

# Inspection report for Sure Start Four Woods Children's Centre

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Local authority	Plymouth City Council
Inspection number	362670
Inspection dates	October 2010
Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	John Diaper
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sure Start Four Woods Children's Centre

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision 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](http://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 the centre's management team, a representative from Action for Children, the local authority, representatives from the advisory board, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of 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.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate**

### Information about the centre

Sure Start Four Woods Children's Centre was designated in 2005 and covers the Honicknowle, Ernesettle and West Park wards of the city of Plymouth. The centre is a Phase 1 children's centre providing the full core offer of services and is run by Action for Children on behalf of Plymouth City Council. It serves a densely populated urban area which is in one of the 30% most deprived areas of the country. The area has few employment opportunities and, when compared with other centres in the county, a higher than average proportion of families are dependent on workless benefits. The area also has a higher than average percentage of teenage parents. The vast majority of users are White British.

The centre provides services from several locations within easy reach of each other. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is delivered at the main site in Crownhill Road. It offers care and education for up to 20 children at any one time.

Governance arrangements are provided by Action for Children.

#### 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

Sure Start Four Woods Children's Centre is making a good contribution to improving outcomes for users. This is because both staff and management show high levels of commitment and work extremely well together in order to meet the needs of their users. Good communication and close working with partners results in all agencies working towards common goals.

Good relationships between staff and users are evident. Staff work hard to ensure users feel welcome in the centre and parents report that they are 'friendly and approachable and always ready to help'. One parent described her relationship with centre staff as being akin to having 'an extended family'. Centre staff have a good understanding of the needs of their local community through their local knowledge and assessment of individual families on registration. They are also informed by data provided by the local authority. However, much of this data was collected up to four years ago, so while it has proved useful and accurate to some extent, the centre cannot be fully assured that it is successfully targeting its services.

A key strength of the centre is the way in which staff support the most vulnerable users to develop their confidence and self-esteem. In the most successful cases, this has resulted in users taking an active role within the community through volunteering their services in the centre. Those users who have experienced isolation really value the opportunities that contact with the centre gives them to make friends and build relationships. The centre promotes an inclusive ethos and works hard to engage all members of its families. For example, staff have been proactive in their endeavours to engage men in the life of the centre. A Saturday group called 'Guys and Games' provides fathers and grandfathers with opportunities to engage in exciting activities with their children and grandchildren, such as playing in the woods.

A number of pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers receive good support from the centre's Malezi worker. She guides them well through their pregnancy and in their first months of motherhood. So far, centre staff have not been as successful in engaging young parents in wider services as they would like.

Centre staff are well trained in safeguarding issues. They are knowledgeable about child protection and reporting procedures. The centre manager is a strong advocate for developing effective practice in safeguarding children. He acts in an advisory capacity at both local and national levels.

Clear line management arrangements and effective supervision mean that staff are well supported. This includes governance arrangements provided by Action for Children. The centre's leadership and management have a good understanding of their strengths and the areas which require further development and these are well communicated to all staff in order that they work towards common goals. Staff working within the centre show clear commitment to improving services and outcomes for users and have confidence in management to provide effective leadership. As a result, the centre has good capacity to improve further.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Together with the local authority and partners, improve the quality of data collected regarding the make-up of the community to enable the effective strategic planning and targeting of services and monitoring of impact.
- Further develop services for teenage parents to ensure this particular group of users and their families are effectively engaged.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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Users are learning successfully about the benefits of adopting healthier lifestyles as there are many programmes in place to support and encourage them. These include physical activities such as post-natal exercise classes, swimming, and walking activities, for example, 'Walking Wellies', and 'Stepping stones to nature'. Many users promote healthy eating in their family homes as a result of good role modelling provided by centre staff. In the 'Mini Munchers' and 'Tastebuds' sessions, parents learn about good nutrition and how to cook simple nutritious meals.

The number of families who smoke in the area is high, therefore the fact that some users are successful in stopping smoking due to centre staff's positive response and encouragement is good. Staff work hard, with good success to encourage other users to give up smoking, particularly those who are pregnant, as they automatically refer them to the smoking cessation service. Many users have been successful in providing their children with a smoke-free home due to their increased understanding of the impact of passive smoking. Concerted efforts by staff and partner agencies to encourage mothers to breastfeed their babies have resulted in some success, despite users' resistance due to cultural and other factors in the area.

