

Inspection report for Bideford Bay Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon
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Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield HMI

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Centre leader	Jane Kivlin
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school, if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Tarka Tots 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.

An inspection of the registered early years provision Tarka Tots Nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. 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 additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's advisory board, the local authority, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of 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

Information about the centre

Bideford Bay Children's Centre developed from a Sure Start Local Programme, starting in 2002. It moved into the purpose built children's centre building in June 2005. As a phase 1 centre it aims to provide the full core offer of integrated childcare and family learning, health, family support, outreach work, links with the childminder network and financial and employment advice from Job Centre Plus. Action for Children have been commissioned by the local authority to manage the centre and at the time of the inspection the centre operated under a management board of representatives from partner agencies and users from the local community.

The centre serves a large geographical area including Bideford and the Hartland area to the west of the town. Recent local authority data show that in the centre's local reach area a higher-than-average proportion of families are dependent on benefits and there is a higher-than-average proportion of domestic violence incidents with children present. The proportion of children in the local area achieving 78 points and above at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is well below average. A small but increasing proportion of families are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Overall effectiveness

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The inclusion of a wide range of families and children is a strength of the centre. The centre has developed a range of partnerships with other agencies that provide good support for users and ensure good outcomes for families across the majority of areas. Outreach workers are given clear roles that allow them to form effective partnerships with individual professionals from other agencies and in building close relationships with users that help to identify their needs. The centre works closely with the Youth Service to provide specific good quality support for young parents. It provides activities closely matched to their needs that encourage them to gain qualifications and develop their financial stability and their self esteem. In providing services for fathers, the centre has developed a network for young fathers, with weekly sessions open to all fathers of children aged 5 years or younger. These sessions help them to develop their child's play and learning. The centre has worked closely with local authority professionals to engage families from minority ethnic groups. The emotional health and well-being of users is enhanced by the centre's partnerships with counselling and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), who deliver weekly support sessions in the centre. However, whilst good partnership arrangements attract a wide range of users into the centre, local authority data show that a proportion of vulnerable groups of users are not currently accessing services.

Outcomes for users' economic well-being are satisfactory; this is because the high proportion of users in the area accessing benefits and seeking employment have limited access to financial advice, careers support and information on improving their financial stability. Some parents and carers have been supported in developing their employment prospects and the centre can demonstrate some success in finding suitable employment for users. Petroc, a local Further Education college, enrolls parents as students and runs numeracy and literacy courses from the centre. However, parents' and carers' evaluations provide examples of a number of adults

who would appreciate greater opportunities to extend their learning and access higher quality education and training.

Safeguarding training is provided for all staff in the Nursery and centre and to parents groups at their request. There are clear policies and procedures in place which are understood and applied by all staff, ensuring concerns are recorded and acted upon. 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. 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 key workers and, as a consequence, children's safety improves.

Children in the Nursery develop skills for the future well and make good progress in their communication, language, literacy and numeracy skills. They learn about information and communication technology and confidently use computers in the pre-school room. The Nursery and centre provide a well-resourced, bright, child-friendly environment indoors and outdoors, where activities are supported by well-qualified staff. The good quality of the crèche facility encourages parents to attend sessions and facilitates good parental involvement in the life of the centre. The Nursery works with a range of professional agencies to provide support for children with special educational needs. In particular, the 2gether project provided through coordinated multi-agency support has been targeted at developing two-year-old children's learning. The experienced Nursery manager reports confidently on the accelerated progress of these children.

The centre works with health partners to provide baby clinics from the centre. These are currently provided at a weekly session from within the centre where high numbers of parents and carers attend. The volume attending these weekly sessions currently prevents health visitors and staff developing the close relationships with users which are characteristic of the majority of the centre's activities and services. The centre recognises the need to develop services and activities for parents of young babies and build on the well-attended health clinics in particular in developing parenting skills with young babies and postnatal groups and increasing breastfeeding volunteer support.

