

Inspection report for Salisbury City Children's Centre

Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	367273
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Hazel Callaghan

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Janice Slade
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school, if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	St Osmund's Pre-School Group Brown Bears Community Nursery

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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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and the service manager as well as members of staff, a representative of the local authority and the Group Manager for Action for Children. Discussions were also held with a variety of users who visited the centre during the inspection, members of the advisory board and representatives of the partners who work with the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
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Information about the centre

Salisbury City Children's Centre is a phase two centre which opened in 2008. Action for Children has been contracted by the local authority to manage the centre and its governance. The Advisory Board monitors, reports and advises the centre. It offers all elements of the core offer, which includes integrated childcare, health services, family support and outreach. It has links to Jobcentre Plus. There is no on-site nursery or pre-school group but the centre staff work in close cooperation with St Osmund's Pre-school Group and Brown Bears Community Nursery.

The centre is situated at the heart of Salisbury city next to the Methodist Church, with which it has a close association. The children's centre is housed in a Grade 2 listed building which has many limitations in terms of the number and size of rooms, and there is no outside area. The centre has consequently developed a number of outreach sites within the community to run its stay-and-play sessions. It signposts users to a variety of services held in other children's centres and venues in the local area. Although the limitations of the building pose a number of difficulties, its position close to the centre of town makes it easy for users from a wide geographical area to attend.

The centre serves a very mixed area which overall is within the 40% most deprived areas in the country. Within this there are some affluent areas, moderately deprived areas and pockets of significant deprivation. Many families in the most deprived areas experience a variety of social and economic difficulties. There is a high incidence of workless families who are on benefits and those who also experience financial difficulties because of low incomes. The large majority of families living within the reach area are of White British ethnicity. There are a number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds, including Polish, Bengali, and Philippino. There are also a growing number of Spanish families. Most have a reasonable fluency in English but not all. Because of the wide range of social and economic factors within the reach area, children's ability range is also wide. Many children from the most deprived areas do not access the early years facilities available until they start school, and their skills are often well below the levels expected, especially in their personal, social and emotional development and language skills. The knowledge and skills of those who access the stay-and-play activities and the pre-school settings are more in keeping with those expected for their age.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Salisbury City Children's Centre offers satisfactory provision for the children and their families in the local area. It has many good features and leaders are constantly seeking ways to improve all areas of its work. Many families within Salisbury access the services it provides, some of whom come from some distance away because of its convenient position and because they enjoy attending. These users are extremely happy with all that the centre provides and parents made many very positive comments such as, 'It's fantastic', 'Relationships are excellent' and 'They are all very

good listeners.’ The range of services is designed to meet the needs of users and is accessed by a growing number of families, many of whom are not from the reach area of the centre. In this way the centre is meeting the needs of many in the wider community well. Many families in the most disadvantaged areas, however, do not access these activities and, although the staff are persistent in devising different strategies to reach out to these potential users, they recognise that there is still work to do in overcoming the families’ reluctance to take advantage of the wide range of services that the centre offers.

The centre’s capacity to improve is good. Staff are very aware of the need to provide value for money in all of their activities and use a variety of effective strategies to do this successfully. The evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre’s provision is accurate and appropriate improvement plans are in place. Staff work together as a united team and good relationships with the various partners enable the centre to extend its services from year to year. Services such as the stay-and-play provision, breastfeeding groups and support for women in abusive relationships are well established and are growing in their effectiveness. The staff evaluate their work and look for ways to make activities more successful. Users are regularly asked their views and given frequent opportunities to offer suggestions and opinions about groups and services. Staff are not, however, always clearly focused on what they want to achieve in terms of the impact on children and the lives of their families. This makes it hard to measure how successful they have been in meeting their needs. Staff are becoming more proficient in using data about the reach area to identify the needs of specific groups, but they are not yet rigorous enough in their analysis or in their use of the data available to measure the extent to which they are making a difference.

