

Inspection report for Cricklade Children's Centre

Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	365667
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Hazel Callaghan

Centre leader	Rachel Stewart
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	St Sampson's Infant School St Sampson's Junior School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Thames Pre-School

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 additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centres, the centre coordinator and other staff, the early years advisory teacher, parents, representatives of the advisory board, a variety of the centre's partners, a representative from the local authority and the Area Director for Spurgeons.

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

Information about the centre

Cricklade Children's Centre was designated in 2008 but did not meet the core offer until 2010 and so is regarded as a phase three centre. The centre originally used a room in St Sampson's Infant School and in 2010 moved into purpose built accommodation situated on the same site as St Sampson's Infant and St Sampson's Junior Schools alongside a building occupied by Thames Pre-School. The centre itself does not provide childcare.

The centre is managed by Spurgeons through a service level agreement with Wiltshire County Council. Cricklade Children Centre is run alongside Malmesbury and Wotton Bassett children's centres which are managed by the head of centres with the centre coordinator managing the day-to-day organisation. Although the centre is on the same site as the infant school, junior school and pre-school and works in partnership with them, the centre has no direct organisational links with them.

The head of centre and the centre coordinator joined the Cricklade team of staff in 2010. Spurgeons took over the management of the centre from Barnados in 2011. During the reorganisations there was a reduction in staff and changes in the staff contractual duties and hours. Jobcentre Plus has a service agreement with Next Steps to provide support on employment issues. Currently 41% of families participate in the centre's activities and engage with its services.

The centre's reach area is made up of predominantly White British families with 7% other minority ethnic groups. There is a growing Polish population and there are five small Traveller sites within the reach area. Some of the Traveller population live in houses and others on the sites for all or part of the year. The reach area is within the 70 to 80% deprivation ranking nationally but there are two Super Output Areas where the levels of deprivation are higher. In the Purton area the proportion of workless families who are on benefits rises to 22% and Cricklade 25% of the population. Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with a range of skills and knowledge that is often below those expected for their age, particularly in their language skills.

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

Cricklade Children's Centre provides a satisfactory service for the families living within its reach area. The quality of the care, support and guidance provided for families who participate in the services it provides is good but at present not enough of the families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable are engaged. The quality of the one-to-one support for those vulnerable families who do access the centre is thorough and effective. One parent's comment was typical of many made to the inspectors: 'They genuinely like the children and are always available if you have a problem.' Another commented, 'Even when you feel your life is back on track, they don't leave you.'

Safeguarding at all levels is good and is a high focus in all the centre's work. Many parents commented spontaneously about how safe they and their children feel in the centre and commented on the caring support of staff. Children in the stay and play grow in confidence and independence. Staff monitor their development effectively and help parents understand how their children learn. However, next steps for those children who attend regularly are not formally identified in order for them to make the best progress in their learning. Parents are encouraged to attend courses that support their parenting skills and those who attend say the activities have been very beneficial in helping them recognise their children's needs and emotions, but there

are very few courses that support parents' own academic skills or that help them back to work.

The leadership has a good awareness of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and uses the data available satisfactorily to identify how well it is achieving its goals. Some information, for example about accidents in the home, is not currently being used sufficiently to provide a baseline from which the centre's work can be evaluated. The centre does, however, monitor how well it is engaging with the different groups and has a high focus on engaging with lone parents and with those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The centre is consequently moving forward in the range of services it provides, and its various strategies to engage with more families in the reach area are having a positive impact. The proportion of families taking up the nursery funding for two-year-old children, for example, has increased due to the support of the centre staff. Rates of participation, especially in the stay and play activities, are increasing weekly. Outreach work with vulnerable families is very effective and the number of families being supported as part of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is reducing because of the good levels of support they receive. These improvements are clear, but the number of families engaging with the centre remains lower than expected and so the capacity for the centre to improve further at present is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families engaging with the centre and participating in the services it provides by:
 - identifying the reasons why some parents are slow to engage with the centre and developing strategies to overcome these barriers
 - setting clear targets for the percentage of new parents who will participate in different activities.
- Use a greater variety of baseline data to support the centre in identifying the impact of its work in improving families' lives.
- Provide courses and activities which promote adults' academic development and support their aspirations of getting back into work.
- Monitor the development of children who attend the stay and play sessions regularly and set targets for their next steps in learning based on the Early Years Foundation Stage stages of development.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for families and their children are satisfactory overall because although the activities provided are of good quality, too few families attend them. The strength of

the centre's work is in the advice and support given to vulnerable families in their homes on a one-to-one basis. The range of activities that promote parents' awareness of healthy eating and engaging with their children to prepare healthy meals/snacks is having a positive impact on helping parents to recognise both the health and cost advantages of providing healthy food at home and enjoying the process with their children. Parents who attend say that their family lifestyles are improved, for example, cooking with their children encourages them to try new foods. There is an increasing focus on keeping healthy through physical activities such as 'Zumba' and 'Rock Rythm and Rhyme'. Parents who spoke to inspectors also stated that they have had good support with psychological problems and mental health issues. Visits from dental care practitioners encourage dental care but as yet there is little evidence to show how these sessions are improving children's dental health.