Children are kept safer within their home environment due to the implementation of a home safety programme. Centre staff work with parents in their homes to identify risks and ways in which to minimise them. This includes providing parents with relevant home safety equipment. Parents report that they feel their children are safe whilst attending the nursery provision. Sufficient use of the Common Assessment Framework means that children's needs are identified and agencies work together coherently. Staff have only recently received training in implementing this framework and the centre has rightly identified the need to ensure that it is firmly embedded in their work.

Staff place high priority on ensuring users' emotional well-being. Those who may be at risk of domestic abuse are very well supported by trained sensitive staff who work closely with individuals in order to offer them appropriate help and support. Users'

levels of confidence and self-esteem are significantly developed through the support they receive from centre staff. Many show a strong desire to contribute something back to their community and volunteer their services as a contribution to the centre.

Parents report that they have developed increased confidence in their parenting skills as a direct result of the input they have received from the children’s centre. They are learning about the value of play and how to handle their children’s behaviour in a positive way. As a result, relationships with their children are enhanced as together they have fun. Children who attend the nursery provision make good progress in their learning and development. They are well behaved and have good relationships with their peers and staff.

Users successfully develop their skills in literacy and numeracy as these are embedded in many of the groups and courses run by the centre. For example, users explore shape and measure whilst participating in a jewellery making course. This in turn enables them to support their own children’s learning. Opportunities are also made available for users to develop more formally their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills and gain qualifications in paediatric first aid. Some users report that the support they have been given from the children’s centre has provided them with confidence and skills to apply for work. The centre extends this support where needed offering free child care places to enable parents to attend interviews or access training opportunities. Those in employment and on low income are supported during school holidays with the provision of free childcare.

Early intervention ensures good support for children who may otherwise fall behind in their development. For example, centre staff and Portage workers work closely together to provide good support in the ‘Step-by-Step’ group to families with children experiencing varying levels of delay or concern. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the nursery are provided with good support and develop well. Children’s early communication skills are effectively developed through the strong emphasis the staff place on promoting early communication. Their transition into school is well supported through good links the children’s centre has developed with local schools. In addition, parents report that their children develop confidence, good behaviour and social skills through their attendance at groups in the centre, preparing them well for life in school.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	2
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	2
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	2
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and</b>	2

<b>governance of the centre</b>	
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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A wide range of well-integrated services is provided in accordance with the needs of the local community. Centre staff have recently redesigned their registration form in order to collate more meaningful data. Staff make good use of this information to assess the needs of users and develop appropriate services. In individual groups and sessions, very good assessment systems are in place to enable staff to plan effectively and adapt service delivery. For example, staff take account of the targets that users set themselves as they embark on a course. These targets are also revisited at the end of activities in order to measure success and plan for the future.

Very good relationships exist with a range of key partners. This is particularly evident with health partners who are sited within the children's centre. Very good working together means that users receive full and appropriate support. For example, joint home visits by the Malezi worker and health visitors to young mothers result in an effective package of support being developed. Staff appropriately signpost users to agencies in order to gain advice and guidance on accessing benefits.

The centre places appropriate emphasis on developing users' confidence in returning to education prior to introducing them to more formal learning opportunities. Users engage in a range of relevant training course and sessions in order to make improved choices in their lives, such as healthy eating and developing parenting skills. Staff celebrate the achievements of users by holding celebration events at the end of courses and providing participants with certificates to recognise what they have achieved. Outside agencies and speakers are used to good effect, providing users with good quality information, advice and support about topics they identify as being important, from safety in the home to cancer awareness. Regular effective evaluation of groups and activities ensures that they remain of good quality.

Users are provided with good care, guidance and support which they value highly. Centre staff and outreach workers develop good relationships with users. Vulnerable parents are particularly well supported by sensitive staff to access services, engage with the centre and improve outcomes for their children and families. In times of crisis, families are able to confidently seek support from both centre staff and management.