The centre's work is monitored by a well-informed and representative management board providing the centre with good support and challenge. They have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses through their regular reviews and evaluations of the centre's work. A committed group of parents sit on the management board and are an integral part of decision making. They provide leaders and managers of the centre with the views and opinions of a wide range of users through an established parents' forum. This active group of parents and carers can point to a number of examples where their views have been used to adapt services and activities. In promoting strong partnership arrangements, in developing the centre's activities to suit the needs of users and with the support of the management board, senior leaders show their good capacity to make further

improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further increase the proportions of all vulnerable groups accessing services by increasing the reach of the children's centre into the most deprived local areas.
- Further develop services and activities for parents of young babies and build on the well-attended health clinics in particular to develop parenting skills with young babies and postnatal groups and increase breastfeeding volunteer support.
- Improve economic well-being outcomes for users by increasing access to adult education and qualifications, information advice and guidance for parents in financial support, benefits and routes into employment

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Children make good progress in their learning and development in relation to their capabilities and starting points. Nursery staff are highly qualified and benefit from the support of early years professionals and the input of the Children's Centre teacher. 2gether sessions working with a range of agencies supporting children with speech and language difficulties and behavioural and development needs are having a very positive impact on children's well-being and development. The centre has played a role in working alongside local schools and settings to focus on children's language development and on improving children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre's stay-and-play sessions for parents in the centre and in the local community develop parents' and carers' understanding of children's learning and development.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted well in the nursery and crèche. Children have good opportunities for regular outdoor play and are taken for walks round the park. The play environment is extended outdoors to ensure children have lots of fresh air and develop their physical skills. Good hygiene routines are promoted throughout the centre. A recent environmental health report gave the nursery a good rating. Children's dietary needs are well met and the centre promotes healthy eating, with young parents regularly cooking meals for the group and developing their understanding of healthy eating.

Children and their parents and carers feel safe in the centre. They report that they are able to build up relationships with staff and therefore are able to share their concerns. Clear procedures in place in the Nursery and crèche support children's safety and health needs with good documentation. Thorough risk assessments of the premises and activities are completed and regularly reviewed by centre staff. Risk assessments for outings are also completed, ensuring that children's safety is maintained when they are taken out in the park or other outings. The centre offers a comprehensive home safety check and a number of families are able to access a

range of home safety equipment. Safeguarding training is provided for all staff. There are clear policies and procedures in place to ensure concerns are recorded and staff complete common assessments. Families with children on child protection plans are visited regularly and signposted to services for support. The centre cooperates with other agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children and families.

Wellness and counselling sessions are effective in promoting families' emotional well-being and have opened up a referral pathway to the child development centre in Barnstaple. Partnerships with CAMHS through family therapy clinics help families facing challenging circumstances to improve their safety and emotional health. The centre's support for families has helped some users to access housing and benefits. The centre can demonstrate some success in helping adults to find suitable employment. The local further education college enrolls parents and carers as students and runs Numeracy in the Centre for them.

An active parent group participate in decision making and make a strong contribution to the life of the centre. They maintain a high profile in the centre and actively gather views of other users to ensure that a wide range of parents and carers have a strong voice. They have helped to submit funding applications to improve services and provision within the centre and regularly review the centre's newsletters and publications.

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	2
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?

2

The inclusion of a wide range of families and children is a strength of the centre. The centre provides good quality activities and support for a range of local groups: lone parents, ethnic minority groups, young parents, fathers and children with special educational needs. CAMHS staff provide services to develop users' emotional well-being and provide valuable support and advice to staff at the centre.

The centre works closely with the youth service to provide specific support for young parents to manage their finances and develop parenting, literacy and numeracy skills as well as their self-confidence. Young parents spoke with pride about their achievements in obtaining qualifications which raised their self-esteem: 'I am proud to be a member of the young parents group and would be truly lost without it.'

Outreach workers work closely with local authority support workers and language support services to encourage the engagement of minority ethnic families. The centre has worked with schools and settings in the local learning community in a joint focus on developing children's language and communication skills. The nursery works with a range of professional agencies to provide support for children with special educational needs. The 2gether project has focused on improving outcomes for a number of children with additional needs. Good partnership working with a range of agencies such as portage, community nursery nurse, nursery plus and Highfield House help to support children with additional needs.

The well-run crèche provides excellent care and play opportunities which encourage users to access services and activities at the centre. Well-qualified staff complete assessment sheets of children's progress during sessions. The 'possible lines of direction' forms record individual children's interests and learning. Staff used these evaluations well to provide suitable activities with a clear focus on developing children's learning from one session to the next. The centre uses an ongoing evaluation pro forma for some sessions, an 'outcomes star' which provides parents with a visual representation of their child's progress. An adult described how useful she found the star in highlighting her child's progression. Evaluations of the progress made by adults are not completed as systematically or consistently. Opportunities are missed to use regular evaluations effectively to adapt activities to more closely meet the learning needs and interests of adult users. The centre is intent on capturing a clearer picture of local needs by gathering opinions of all parents in the local area as well as those that access the centre.