The centre has a warm and welcoming atmosphere which parents appreciate. Parents say they feel safe in the centre and that it helps them to consider issues that help them keep their children safe. There are clear expectations on parents while using the centre and rules such as no hot drinks near the children are well enforced by all parents. The staff are effective in supporting children as part of the CAF assessments and in the one-to-one support. Home safety checks made with families and a focus on home and road safety are regularly given in play and stay sessions. Children are encouraged to consider how to eat safely. The first-aid course was well received by parents. Those women who have asked for help as victims of domestic violence have been given strong emotional support and advice. There are no baseline data about accidents in the home resulting in hospitalisation at present with which to measure the impact of the centre's work, and so the impact of its work in reducing accidents at home is purely anecdotal at present.

Children who regularly attend drop-ins are developing independence and enjoyment of play. Many parents commented on how their child enjoyed the sessions at the centre how they had grown in confidence and were well prepared for learning. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and their families are well supported. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores in 2010 show that 61% of children gained 78+ points across the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

The gap between children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage of the lowest 20% and others is slowly closing. The centre does not provide childcare and does not yet have data to clearly demonstrate how it is effectively contributing to this improvement. A few vocational courses are held and enjoyed by parents but most courses are designed to give parents confidence. Activities planned for focus groups are fairly small and numbers attending parenting courses are low overall.

Parents are encouraged to have their say and discuss how their needs can be met. They evaluate courses and activities and some are on the advisory board. 'Have Your Say' meetings are well attended. The centre is active in encouraging parents and others to be volunteers at the centre. Four volunteers have been active in the centre

in the past and more are now on course to have their details checked and be ready to start. Families who need advice and support on budgeting, financial planning and access to benefits are well supported. The Next Steps adviser comes in to meet with parents when requested and works with them in developing plans for returning to work but the numbers involved remain fairly small at present.

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	3
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

The centre evaluates parents' needs effectively and provides a positive range of services to meet their needs, such as the focus group on toddler talk in the centre. Activities are also provided at Purton, and these are beginning to meet the needs of families in this part of the community who cannot travel up to Cricklade easily. Staff are also working hard to develop a breastfeeding group, as this has been identified as a priority for the centre, but have encountered a number of difficulties in getting it started. Lone parents are targeted for support and encouraged to attend specific activities which are planned to meet their needs. A dads' group runs monthly but as yet only five fathers attend. Signposting for support in stopping smoking is available but no actual programmes are running.

Provision for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved significantly due to the support of the early years advisory teacher. Staff are being supported in developing their confidence in the basic principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Observations of children's learning and development are made individually and as part of a group based on child development principles, and systems for the identification of children's next steps are being developed. Parenting courses are held but only a few attend. Parents' confidence and parenting skills, however, are strongly promoted in activities and as part of the one-to-one support. There is no specific focus on developing parents' own academic skills at present as this is not seen by parents as a priority. Such courses that promote parents' literacy and numeracy are not drawing enough interest from parents so

have proved unsustainable. At the 'Have Your Say' meeting, parents highlighted an interest in developing childcare expertise and a session is soon to be introduced.

The quality of care, support and guidance given to families who access the centre's services is good. The centre works closely with the health visitors to identify vulnerable families and the outreach activities provided by the family support worker in families' homes are highly successful at improving outcomes for parents, families and their children. Regular clinics run by the health visitors at the centre provide good support for new parents and care for their babies. They introduce families to the centre and most register while at the clinic. Good levels of support are provided for those mothers who are experiencing domestic violence and at times of crisis. Domestic appliances, for example cookers, have been provided for some families. The centre has provided transport for those parents who want to attend a course but cannot otherwise and crèche facilities are also provided for meetings and courses.