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning,</b>	<b>2</b>



<b>development and enjoyment for all users</b>	
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	2
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	2

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre is managed by a committed manager who leads a passionate and dedicated staff team. He exemplifies very strong values and provides clear direction. He has provided staff with very good support through a difficult time and as a result, they have a very high regard for the way in which they are successfully led and managed. The centre manager delegates lead responsibilities effectively in order that projects and tasks are well managed and led by members of the team. He is very skilled in recognising strengths in staff members and developing and using these to good effect. Centre leaders effectively seek funding for projects which meet the specific needs of users. For example, the nursery manager was successful in securing funding for free early education for a number of two-year-olds in the locality. The environment is welcoming and safe and the accommodation is used well to accommodate a good range of services.

Leaders and managers communicate high expectations at all levels. Centre leaders and staff complete a regular cycle of self-evaluation and both Action for Children and the local authority challenge the centre appropriately to improve further. The advisory board has good representation from a range of stakeholders. This includes the police, local churches, Jobcentre Plus, the local authority and parents. Whilst a good working relationship with social care is apparent, the centre continues to work to secure their involvement at a strategic level. The board provides leadership and management with a good balance of support and challenge based on its clear understanding of the needs of the local community. The centre knows its community well and, in the main, ensures that its services are targeted at its most vulnerable users. However, the lack of more recent data means that it can not be fully assured of its success.

Parents have a strong voice in the centre and are well represented both on the advisory board and through the parents' forum. They are regularly consulted on the development of services such as the content of individual groups and activities. The centre manager recognises that seeking the views of the wider community is an area that requires development. As a result, he is now working closely with a local university to undertake a survey of all households in the locality.

The centre has been proactive in ensuring it can provide an inclusive service to those who are not fluent in English by having key documentation such as their safeguarding statement and complaints policy translated into a number of

community languages. In addition, staff know how to access translation services should these be required. Whilst the ethnic make-up of the community is not diverse, staff ensure a range of festivals from a variety of cultures are reflected within their activities.

Good recording and reporting systems and a tenacious approach from the centre manager regarding concerns of individual children mean that vulnerable children are safeguarded. Effective recruitment systems ensure that those who are directly employed by the centre are suitably vetted and suitable agreements exist with partner agencies. Outreach services are well developed and used very effectively to engage those who are most vulnerable and hard to reach. Users speak very highly of the support they have been given through the outreach provision. Effective partnerships with a good range of agencies mean that services are integrated and cohesive. Overall, the centre has good capacity to improve and provides good value for money.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	2
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	2
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	2
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	2
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	2
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	2
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	2
<b>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</b>	2

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

This inspection took account of the inspection findings from the concurrent inspection of Sure Start Four Woods Children's Centre early years provision.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sure Start Four Woods Children's Centre on 20 and 21 October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that both staff and managers provide you with a good service. Staff understand how they can help to make a difference to the lives of many of you and your children. They show a very strong commitment to improving the lives of all of you and they work well together to do so. They have developed some very strong partnerships with other professionals and organisations so that they can offer you the correct support, advice and guidance. We agree with you that staff are very approachable and it is clear that you have good relationships with them.

We noticed that you make a strong contribution to the running of the centre and what services it offers. You are well represented on the advisory board and through the parents' forum. You are given regular opportunities to present your views and thoughts. Many of you are willing to help out at the centre and volunteer your services. Staff at the centre work hard to include all members of the family; they provide dads and granddads with the opportunity to undertake activities with the children in the 'Guys and Games' group.

Centre staff work hard to make sure you and your children remain safe. For example, staff are well trained in how to safeguard children, and management have taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable. Centre staff also work closely with you to help you ensure that your homes are safe places for your young children. It is clear that many of you have taken positive steps to improve your health and the health of your families by learning about healthy diets and how to cook nutritious meals.

Leaders and managers of the centre have a good understanding of what steps are needed to improve their services even further and they are determined to make your lives the best they can be. However, they are not currently provided with information in enough detail to make sure that they are able to fully meet your needs.

Some of you told us that the support you have been given from the children's centre has provided you with the confidence and skills to apply for work. You also told us that your children's confidence has developed because of their involvement in groups provided by the centre and this has prepared them well for life in school.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts about the centre.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).