

Inspection report for Barnstaple 2 (Sticklepath) Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon County Council
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Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre leader	Helen Hallam
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Woodville Estate Barnstaple Devon EX31 2HH
Telephone number	01271 379253
Fax number	01271 379253
Email address	Helen.hallam@actionforchildren.org.uk

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.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.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.

An inspection of the co-located 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's management team, representatives from Action for Children, 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 about the wider community.

Information about the centre

Barnstaple 2 Children's Centre, known locally as Sticklepath Children's Centre, is a phase two children's centre. It is in an area which is not identified as deprived overall although there are some pockets of deprivation where families are either dependant on workless benefits or are on low incomes. It was designated as a children's centre in 2007 and is run by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. The centre offers a range of services which include health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. These are provided at the children's centre, at another locally sited children's centre and in community venues in the locality.

The centre works in a cluster alongside three other centres within North Devon. Staff work across two centres: Barnstaple 1 and Barnstaple 2. The centre's reach area covers Sticklepath, Fremington, Bickington and areas out towards Bideford. The population is mostly White British, with a small but growing percentage of other ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. There are

806 children under five living in the reach area. Children’s levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are broadly in line with expectations although are low in communication, language and literacy development.

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

Barnstaple 2 (Sticklepath) Children’s Centre provides good services which effectively promote positive outcomes for local families. Staff and managers show high levels of commitment and work well together in order to meet the needs of families. Staff skilfully implement the centre’s effective assessment procedures and sensitively assess the individual needs of families. They work closely with a range of partners to ensure that families are effectively matched to services which meet their needs. Families are able to access a good range of services as centre management makes good use of the cluster model; families within the reach area access groups, activities and services delivered at both centres in Barnstaple.

The centre offers parents and families a warm welcome. Their first point of contact when they enter the centre is with an extremely well-informed receptionist who has an in-depth understanding of the aims of the centre and the services it provides. Parents particularly value the opportunity their contact with the centre to socialise and make friends has provided; ‘I would have been lost without it’ and ‘I don’t feel so alone’ were reflective of comments made by parents who spoke with inspectors.

One of the strengths of this centre is the breadth of opportunities provided for parents to learn and develop. Together with adult and community learning and local colleges, the centre has developed a comprehensive programme of courses and workshops so that parents can develop skills and gain recognised qualifications. Parents truly value the support they receive from the centre and many express their desire to ‘give something back’. They are supported to do so through a well-organised and successful volunteer programme.

Centre managers have a good understanding of the centre’s strengths and the areas

which require further development. Staff use a variety of means to evaluate the quality of the services they offer and act upon findings. Action to overcome weaknesses and gaps in provision has been effective, for example specific ante-natal provision for teenage expectant mothers is improving their attendance. Clear action plans are in place in order to improve services further. While good use of data is apparent when identifying priorities, leaders use data less effectively to evaluate the effectiveness of service delivery. Leaders are well focused on the areas which require further development and the centre has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Maximise the use of data through more rigorous analysis to securely measure the impact that services are having on engaging families and improving outcomes.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents are developing a good understanding of how to improve the health of their families. In particular, young parents are supported to understand what constitutes a healthy diet. They have learnt how to prepare healthy meals and grow and cook their own vegetables at the centre. A particular emphasis is placed upon children and their parents being active during sessions and staff make good use of the outdoor area to facilitate this. Through the effective promotion of breastfeeding the percentage of mothers who choose to breastfeed at birth has increased over the past two years from 68% in 2009 to 72% in 2011. The emotional well-being of children and their parents is given good attention. Courses such as 'Here's looking at you baby' focus well on maternal mental health and support effective bonding. Provision of counselling services enables families to address their individual concerns in a safe and confidential manner.

