

Inspection report for Seacombe Children's Centre

Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	362560
Inspection dates	1-2 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Steve Isherwood HMI

Centre governance	Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Centre leader	Sarah Harper
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	NA
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY283225 Jack and Jill Day Nursery

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.

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leaders, front-line staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, parents and carers and service users. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Seacombe Children's Centre is a phase one centre and has developed from a Sure Start local programme. The area served by the centre is socially and economically disadvantaged with a high proportion of its wards being ranked as in the top 5% of the most deprived areas in the country. The area is characterised by high unemployment, high numbers of lone parents, low levels of breastfeeding and high numbers of women receiving help for maternal depression. The vast majority of families are of White British heritage backgrounds with a small number from minority ethnic groups. The number of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is above average, as is the proportion of children aged under-four who are living in households where no adult is working.

The centre provides the full core offer and a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, drop-in health support, adult courses and workshops. In addition, the centre provides community sessions and parenting courses at a nearby satellite centre commissioned from a local church.

The centre is governed and managed by an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community.

The centre's full day-care provision is provided by Jack and Jill Day Nursery. The Nursery is privately managed and is subject to separate Early Years inspection arrangements. It was last inspected in March 2010.

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 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

This is a good centre which is inclusive and welcoming. Outcomes for users are improving. Families feel accepted and valued. 'Staff make you feel welcome'. 'I feel safe here'. 'There's no question that's stupid to ask'. 'They talk to you as normal, they don't judge you'. These comments, expressed by a grandparent and a teenage parent and echoed by many others, help to explain why Seacombe is an effective children's centre. Staff accept people as individuals and focus on their needs and how services can offer support as locally as possible.

A key strength of the centre is the excellent partnership working and the range of services that have co-located together in the one building. Space is used well, including at an outreach site and more new teams are continuing to join together. Provision is personalised well to individual needs, including for the most vulnerable. Staff are quick to support all children and their families whatever their circumstances. As a consequence, the centre's commitment to equality of opportunity and diversity is strong.

The Early Years Foundation Stage permeates all of the centre's work including the crèche. Children's learning and progress are recognised and very well celebrated in displays of their work around the centre. This emphasis benefits from having a qualified teacher within the centre team. The quality of learning for babies and young children in community groups and childminding drop-in is particularly effective with staff showing a clear understanding of effective practice. The on-site private nursery is working with the centre to improve from a satisfactory inspection outcome in March 2010, and clear actions have been identified.

The centre manager is showing effective leadership in integrating a complex range of services together, working with partners to develop a shared vision and to ensure high quality integrated services. This is supported by clear and open communication across staff teams and a commitment to improvement. Opportunities remain for increasing parents' and carers' contribution to the governance of the centre.

Senior leaders are reflective and work hard to use local knowledge to improve their services. They review the evaluations that are undertaken across centre activities and are well informed about the views of parents and carers. They have a clear understanding of the strengths in provision and where further improvement is still required. For example, they are aware that further work could be done to reach all families in the area served by the centre, including those who may be reluctant to engage. While the centre evaluates the quality of provision regularly, plans for improvement are not sufficiently focused on measuring success and impact. Some of the evidence, although useful, is anecdotal and is not yet reliable enough to enable leaders to judge whether activities are as effective as they could be. In addition, the centre's systems for recording its own self-evaluation are too descriptive and are not yet set against local or national targets.

Staff and other adults consistently give the highest priority to safeguarding. All procedures and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and their families are up to date and meet statutory requirements. Parents feel that the centre is a safe place for them and their children. Services are flexible and staff work hard to meet individual needs for families who attend.

Considering that outcomes are improving and together with its other strengths, the centre has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve action planning and self-evaluation by:
 - developing systems that are more evaluative and focus more clearly on the impact the centre is having on making a difference
 - ensuring that targets are specific and measurable and focused on improving outcomes.
- Increase user involvement further by:
 - identifying and engaging further with families in the community who are not currently accessing the centre's activities
 - increasing the contribution of parents and carers to the governance of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for parents and families are good and improving. This is because services are well integrated between staff in the centre, locality health professionals, speech and language specialists and voluntary and private childcare providers. Families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable are referred quickly and this

is enhanced by strong communication across staff teams. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively when specialist intervention is required. This means that support for families is targeted early at preventative measures rather than allowing situations to escalate and reach crisis point.

Effective partnership with mental health professionals is leading to reduced levels of stress, anxiety and depression for local families. Parents and carers said that they valued the support given for their needs as well as their children. For example, work to improve dental hygiene has led to some families being more informed about healthy behaviour and an increase in new registrations with dentists. Furthermore, children's speech and language development is supported well across the centre and as a result, children's needs are being identified earlier. In addition, good antenatal advice has led to a positive decrease in smoking during pregnancy.

Parents are more confident and aware of health issues. As one parent commented: 'The centre gives us confidence in our parenting skills and helps us to feel that we are doing a good job'.

Families feel safe when using the centre and are confident that they can share any concerns that they may have. Parents commented that children's safety is prioritised well across the centre including within the on-site nursery. Childrens' safety in the home is improving as a result of family support workers visiting families to provide free home safety equipment and advice. Outcomes for children on child protection plans are good because families are treated with respect, given high quality supervised access and individualised support. This is enhanced by the integration of social workers into the centre team.

