their parenting skills. The activities and opportunities provided for families are not only helping them manage their children's behaviour well but are also helping improve parents' confidence and self-esteem. Parents receive clear and timely advice about benefits and with developing the skills needed for economic well-being. Parents are increasingly making use of the courses provided to improve their confidence and are gaining experience through a well-organised volunteer programme. Fewer parents, however, are taking advantage of the opportunities provided for them to gain qualifications which will help them secure employment.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
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	2
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

The centre provides a good range of integrated services and activities to meet the needs of families living in the area. The centre is in contact with all families within two weeks of the birth of a child and engaged with all families to varying extents depending on the outcomes of thorough assessments of needs. Where appropriate, parents are referred to specialist city-wide services such as those for teenage mothers, the Traveller community or substance misuse. There is a strong focus on parents as individuals and in supporting them at home where appropriate. All families are visited by health visitors within two weeks of the birth of a child. Assessment of the health, well-being and social needs of families is thorough and ensures services are appropriately targeted according to needs. There is increasing emphasis on ensuring provision helps children achieve early learning goals, but only limited attention is given to systematically helping parents take full advantage of the opportunities available for achieving economic well-being.

The quality of care, guidance and support is excellent. Early assessment of needs by health visitors results in prompt engagement with all families, including those who would otherwise be hard to reach. The Common Assessment Framework is used very successfully in supporting children and families at risk and the role of centre staff in implementing child protection plans is clear and well understood. Inter-agency working is well developed, as is the sharing of information about needs and the progress made by families. A particularly strong feature of the care and support provided is the frequency of home visits by health professionals and early years visitors where need is significant or parents are reluctant to visit the centre. One parent explained how regular visits from an early years visitor had helped her understand how to influence her child's behaviour and encouraged her to join groups at the centre. There are good examples of peer support such as for breast feeding and many mothers who complete the programme for those suffering post-natal depression keep in touch for support.

Provision such as 'Family Learning', 'Stay and Play' and the parenting programmes provides good opportunities for supporting children's development and improving parenting skills. Parents attending the centre said they would recommend the centre to others. Helping children achieve early learning goals is now an integral part of centre provision. A range of good opportunities are provided for parents to improve their self-esteem and personal well-being. Jobcentre Plus visit the centre regularly to advise parents and keep them informed of employment and other opportunities. In association with local colleges, a good range of programmes are available at different levels to help parents gain the skills and qualifications required for employment.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre is highly committed to meeting the needs of all families in the reach area. The health-led model is very effective in engaging with families early and in assessing their needs. This promotes equality and diversity well as it enables all families to receive the help they need promptly. Practice is inclusive and fathers are encouraged to attend. The centre has analysed the 20% of children showing the lowest level of development against the Early Years Foundation Stage carefully to support the targeting of further support, and found White British boys who are not eligible for free school meals to be the predominant group.

Partnership working is excellent, enabling interventions to be targeted appropriately where there are concerns about welfare, development or parenting skills. Child protection arrangements are implemented rigorously and the use of the Common Assessment Framework is well embedded and highly effective. Arrangements for recruiting staff and ensuring they are vetted and deemed safe to work with children are rigorous. Services to support families in crisis because of housing problems or domestic abuse are readily available.

The centre has clear arrangements for governance and accountability. The roles of managers and staff are clearly defined. Supervision and support structures are used well and staff are confident in their work. Training is well thought out, as, for example, in embedding the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and in implementing safeguarding arrangements. The advisory group provides appropriate support and challenge and good use is made of the views of service users in developing provision.

The centre is highly effective in identifying priorities for development, having focused primarily on health and safeguarding in the first instance while establishing firm foundations for improving children's learning and families' economic well-being further. The impact of activities and interventions are evaluated well by managers and professionals and this, together with excellent use of data, enables resources to be managed effectively and targeted to area of greatest need. Managers and staff are committed to evaluating the impact of services and intervention and to ensuring these have measurable outcomes. Overall, the centre provides excellent 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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
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	1
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	1
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

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the South Portslade Children's Centre on 8–9 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We observed a range of activities such as baby massage, the Chatterbox Group and the Baby and You Group, and met many of the children's centre staff who support you. These included specialist health visitors and early years visitors. During the visit we spoke to parents who use the centre and they told us about the different ways the centre helps them and the community. We would like to thank them for taking time to meet us.

There are many good things about your centre and some that are outstanding. The care, guidance and support you receive is excellent. The way in which health visitors see you within two weeks of giving birth is very effective in helping ensure you receive the support you need, as are follow-up visits and the support provided by early years visitors. Centre staff work together very well and the way they promote the healthy development of children and adults is excellent. The support provided for breast feeding is excellent and mothers are helped very well to ensure their children are not overweight.

The centre is also exceptionally good at ensuring children are safe. Staff work very well in partnership with other agencies such as the police and social services to keep children safe. The centre and its partners share information well to provide the right services to help you and your families at times of crisis.

We saw the way the centre helps children develop and learn so that they are ready for school. We also saw the way the centre helps families to learn to play with their children so that they can enjoy their time with their children and help prepare them for school. The centre is also good at helping parents improve their self-confidence and also at providing opportunities for parents to meet and talk. The centre and its partners provide good opportunities for you to develop new skills and gain qualifications. We have asked the centre to encourage more of you to take advantage of these opportunities. Some of you volunteer to work at the centre and this is a good way of learning new skills. We have also asked the centre to encourage more of you to become involved as volunteers.

The centre and the services you receive are extremely well managed and the comments and views you provide about the services you receive are used well by managers to improve them, and it is important that you continue to help them in this way and also support the advisory group.

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