Children are kept safer in their homes through the implementation of a 'Safe at Home' scheme. Parents are supported to identify risks and are provided with a range of safety equipment. Young parents are further supported to keep their children safe as they have undertaken paediatric first aid training. Outreach workers undertake 'New born behaviour observations' with individual families to promote safer practices in the home, such as adopting an appropriate sleeping position for their babies. Centre staff offer families subject to a child protection plan good support. This has resulted in some families being able to stay together. Where this has not been possible, staff have supported parents well to make an informed decision based on what is in their child's best interest.

Children attending the crèche and groups enjoy their learning and make good progress. They access high quality resources and a range of interesting activities,

such as exploring the colour and texture of paint using their hands and bodies in an activity to celebrate the Hindi festival of 'Holi'. Parents' understanding of how their children develop has been increased through attending parenting courses and the advice given by staff. For example, some parents now have a clearer understanding of stages of development and confirm that this has resulted in them adopting a more positive approach to handling their child's behaviour. They learn how to support their child's language and communication skills due to the good attention paid by staff on promoting this particular area of development. This good provision has contributed to a strong upward trend in the number of children who achieve a good level of development at the end for the Early Years Foundation Stage having increased from 43.7% in 2009 to 56.2% in 2011. During the same period the achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest narrowed from 39% to 27.9%.

The centre is establishing itself at the heart of its community as families become increasingly involved in community events. A large number of families were involved in an art project where their much valued work was replicated by local artists to decorate the outside of the centre. Parents are effectively involved in making decisions which shape service delivery; they are well represented on the advisory board where they feel their views are heard and valued. The successful volunteer programme supports parents and others within the reach area to develop the confidence to take on additional responsibilities. This includes a number who have successfully secured employment in the centre itself. A typical example is the recently recruited parent champion who is drawing on her experience, knowledge and skills of having been a parent to become a volunteer and now a paid employee.

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	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

Staff know the families who use the centre well. Robust assessment systems in place mean that their needs are effectively identified and planned for. This includes good

use of the Common Assessment Framework process which is fully embedded in the centre's work. Staff have good access to information which they use appropriately in order to build a picture of the needs of the community. They make good use of their local knowledge of the reach area in order to help highlight potentially 'hidden' areas of deprivation within an overall more affluent community. They also employ evaluation of services effectively to improve services in line with the needs of families. They undertook a particularly successful project in order to listen to the views of children who use services. Children recorded their preferences using cameras and this directly influenced the development of the outside provision. Managers recognise that closer scrutiny of data is required to enhance service planning and evaluation. Staff also listened well to pre-natal teenage mothers and developed specific services to meet their particular needs.

Parents confirm that their contact with the centre has had a significant impact on raising their levels of confidence. Many expressed how this had enabled them to move on to accessing learning and development opportunities. Through a strong partnership with adult learning, the centre is offering parents a good range of opportunities to extend their skills and knowledge, such as Do It Yourself workshops, first aid qualifications and how to provide children with healthy lunchboxes. Staff recognise and celebrate families' achievements through the award of certificates and articles in local press and the centre's electronic newsletters.

Parents express how much they value the support they receive from centre staff; 'The centre has been a lifeline for me' was a typical comment made. Several reflect on how their engagement with the children's centre has reduced social isolation. Families can easily access good quality information, advice and guidance. Staff are knowledgeable and make themselves available for families. They effectively signpost parents on to other agencies as appropriate. A good range of information is available on notice boards and through leaflets on display throughout the centre. This includes the provision of sensitive information, such as that related to domestic violence and sexual health, within toilet cubicles so this can be accessed in private. Families have confidence that in times of crisis centre staff are there to support and guide them.

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 well led by an extremely committed and passionate senior management

team. Clear line management arrangements and effective supervision mean that staff are well supported. This includes coherent governance arrangements provided by Action for Children. The local authority is closely involved in monitoring the effectiveness of the centre against a detailed service plan. A strong focus is placed upon the continual professional development of all staff. This includes formal training opportunities as well as the sharing of good practice and dissemination of knowledge and ideas. As a result, the centre has a well-trained and knowledgeable team at all levels.