Outcomes for users are good. The aspects of the centre’s work that are the most successful are those in promoting users’ health and safety, and this is having a positive impact on children’s lives. Parents are engaged well in promoting their children’s healthy eating. The number of mothers who are breastfeeding is growing steadily and the length of time they continue is also improving. Parents recognise its importance in promoting their babies’ good health and the effective sessions on weaning further support their children’s healthy diet. Safeguarding procedures are good and carried out thoroughly at the centre and the various other settings. Staff are very focused on the need to keep children safe, and their good understanding is shared with families. The baby resuscitation course was very well received by the mothers and fathers who attended. Children and adults really enjoy the activities provided by the setting. This could be seen clearly during the ‘messy play’ sessions, in the sensory room where children sat fascinated by the coloured fish projected on to the walls and by the way babies giggled as they were jiggled along to the action songs sung by their mothers at the Mum and Baby group.

All staff who work with young children are well trained in how to promote active learning through play. The Early Years Advisory Teacher works with centre staff, the linked child minders and at the pre-school groups each week to promote children’s learning most effectively, and this is helping them to make more rapid progress.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop strategies that are effective in engaging the difficult-to-reach families, especially those who are the most vulnerable and in need of support.
- When planning new activities, identify what outcomes the centre aims to achieve in improving the life chances of children and their families and devise systems by which these outcomes can be measured and evaluated.
- Use data more effectively, not only to identify the different groups that need support but also to measure the impact of services provided.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre staff are well focused on developing users' understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. Children who attend the stay-and-play session are encouraged to wash their hands and to eat the fresh fruit available. Parents consequently feel more positive about trying the different varieties of fruit at home, knowing their children enjoy them. The 'Cook for Life' course was thoroughly enjoyed by the users who took part and parents said they were encouraged to try out new menus at home using the vegetables they were given. The benefits of breast feeding are well understood by parents and the number of mothers breast feeding has grown significantly. Advice on successful weaning also plays an important part in children's health and well-being and this is also having a positive impact on reducing rates of obesity of children starting school.

Children and families feel very safe at the centre and in the various venues used for stay and play. Good attention is given to monitoring access to the centre and ensuring parents and children are safe when using its facilities. A strong focus is placed on safe practices, such as using cups with covers for warm drinks, which the users fully appreciate. They are encouraged to recognise unsafe situations and staff at the centre and outreach workers are very effective in supporting parents in understanding their children's needs and helping to keep them safe. The development of parenting skills, for example by modeling good practice and giving support and advice, is building parents' self-confidence and self-esteem. First aid training for parents and carers increases their skills in responding to accidents and emergencies.

Staff provide strong role models that successfully support children's positive behaviour, and a culture of mutual respect and supportive relationships is evident in the centre. Baby massage classes with a trained worker help parents to bond with their babies. Children, parents and carers feel safe in the centre because they build good relationships with staff who are able to listen to and act on their concerns. The safety and well-being of centre users, including those who are most vulnerable, is a high priority for all senior leaders. Families with children on child protection plans are carefully monitored by senior staff. They are visited regularly and signposted to

services to address their needs. Here, too, individual members of staff are clear about their responsibilities as members of the 'team around the child' and as a consequence, children's safety improves. Discussions with parents and carers and individual case studies demonstrate the difference that activities and support have made to their own and their children's well-being. Parents and carers say that staff are 'so supportive' and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence, aspirations and achievements as well as their children's development.

Good advice is available for those who are experiencing difficult financial circumstances and those who are finding it very difficult to make ends meet. The most vulnerable families, however, are often slow to seek advice and, unless they are referred to the 'Money Talks' adviser, miss out on this support. Support from Job Centre Plus is limited to leaflets and signposting to other offices and centres and so support in finding employment or to access training is not as effective as it could be. Children are well supported in their learning. They behave well in play sessions and at the pre-school groups. They respond well to the adults and other children, showing much enjoyment in their activities. Children are encouraged to make a positive contribution by clearing away their toys and resources at the end of the session. Their achievements are satisfactory overall, but the gap between their attainment at the end of Reception and that found nationally is closing.

