

Inspection report for Exmouth Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	367669
Inspection dates	9– 10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield HMI

Centre governance	The Children's Society
Centre leader	Rachel Loram
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Moorfield Road
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Years 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.

Information about the centre

Exmouth Children's Centre is a phase two centre and combines two sites within Exmouth, one based at Moorfield Road and one at Egremont Road. Moorfield Road has a reach area of 990 children; Egremont Road has a reach of 1038 children. A charitable organisation, The Children's Society, is commissioned by the local authority to manage the two sites. A core offer monitoring group acts as an advisory board for both sites with a combined service plan and one staff team serving the whole reach area. The two sites are managed by a single manager who has been in post since August 2008.

The reach area for the two sites includes 14 primary schools located in Exmouth and surrounding villages of Lympstone, Woodbury, Woodbury Salterton, Budleigh Salterton, East Budleigh and Otterton. The families in the reach area for both sites are predominantly of White British origin. A small but increasing proportion of families are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of families on benefits and out of work is in line with the local authority average.

The proportion of children within the local area working at age appropriate levels in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been below the county and national average over the last three years.

In both local areas the proportion of children who are obese or overweight is below the county and national average. There has, however, been an increase in these levels over the past three years.

The number of domestic violence incidents with children present is slightly above the local authority average in the Moorfield Road reach area. The proportion of lone parents living in the Egremont Road reach area is slightly above the local authority average.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

A strength of the centre is the significant number of parents and carers who contribute to its work as trained volunteers. An enthusiastic volunteer coordinator has ensured that these volunteers receive appropriate training. Peer volunteers are able to build on their own experiences to provide support for parents on feeding and weaning their babies. Over the last two years this has helped to increase the proportion of mothers in the local area breastfeeding their child. In addition, some suitably trained volunteers help to improve the emotional well-being of a number of users by providing regular counselling sessions.

The centre helps adults and children to make good progress in developing healthy lifestyles. Well-organised and very popular weekly ‘get up and go’ sessions have increased the proportion of parents and carers registering with the centre. These sessions provide families and local childminders access to a good range of play resources in a friendly environment. They help children to develop their physical skills and to make good progress in increasing their self-confidence and levels of independence. In addition, the centre provides ‘HENRY’ sessions aimed at develop adults’ awareness of a balanced diet and appropriate portion size. Improving partnerships with health has led to the provision of weekly ante-natal services from the centre. These have helped to improve communication between the agencies and in providing a more cohesive approach to supporting families.

Staff get to know individual families well and are consistent in the good levels of care and concern shown to children and adults. The centre has a comprehensive safeguarding policy and provides regular training to ensure that staff understand and follow the procedures to record and share concerns about a child or vulnerable adult with other agencies. The centre works closely with Family Intervention Services and counselling services to ensure that the risk of harm to children is reduced. The centre completes risk assessments on its activities and services and the majority are reviewed on an annual basis.

The centre provides a range of activities to encourage children's learning and development at both sites and with pre-school settings in local villages. These activities are planned to ensure children are provided with opportunities to develop in all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre is developing the use of its outdoor areas to provide opportunities for children and families to grow fruit and vegetables. However, the outdoor area is not used sufficiently to develop children's communication and language and their mathematical and problem-solving skills. The centre's activities help to support children and young babies in their good physical and social development. However, evaluations of these activities do not consistently focus on the progress made by children in their learning and development.

The centre promotes the inclusion of all children and families. It provides services for young parents to access support, advice and practical help in developing their parenting skills and in keeping safe. Fathers attend weekly sessions where they develop their relationships with their children through play and activities. The centre provides specific sessions for adoptive parents. Families with children with additional needs are supported by a range of specialist agencies and through weekly 'step by step' activities.

The core offer monitoring group meets regularly to review the centre's performance. With local authority support, social services and health partners have helped to evaluate services and provision and improve partnership arrangements. However, involvement in the governance of the centre by other partners is sporadic and the centre has few links with local education settings. Very few parents attend meetings, limiting the extent to which users contribute to decision making and are involved in governance of the centre. This hampers the centre's work in ensuring that services are targeted at meeting the needs of vulnerable groups of users in the local community.