Partners have a clear understanding of their role and responsibility in improving outcomes and as a result, services are integrated. Comprehensive action plans focus upon the centre's key priorities and link well to the services that are delivered. A range of systems are in place which enable staff and managers to evaluate the effectiveness of services. For example, entry and exit questionnaires are completed for some services, such as parenting courses. These clearly measure how much a parent's understanding and confidence have developed. However, leaders make less use of data to help them to see clearly the impact that services are having on outcomes for the reach area as a whole.

The centre offers good value for money. Good use is made of provision across the two centres in Barnstaple in order that families are able to access a full range of services. Staff employ volunteers effectively to enhance service provision and ensure the sustainability of groups and services. Very good use is made of students who are placed at the centre who undertake research and development projects which improve outcomes for families.

The inclusive ethos of the centre is felt across many of the centre's activities. Specific groups and outreach work have been successful in engaging those who may be hard to reach, such as young parents and fathers. Staff are developing their work to engage those from multi-ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language. Increased publicity of services and the translation of documentation in a variety of languages are beginning to have a positive impact on engagement. Staff are improving their focus on celebrating diversity within groups through the celebration of a range of festivals. Good support is provided for children who have additional needs and their parents through the provision of the 'Step-by-Step' group and music therapy sessions offered in conjunction with the Portage service.

Staff are well trained in safeguarding issues; this includes training provided by the local authority as well as that provided by Action for Children. They have a good understanding of how to implement procedures to protect those children who are at risk of abuse. Effective liaison with appropriate agencies, such as children's services, means that concerns are effectively monitored. Appropriate procedures are in place in order to ensure those who work with the children and their families are suitable to do so. A strong focus is placed upon supporting those who may be vulnerable to domestic abuse; staff at all levels are well trained to recognise relevant signs and parents are sensitively supported to recognise potential risk for themselves.

The centre values highly its strong links with a range of other agencies. Strong

partnerships, such as those with health colleagues and the police, lead to co-ordinated and integrated support for families. Partners express how much they value the steps the centre staff take to keep them informed such as the provision of a monthly e-newsletter.

Families in the reach area are effectively involved in the development of services. They are well represented on the advisory board and, through 'Families Voice' the parents' forum, their views are taken account of. The recent appointment of a parent champion demonstrates leaders ongoing commitment to ensuring the voice of parents is heard and fully taken account of.

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	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

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Sticklepath Children's Centre on 21 and 22 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that both staff and managers are truly committed to providing you all with a good service and they make a good contribution to improving outcomes for you and your families. It is clear that staff know you and your families well. This is because they are skilled in assessing exactly what you need in order to improve your lives. They have developed some very strong partnerships, such as with the health service and police, in order that they provide you with as many services as possible and can offer you the correct support, advice and guidance.

Many of you told us that your contact with the centre has developed your confidence and self-esteem. It is evident that you really benefit from the opportunities the centre provides for you to socialise and this has enabled you to develop some strong friendships. We agree that staff are warm and welcoming. You told us they are always there to listen to you when you need them the most. They understand that helping you to be emotionally strong will support you as parents.

We noticed that you make a strong contribution to the running of the centre and the services it offers. You are given regular opportunities to present your views and thoughts and you help make decisions through 'Families Voice' and the advisory board. Many of you show a clear desire to give something back to your community and do so most effectively through volunteering your services within the centre and beyond. You are well supported by staff to do so.

One of the strengths of this centre is the opportunities provided for you to learn and develop. Staff work closely with adult and community learning and local colleges and have developed a comprehensive programme of courses and workshops so that you can develop skills and gain recognised qualifications.

Leaders and managers of the centre have a good understanding of what steps they need to take to improve their services even further and they are determined to make your lives the best they can be. To help them to do this we have asked leaders and managers to make full use of all the information they have available to them in order that they can be certain that the services they are delivering make a big difference to improving the lives of as many families as possible.

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