Case studies illustrate how effectively professionals, such as the speech and language therapist, help parents and carers understand how to support their child's development. Other advisers, for example from 'Money Talks', are helping users to be more confident and successful in managing their family's lives. Parents and carers are encouraged to evaluate the work of the centre and to play a part in helping it to improve by filling in questionnaires and joining the parents' forum. Most suggestions are very minor, however, as most feel the centre is doing a 'fantastic job', and many feel 'It is simply great as it is.'

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

Assessment of individual needs is satisfactory overall. It is good for children and families referred to the centre by external agencies, or for those who self-refer. All current users' needs are effectively identified but the centre staff are well aware that the needs of their core group of most vulnerable families in the reach area are not sufficiently identified. Much work has been undertaken with the support of the local housing manager and a representative from Shine, a charity that works with families in the most deprived areas to locate these families, but they do not access the services available. Many are very resistant to the many offers of support and advice and this makes assessment of their needs difficult.

Outreach workers are effective in assessing registered families' needs and accessing the help and support they need. Sometimes the detailed information that is needed for the Common Assessment Framework to be put in place is difficult to obtain and this slows the process but once in place no time or effort is wasted in getting the support or help needed. The 'Team Around the Child' approach is well embedded and strong partnerships with other agencies ensure that assessments of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are accurate. The local authority's data show an increasing number of families where either a child or parent has additional needs. The centre does not run any specific courses for them but where possible makes its amenities available for their use. The Downs Syndrome Support Group, for example, uses the centre each month and as individuals they have open access to the sensory room and the ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) group also makes use of the centre's facilities.

Good care, guidance and support, together with effective multi-agency working, ensure that families have access to personalised support. This includes parenting groups, one-to-one guidance and advice in the centre or at home, specialist health services and financial advice. Courses to support women in abusive relationships have resulted in many recognising the types of behaviour used by their partners and its impact on them and their children, which helps them to manage it. Some have gained the confidence to put an end to the relationship.

A good focus is placed on developing users' parenting skills and their knowledge of how to develop healthy lifestyles for themselves and their family. The importance of dental care is also discussed as part of the many different sessions, but immunization is not as successfully promoted. A strong focus is given to training all staff who work with children in developing effective understanding of how to promote stimulating learning environments. Successful work with local childminders is having a very positive impact on the achievement and enjoyment of the children in their care.

Staff make the centre attractive and a place that parents and carers want to attend. Some sessions are very busy as a result and more have had to be put on. Having fun

at events such as the 'stay and play' attracts users to the Centre and opens their eyes to other aspects of its provision. Mums and Dads are welcome to the vast majority of activities. The very successful 'Saturdays' events are attracting an increasing number of fathers. Courses and a wide range of activities create enjoyment, build confidence, enable lone parents to become less isolated and provide a venue for those of minority ethnic groups to join together. The Polish group is a particular success and parents state how wonderful it has been to meet others from their homeland, to speak their own language and enjoy their own culture, as well as to share it with others. Several other nationalities are represented in the centre's activities and courses, effectively promoting community cohesion. Very little at present is available for users to extend their knowledge of the English language or to further their education or training.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Effective leadership and management at all levels ensure that the centre provides good value for money. The staff are encouraged to extend their professional skills and, in this way, many of the centre's services are developed by current staff rather than buying in other agencies. This 'home-grown talent', along with the effective use of volunteers, such as those in the breast feeding group and the father who runs the 'Saturdays', is helping to keep costs down. The fact that all the services are free to users is much appreciated, as are the gifts of fruit, vegetables and packs of safety equipment which extend users' awareness of keeping safe and healthy lifestyles.