Several parents and carers are encouraged by the centre and the parents group to become volunteers and support other users. They act as volunteers alongside staff from the centre in a range of activities helping to befriend new parents and families and, in the words of one, 'to repay the centre'. The centre plans to increase the number of volunteers and train more breastfeeding peer supporters to attend ante-natal sessions and develop relationships with new parents.

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	2
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

The centre works effectively in partnership with a range of agencies to develop provision and outcomes for children and adults. In particular it has developed strong links with agencies to support young parents, ethnic minority groups, lone parents and children with additional needs. These partnerships ensure that the centre is an inclusive environment where equality and diversity are promoted well. This is apparent in the centre's working policies and practices and none more so than in the day-to-day warmth of the welcome and the good relationships between staff and users.

There are clear safeguarding procedures within the centre and staff spoke knowledgably about the procedures for sharing concerns with senior staff and parents. Thorough recruitment procedures are in place to ensure the suitability of staff prior to their appointment. These include interview questions on safeguarding and equality and diversity. Case files for families on 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.

Senior leaders and managers have developed the centre's services and activities so that outcomes for users have improved and are good in most areas. This ensures that the centre currently provides good value for money. The centre's management board are provided with a range of information and in their regular evaluations develop a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Currently these evaluations do not make sufficient use of local authority data and information to ensure services engage all adults in the priority vulnerable groups of users.

An active parents' and carers' forum plays an integral part in the life of the centre. Their views provide the centre with valuable information and this is used to modify and improve services. These evaluations feed into a detailed and well-considered strategic plan with a wide range of priorities, although criteria to measure the success of some actions are not always clearly recorded.

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	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
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	2

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

The children's centre inspection findings were informed by a parallel inspection of the separately managed Tarka Tots Nursery on 18 January 2011. The full inspection report for this event can be found on the Ofsted website.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bideford Bay children's centre on 19 and 20 January 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found the centre to be a warm and welcoming environment which provides a good range of activities helping you and your children to make good progress in a number of areas. One of the strengths of the centre is the wide range of families that come into the centre. The centre works closely with a range of other professional groups to provide good support and advice to different groups of users. We found that young parents were well supported by staff from the centre and from the local youth service. Several young parents told us about the support they had received and the difference that this had made to them and their children. A group of fathers meet regularly and enjoy helping their children to play and learn. The centre has worked closely with the local authority to support families from a range of other ethnic groups. We found that adults in all these groups were helped and encouraged because staff and adults developed good understanding and friendly working relationships. These help you to talk to staff about your concerns and to explain to them the help and advice that you need.

We found that you make good progress in a number of different ways. Children in the Nursery and crèche sessions make good progress in their learning and development because staff plan sessions which are carefully matched to their interests and abilities. You are helped to feel safe because the centre provides you with safety equipment but also because the centre has clear systems in place to ensure your safety. The centre uses displays and posters to let you know what is going on in the centre and also to let you know what they will do when they have concerns. They share any concerns with you and where these concerns place children at risk they work closely with you and other professionals to provide support and advice to improve the situation.

We found that the centre has helped some of you to improve your qualifications, find employment and provide you with financial advice. We have asked the centre to increase the number of opportunities for you to access training and complete qualifications and increase the amount of financial support and advice on benefits and to help more of you to find routes into employment.

During the inspection we found that the health clinics were attended by large numbers of families. We have asked the centre to build on the success of these sessions by providing activities and services for parents of young babies and to increase the numbers of adult volunteers who provide breastfeeding support and advice.

One of the strengths of the centre is the way that parents and carers are involved in improving activities and services. A large number of you regularly attend parents' and carers' meetings and help the centre by offering your views and ideas. You provide valuable support and for many of you this is your way of repaying the centre. We thank all those of you that took the trouble to tell us how much the

centre has helped you to change your lives. We know what the centre has done for you. However, from information gathered by Devon local authority we know that there are still a number of families who would benefit from the support of the centre and who are not involved. We have asked them to make sure that their services are aimed at encouraging a greater number of these families to access the centre.

Thank you for sparing the time to talk to us and to let us know your views.

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