There are improving links in the centre's use of evaluations to inform strategic planning and develop service provision. Leaders and managers have focused on improving weaknesses and gaps in provision and outcomes. Senior leaders have strengthened partnerships with health and social services and adapted services to increase the participation rates and attendance at sessions run by the centre. The centre is beginning to develop links with education settings through a local learning network aimed at sharing good practice in raising children's achievement and standards. Systems to monitor and evaluate the centre's work and performance are

embedded and are clearly focused on improving outcomes for all users. These improvements to services and partnerships with key agencies confirm the capacity of leaders and managers to continue to improve is satisfactory. The centre's annual conversation with the local authority has helped to clearly identify its priorities for the future. These priorities include a clear focus on developing services to meet the needs of more vulnerable users.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Target services and activities more closely to meet the needs of vulnerable users in the local community.
- Increase the involvement of parents and carers, the core offer monitoring group and key partners in evaluating the centre's performance and use the information gained to shape services and improve provision and outcomes for all users.
- With local authority support:
 - develop closer partnerships with education settings to raise children's achievement and standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - develop evaluations of the activities to provide more precise information of children's learning and development
 - develop the centre's use of the outdoor area to ensure that children are provided with opportunities to learn and develop in all curricular areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Young babies and children make good progress in their physical development and social development; well-attended 'get up and go' sessions help children in their development of gross motor skills. At the conclusion of an active play session children gathered under a large parachute with obvious delight and enjoyment. Parents arriving for a healthy eating session are provided with opportunities to try new foods. Children are encouraged to try new experiences by watching their parents and carers and peers eat malt loaf, vegetables, dips and yoghurts. Young babies in sessions were fascinated by a range of metal household resources.

While few parents attend core offer monitoring group meetings, a significant number of parents and carers volunteer and provide strong support in promoting breastfeeding. Volunteers take pride in their work and make good personal development through supporting others. In several sessions parents and carers

develop strong social groups and provide mutual support, discussing their children's problems and offering their solutions.

Family Support Workers provide well-targeted and coordinated advice and guidance in partnership with the Family Intervention Service for families in times of crisis. Centre staff are targeted at supporting families where there are concerns for children's safety and well-being. There is evidence that these partnerships have helped to reduce the risk of harm to children and improve outcomes for families. This well-organised support shows improved outcomes for families who have experienced domestic violence. The centre recognises that there are a number of hard-to-reach families within the local area that are not accessing services and that outreach workers are not engaging with all vulnerable groups of users in the community.

The centre promotes users' learning and development through links with adult education providers. In partnership with a neighbouring school they have provided family learning workshops. Evaluations from adults show that these sessions helped to support their child's learning and development and enabled them to play a more active engagement with their child's school. The centre has been able to access funding to improve home safety by providing stair guards and home safety apparatus. Centre staff provide access to support from Christians Against Poverty for some families to access emergency funding in times of crisis. Partnerships with local housing agencies and Citizen's Advice Bureau help to provide support and advice for users. Parents have been supported through the centre's partnerships with Jobcentre Plus in seeking employment. Jobcentre Plus reports that numbers of users in need of their support has increased rapidly.

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	3
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

Staff provide a friendly and warm welcome and get to know individual children and families well. In a healthy eating session staff followed up on children's progress from the previous week, and in providing encouragement and reinforcement they make a discernible difference to children and adults. Several adults were quick to praise the level of care and support provided by the centre's competent staff and volunteers. Parents and carers provided several examples where they had sought individual advice and support and received a positive response from staff. Counselling sessions are tailored around the needs of individual users and can be extended beyond a set six-week period where necessary enabling parents and carers to improve individual and family outcomes.

The centre has established partnerships with a range of professional agencies. It works closely with speech and language therapists to provide support for children to develop their communication skills. 'Two time' is a session open to all providing advice on children's early language acquisition, but also provides support for children with low levels of language difficulties. Specialist staff are able to provide good modelling and strategies to support children's speech and language development at an early age. Partnerships with health have led to improving the centre's support for first-time parents-to-be. Ante-natal sessions at the centre are delivered jointly by centre staff and midwifery services and provide families with accessible support in a well-resourced, child-friendly environment. Where necessary centre staff are on hand to provide adults with further support and advice or signpost them on to other professional agencies. Parents and carers of children with additional needs are able to seek advice from specialised staff. A range of agencies provides specialist support for families of children with additional needs through the weekly 'step by step' sessions.

The bright, child-orientated environment provides a good range of varied activities. The centre has improved the outdoor area to create a sensory garden and children are able to grow vegetables and fruit to eat. Opportunities are missed to use the outdoor area to encourage children's language and communication skills and their problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy. The centre has a good range of resources to develop children's physical play and to allow children to make suitable choices during creative activities.

'Bounce and rhyme' sessions encourage children's early language skills and physical development by making good use of a range of sensory resources. 'Treasure basket' sessions help to show parents and carers how to provide stimulating activities for children from readily available resources. All plans for sessions with children demonstrate a secure knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage, with activities for children planned across all areas of learning. However, evaluations do not consistently provide enough detail to inform future learning for individuals.

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	3
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?