The centre works effectively in partnership with a range of agencies to develop provision and outcomes for children and adults. It has developed good links with various members of the health service, particularly health workers and midwives, to identify the needs of new families and to provide a wide range of services for their support. These partnerships ensure that the centre is an inclusive environment where equality and diversity are promoted effectively for most groups. This is apparent in the centre's working policies and practices, none more so than in the day-to-day warmth of the welcome and the good relationships between staff and users. There is not yet sufficient engagement with the most vulnerable families and this limits the centre's effectiveness in ensuring equality of access.

There are clear safeguarding procedures within the centre and staff spoke knowledgably about the systems for sharing concerns with senior staff and parents. Thorough recruitment procedures are in place to ensure the suitability of staff prior to their appointment. Rigorous monitoring of identities and past employment histories ensure that staff have appropriate qualifications. Case files for families where the Common Assessment Framework is in use and those on the child protection register are supervised regularly by senior staff. Individual families are closely monitored with weekly contact and are provided with access to specific activities and support. Several families have been supported so that the risk of harm is reduced.

The centre's management board is provided with a range of information and, through regular discussions, members develop a good understanding of the work of the centre and areas for development. Currently these evaluations do not make sufficient use of local authority data and information to ensure services are as effective and well targeted as they need to be. The annual business plan effectively sets out what is to be accomplished and the improvements to be made. These are based on the centre's accurate assessment of its strengths and weaknesses but plans do not identify clearly enough how the activities will improve children's life chances or the impact desired. This makes it difficult for managers or the advisory board to successfully measure the impact of the services provided.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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

Although the centre works closely with St Osmunds Pre-school group and with Brown Bears Community Nursery they are not formally linked with them and as such their reports have not been used to inform judgements during this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Salisbury City Children's Centre on 2–3 February 2011. We judged the centre to be satisfactory overall but recognise that many aspects of its provision are good and that it is much appreciated by all of you.

Those of you that we spoke to told us that you really enjoy coming to the centre and feel happy and safe because staff are always there to listen and help you. You also told us that your children enjoy coming to the centre and particularly enjoy activities such as the stay-and-play sessions. You also like being able to meet up with other parents and carers, to share ideas and help each other, for example by chatting with other mums at the Mum and Baby sessions. From our observations, discussions and case studies, we were able to see what a good impact the centre is having on your lives. For example, some of you told us that you were able to improve your own health and that of your children. You told us that you felt well informed about how to improve your children's diet and many of you said you really enjoyed the 'Cook for Life' course as it gave you lots of good ideas on healthy meals that were easy to prepare. More and more mums are finding the breastfeeding group really supportive and caring. Several mums told us said how patient the staff are and how glad they are they persevered.

We could see that safeguarding procedures are good and carried out thoroughly at the centre and the various other settings. The manager and staff provide good care, guidance and support for all of you who use the centre. They are a dedicated and supportive team who do their best to build links with other skilled people, such as midwives and the speech therapist, so that you get all the help you need. Staff are very focused on the need to keep your children safe and their good understanding is effectively shared with you too. We heard how valuable you found the first aid courses, particularly those sessions that helped you to know how to resuscitate a

child if the need arose. It's great that now some of you volunteer to help others as a result of the guidance you had yourself.

We know that the centre staff encourage you to evaluate the activities they provide and to play a part in helping the centre to improve by filling in questionnaires and discussing new activities. Most of the suggestions are very minor, however, as most of you feel the centre is doing a 'fantastic job', and many feel 'It is simply great as it is.' We agree that the centre does many things well and that relationships are strong but we have asked the staff to continue their efforts to involve parents from the most vulnerable families too, so their children also benefit from all the activities that your children enjoy. To improve the centre further, we have asked staff to make sure the targets in their improvement plans are really clear so that you know what they are trying to achieve and so they are able to measure the impact of their activities. The centre uses all sorts of data to identify those families that might need better support but are not quite as good at using it to evaluate how well they are achieving their goals.

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us during our visit. We very much enjoyed talking with you and we appreciated your willingness to talk with us about some of your personal experiences. We wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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