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 senior leaders have a clear view of the strengths and weakness of the centre and have developed effective plans for its improvement. The centre is gaining in momentum after the changeover in its management to Spurgeons, which resulted in many changes in staffing arrangements. There are well-structured protocols and management systems which support the day-to-day running of the centre. Governance through the advisory board is satisfactory. Board members see their role as supporting the centre and providing feedback on the needs of their communities. They monitor and question the progress towards the centre service plan and discuss judgements within the centre's self-evaluation form. The centre service plan has appropriate focus for improvement and set very ambitious targets last year. Staff have clear roles and responsibilities. Supervision arrangements are well developed and regularly held. Training is made available to support staff expertise and to broaden the range of services available.

Good use of data on families' participation in the centre's activities highlights the need to expand engagement with those families who may be harder to reach. Centre leaders have a clear view of what needs to be improved and plans to increase engagement with these parents are well on their way, including work with the Westlea Housing Association where many of the most hard-to-reach families live.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. Sustainability is high on the agenda and this is promoted through the effective use of staff expertise across the three centres and the sharing of staff and resources. Staff are diligent in ensuring there is no discrimination and the centre is open to all. They have worked with the Travellers' education service in an attempt to engage with the Traveller community but as yet have had limited success. Staff support vulnerable families and there are many good examples of individual needs being met. Good support is given to families in which a member is disabled or has special educational needs. Strong links with the pre-school next door, for example, are enabling sensory equipment to be made available for children with significant needs.

The partners say that working arrangements with the centre are developing well to provide a wide range of services and information about what is available. Good levels of communication and effective integrated working provide good quality support and guidance. The centre is effective in its work with other agencies in the CAF processes and in child protection work. Partners say they are clear about the centre's priorities and they work with centre staff to promote the engagement of families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable and those who are not currently using services. There is a clear focus on evaluation of services and the impact on those who attend activities. Each of the partners interviewed commented on the strong skills of the centre staff.

High priority is given to safeguarding and it is always an item for discussion at staff meetings. Policies and practice are effective in ensuring children and their families are safe. Security is good. Staff are effectively trained in safeguarding and child protection procedures. Systems for monitoring and reporting concerns are well developed and efficient. A thorough safeguarding audit is used to highlight areas that can be improved which are then successfully addressed. Staff work well with other agencies to form a team around the child and support for families. Partnerships with those parents that access the centre services are strong and positive.

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	3
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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cricklade Children's Centre on 21–22 March 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to chat to us and tell us about the activities you enjoy at the centre. We can see that you are very pleased with the support and advice the staff give you and that you really love the opportunity to meet other parents. You also told us how worthwhile it has been for your children to meet other children so they can learn to play happily. You felt that they were gaining in confidence and they were learning to cooperate and behave well. We could see that the staff have a good understanding of how children learn and develop and you were gaining a good understanding of this as well. We have asked the staff to start identifying next steps for those children who attend stay and play sessions regularly so their learning moves forward even more quickly.

We can see from your many comments after the activities that you are very pleased with what the centre has to offer, especially those activities that help you understand your child's needs and emotions. You have told us this is helping you to cope better and to feel less anxious and stressed. Many of you that we spoke to talked about how great the staff are at giving advice and that they felt really confident now in being a mum. There is an increasing focus on keeping healthy through physical activities such as 'Zumba' and 'Rock Rythm and Rhyme'. One mum commented that the exercise sessions give her a new outlook and zest for life. The courses that have helped you learn about cooking healthy meals on a budget have also been successful and some of you found the first-aid course very useful. The sessions on understanding how your child is learning and how to manage their behaviour has played an important part in making family life much happier.

We have seen that the care, support and guidance the centre staff provide is good. Several parents told us how important it has been for them to be accepted as they are and given support unconditionally. Relationships between the staff and you and your families are very good and we saw the warm welcome that all visitors to the centre receive. The centre is a safe place for you and your children, and staff are good at helping parents understand how to keep their family safe as well. We saw how positively the centre works with other partners, for example the health visitors and the local pre-schools, to support your child's development. Many positive services are provided by the centre but at present less than half of families with young children in the area are able to take part in the activities. We have asked the centre to reach out to more families so they too can enjoy the good activities provided. We have asked that staff learn even more about issues that affect families in the area so they can measure how well they are supporting you to make positive differences in your families' lives, for example, by knowing how well they are helping to reduce accidents in the home.

It was good to see how many of you came along to the 'Have Your Say' meeting and the good ideas that came from the discussions. We know the centre is soon to put on an event to support those of you who want to know more about entering a childcare occupation. Despite this positive initiative there are very few opportunities for you adults to improve your English or mathematical skills or to develop new skills that could help you into employment. We have asked that the centre works with outside providers to run these sorts of courses.

Thank you again for helping us with the inspection. It was good to meet you all and we wish you all the very best for the future.

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