3

Leaders and managers show a clear understanding of the centre's major strengths and areas for development. They have increased the proportion of local families using the centre and have successfully encouraged users to develop healthy lifestyles. The centre satisfactorily promotes the inclusion of a wide range of children and families. Parents and carers of children with additional needs are appreciative of the presence of positive role models among the centre's volunteers.

It targets different groups of users and provides services specifically for adoptive parents, fathers and for children with additional needs. Activities for young parents provide them with opportunities to make social contacts and provide support and advice in parenting and keeping safe. Few lone parents and families from minority ethnic groups are currently accessing the centre's services and activities.

The core offer monitoring group for both sites hold regular meetings and have maintained a focus on improving the work of the centre. However, despite the centre seeking to recruit representation from partnership organisations, their attendance has been variable. The 'cake club', a parent focus group, is increasing opportunities for parents and carers to offer their views and opinions. This has resulted in changes to the timings of activities and in providing additional sessions of popular activities. Few parents and carers attend core offer monitoring group meetings and actively participate in evaluating and shaping the centre's services and provision.

The centre's safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. The Children's Society has clear recruitment procedures; its recruitment policy details all the appropriate checks on staff prior to their appointment. The centre's single central register clearly records the completion of checks and there are clear procedures in place to share information with relevant agencies. The centre's safeguarding policy is detailed but is not tailored to the specific nature of the centre and is not accessible to users. Staff are familiar with the centre's procedures and know who to contact when they have concerns. As part of their induction process, the volunteer coordinator provides volunteers with good quality training in child protection. Through improved communication with social service professionals, children's centre staff are regularly

invited to provide support for families facing difficult circumstances. Good links with the Family Intervention Service ensure that the centre is able to provide families with a cohesive approach, helping to reduce the risk of harm to children.

The centre is developing systems for evaluating the long-term impact of the provision. Staff regularly complete evaluations of activities and services although these evaluations vary in the extent to which they provide precise information on users' progress in improving outcomes. Supervision is regular and provides staff with opportunities to discuss concerns and identify professional development. Staff have been helped to develop their skills and qualifications through the centre's partnerships with a training provider.

Evaluations from health, social services and from parents and carers are used to monitor the centre's work and improve outcomes for families. The centre gathers information and data on users' attendance to evaluate the impact of its work on improving outcomes for families. With support from the local authority through an annual conversation, the centre has set clear development priorities aimed at improving outcomes for vulnerable groups of users.

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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
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	3
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	3
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Exmouth Children's Centre on 9 and 10 February 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We found the centre to be a warm and welcoming environment which provides a range of activities helping you and your children to make satisfactory progress in a number of areas. One of the strengths of the centre is the wide range of volunteers that help to support the centre's work and range of activities. Peer volunteers work together with staff to provide helpful support and advice on feeding and weaning babies. Parents told us that this has made a difference and helped them to sustain breastfeeding their child over a longer period of time. Users also benefit from the counselling sessions provided by well-trained volunteers.

We found that you make good progress in developing healthy lifestyles. Several of you attend the well-organised 'get up and go' sessions in the local tennis club. These sessions are helping to attract a greater proportion of parents and carers of young children. The centre's activities and sessions help children in their physical development and they grow in confidence and independence as they play with a range of play apparatus and resources. 'HENRY' healthy eating sessions encourage families to adopt a healthier approach to eating. Senior leaders have managed to organise ante-natal sessions in the centre run by midwives and these provide a welcoming environment for adults and children.

Staff get to know the families that come to the centre well and their kind and considerate approach is recognised and appreciated by many of you. Families experiencing difficulties are well supported by centre staff and professionals from the Family Intervention Service. The centre has clear systems in place to ensure that it works with other agencies to provide support and advice and improve the safety of children.

We found that the centre provides a range of activities for young children, both at the centre and in local villages and pre-school settings. Activities are planned so that children are provided with a range of experiences. The centre gathers evaluations of these sessions but we found that these assessments do not clearly report on the progress and learning that children make during these sessions. The centre has developed the outdoor area to grow vegetables and fruit. However, it does not make full use of the outdoor area to develop children's language and mathematical skills. We have also asked the local authority to work with the centre to develop closer partnerships with education settings and raise local children's achievement and standards.

The centre's advisory board meets regularly to discuss and review the work of the centre. Key partnerships with health and social services have improved and they now help the centre to evaluate the effectiveness of their joint working. However, other partners rarely attend meetings and few parents and carers contribute their views and opinions. We have asked the centre to involve more partnership agencies and increase the proportion of parents and carers attending advisory board meetings.

The centre's leaders and managers have developed partnerships with health and social services to improve outcomes for users. They have increased opportunities for users to attend sessions and activities at the centre and in local villages. In acknowledging the centre's provision services for a range of different groups of users, we have asked the centre to target its services more closely to meet the needs of more vulnerable groups of families in the local area.

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

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