A particular strength of the centre is the high quality of opportunities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together. The impact of this was evident in a Baby 'PEEP' session where staff skilfully encouraged parents to sing songs and interact with their babies. This led to high quality opportunities for mothers and babies to play and learn together.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is being used effectively to improve the quality of children's learning across the centre. Activities are well chosen and stimulating and are matched well to children's interests and stages of development. However, senior leaders are not complacent and recognise that the next challenge is to look more closely at the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and gaps in attainment for children aged five who have attended the centre.

Parents and carers are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the centre with opportunities to undertake voluntary work and by becoming members of the active parents' forum. They are encouraged to offer their views and suggestions on a regular basis through discussions, evaluations of activities and satisfaction surveys. Senior leaders are aware that one of the next challenges is to increase the involvement of harder-to-reach groups in the community and encourage more parents and carers to become members of the advisory board.

Support provided by the centre helps to promote economic stability. For example, children are encouraged to be active, inquisitive and independent learners in the range of activities provided. In addition, parents and carers are supported with a good range of advice in securing benefits, budgeting, accessing local training courses and in returning to work.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre meets its core offer well and provides a wide range of additional services. Assessment is increasingly used well to determine the needs of all users. Parents and carers' views are sought via the Parents' Forum in questionnaires and through regular discussions with staff. Communication between agencies and joint working arrangements between staff are highly effective. There is a strong emphasis on providing emotional support to raise the confidence and self-esteem of all users. As a result, staff have a good knowledge of local families and the community and are able to provide personalised care to those in greatest need. This includes tailored support for teenage parents and fathers, for grandparents and parents of children with special needs and/or disabilities. In addition, specialist infant health services target the needs of individual children with specific programmes of support, including speech and language. As one parent commented, 'My whole family has benefited from using the centre'.

Opportunities for purposeful learning are promoted and activities are of good quality. Parents' and carers' understanding of their children's development is promoted well through activities such as baby massage, 'stay and play' sessions and access to positive parenting classes. The crèche is very well led and organised and enables users to access training courses with ease. Adult learning and partnerships are well established and provide a good range of opportunities where parents and carers can

enhance their employment prospects by attending various courses and gaining further qualifications.

The overall quality of care for children and their families is good and in the on-site private nursery it is satisfactory and improving. Staff are vigilant in ensuring that all users are well cared for and supported. Information about coping with debt, unemployment, living in poverty and accessing benefits is widely promoted and highly visible. In addition, families report that the centre has helped them significantly in time of crisis. They are very confident that staff will listen to their concerns and that problems will be swiftly resolved. 'The positive way staff speak to you and relate to you is a real strength of the centre', was a typical comment.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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 success of the centre is underpinned by good leadership and management at all levels. The centre manager sets the tone and is responsible for the high quality relationships that exist. Morale is good, teamwork is strong and staff are forward-thinking and reflective. As one member of staff commented, 'We are always trying to get better at what we do'. As a consequence, senior leaders work effectively together and have a clear understanding of their different roles and responsibilities. This helps to ensure that services and resources are well targeted on the needs of the community and provide good value for money. The centre's commitment to equality of opportunity is strong. The inclusion of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families is a key priority. This ensures that staff are effective in removing all barriers to learning and in tackling discrimination. Central to this work is clear agreement of what the centre does well and where further improvements can be made. For example, senior leaders are well aware that work to engage harder-to-reach groups in the community and strategies to increase users' involvement on the advisory board could go further.

The centre is working hard to establish systems to measure the success of its provision on outcomes. However, at present, self-evaluation procedures are too descriptive and are not sufficiently well focused on the outcomes of users or set against local or national targets. In addition, the centre's development plan requires

some fine-tuning to ensure a sharper focus on outcomes and data for measuring success.

Partnership working is particularly strong and exceptionally well integrated. Relationships are very well established and effectively managed. There are excellent links between other agencies, the local authority and local children's centre's.

No stone is left unturned to ensure that all children and their families are safe and well cared for. Safeguarding procedures are clear and meet statutory requirements. Appropriate systems are in place to check on the suitability of employees to work in the centre. All staff are trained in child-protection procedures and work effectively with a range of other agencies to protect children and vulnerable adults from a wide range of potential dangers, including domestic violence, alcohol abuse and health and safety issues in the home.

Members of the advisory board are well briefed about the centre's work. They have a clear understanding of the strengths in provision and are committed to see the centre improve further.

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	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	1
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

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Summary for centre users

Thank you for your help when we inspected Seacombe Children's Centre recently. We spoke to many of you about the centre's work. We really enjoyed chatting to you in your activities, around the centre and at lunchtime. You expressed your opinions very clearly and they were very helpful to us. We were delighted to hear your positive views and how helpful and friendly you find the staff. As I told some of you I would, I am writing to say what we found out about the centre.

First and most importantly, we are pleased to tell you that we judged the centre as good overall. You told us how much you value activities on offer and that coming to the centre has given you more confidence and has helped you make new friends. As a result, we were pleased to hear that many of you feel less isolated in the community and feel more confident as parents.

The centre works extremely effectively with other partners to make sure that the activities are exactly what you need. We know how much you appreciate the fact that staff go out of their way to get to know you and your families and visit you in your homes. We can see how the centre is making a positive difference to your lives.

The centre staff take great care to ensure that you and your children are safeguarded and that the centre is a safe and welcoming place to be. We particularly liked the comment from a grandparent who said: 'I wish the centre had been around when my children were young'.

The staff work really hard to make the centre as good as it can be. To help them, we have suggested that they look more closely at how they plan and measure whether the activities they provide are making a difference to you. This means they will then be in a stronger position to see how well they are doing. We have also asked them to get more of you involved in the work of the advisory board and to work even harder to get more families in the community to use the centre.

Thank you once again for your help.

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