

# Inspection report for Zig Zags Children's Centre

Local authority	Torbay Council
Inspection number	362611
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Robert Pyner HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Noreen Libby
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school, if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Adagio 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/childcare provision, Adagio 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Years Inspector.

The inspectors visited a range of provision at the centre and other venues used by it. They held meetings with senior managers from the centre, members of the Parents' Advisory Board (PAB) and a number of partners, including the main Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare provider, health, education and children's social care professionals. They also spoke with a representative from Jobcentre Plus and with users of the services. An inspector interviewed senior managers from the local authority responsible for services in the locality and the group manager for Action for Children. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a wide range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Zig Zags incorporates the satellite Echo Centre and is one of a cluster of three children's centres managed by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. The manager leads all three children's centres in the cluster. Zig Zags Children's Centre serves an area of central Torquay. The centre was designated to serve one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country; two of the three wards within the reach area are within the top 10% most deprived areas nationally. Across the reach area the proportion of young children living in households in receipt of unemployment benefits is around one third but rises to about four in ten for two electoral wards. The proportions are broadly the same for families in receipt of child tax credits and income support. These figures are significantly higher than the average for Torbay. Most families in the reach area are of White British heritage but the proportion from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, at around 7%, is almost double the local authority average.

The centre originated as part of the Sure Start programme and opened in 2006, with the full core offer available since this date. Zig Zags is based in good quality accommodation close to the centre of Torquay. The lower floor of the centre is a play café which is used as an access point to the services offered. The Echo Centre is accommodated in a building previously used as a school, offers crèche and a meeting room and is the main administration centre for the cluster of three children's centres, including outreach services. The centre runs an extensive range of outreach services at other locations linked with health, education, social care and work-related professionals. Locations include Stone Court, a housing scheme for vulnerable families.

Zig Zags has an established PAB which supports the centre. Formal governance is through the Torquay Children's Centres Review Group which includes representatives from all partners and includes representatives from the PABs for all three centres managed by Action for Children. This group was established in September 2010 and has held two meetings to date.

Childcare and nursery education is provided through the Adagio Nursery based on the top floor of the Zig Zags Centre. Data from schools indicate that on entry to Reception classes the children from the reach area have levels of development which are below the local authority average.

The manager took up her post as leader of the cluster of three children's centres two years ago.

## 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**

**1**

## Main findings

Zig Zags Children's Centre, incorporating the Echo Centre, provides good support to children and families in its reach area. Some aspects of provision and elements of leadership and management are outstanding. This high level of service is the result of the drive and ambition of the centre leader and staff, the outstanding evaluation of services which is used as a very effective driver for improvement, and the involvement of users to support development. This leads to an effective range of

partnerships with a wide range of providers to develop a cohesive approach to the needs of the community. Staff display very high morale and an excellent commitment to improve and adapt provision for families in the reach area. The local authority provides the centre with comprehensive data on provision and outcomes and the centre leadership uses this very effectively to measure success, hold providers to account and plan improvements. Development plans show that data, both quantitative and qualitative, are used very well.

Another outstanding feature is the flexible way that the needs of users are assessed and addressed to tailor support. Examples of this include the specific support for parents of children with special needs, parents from minority ethnic groups and vulnerable families. This is greatly appreciated by service users. Central to this approach is the work of the Play Café as a way of introducing users to the provision offered. Skilled staff in the café enable swift referral to services for users, and these are followed up to review impact. A further excellent aspect is the engagement of users in the work of the centre. Zig Zags has an established PAB and members attend senior management team meetings and training days and are represented at the formal quarterly review meetings. As an outcome of this, leaders have a good idea of the changing needs of users and provision is adapted appropriately. A good example of this is the development of the Fun 4U2 group for young parents.

The partnership with the health service has resulted in regular meetings between centre staff and health visitors to discuss individual families and identify those who could benefit from the centre's provision. Overall, the outcomes for families in developing healthy lifestyles and addressing welfare concerns are good. However, rates for proportion of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding remain stubbornly below the national and local authority averages. Similarly, rates for teenage conception remain high within the reach area compared to the local authority average. Taken as a whole, provision for users to develop work and life skills is good. But, while the partnership with Jobcentre Plus is firmly established at another centre in the cluster, this is not the case at Zig Zags and is a missed opportunity to meet needs. Safeguarding procedures developed by the centre are good and include safer parenting courses. Issues of equality are dealt with well, firmly based on the needs of the local community.

Given the generally successful outcomes, the centre's overall effectiveness is good and improving well. This, together with staff commitment and drive, highly effective user engagement and comprehensive and accurate self-evaluation focused on improvement, indicates that the centre has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop work with health partners to improve the percentage of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding and provide more effective health information and support to reduce the under-18 conception rate within the reach area.
- Engage with Jobcentre Plus to improve the provision of learning and work-place skills available to users, including young parents.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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The centre plays an important part in the provision of health-related courses and activities. Much of this provision involves high quality partnership work with health professionals. Health visitors and family support workers meet regularly, which means that families can be referred easily for support from the centre. These include ante-natal clinics run by midwives held at the Echo Centre, guidance for breastfeeding and the Bambi Club to support healthy lifestyles through effective parenting. There is support for behaviour management and the emotional health of children, with successful outcomes. Parents appreciate this provision, as is shown by the comprehensive course evaluation data held by the centre. As one mother said in a course evaluation: 'I became more confident in taking the children out. To get back family life. People not looking at him (her son) when we are out like he's a spoilt child. He is now a pleasure to take out.' However, despite these clear partnerships which, for example, have been effective in reducing childhood obesity within the reach area, rates for breastfeeding and conception rates for teenagers under the age of 18 remain high.

Safeguarding procedures for children using the centre are effective. Staff are trained to use the Common Assessment Framework to ensure issues are recorded and shared appropriately. Assessment and recording procedures are clear and understood by partners. There is extensive training for staff on safeguarding, particularly for vulnerable children.

Data from the local authority indicate that the attainment by children in the reach area is broadly average by the time they enter Year 1 for two electoral wards but lower for the third. Overall, data show that the progress children make in a range of indicators of learning is good and improving. The gap with the national average for attainment is closing. Clear improvement is shown in the outcomes for speech and language development through the 'Here's talking to you' and 'Chattertots' courses. These courses are instrumental in improving children's personal development.

Users' contribution to decision making and governance is outstanding. The centre offers a range of support to parents and children in order to develop life skills, economic stability and independence. A strong feature is the work of Play Café in helping parents understand how to engage with the benefits system. Jobcentre Plus staff work at another centre within the cluster, but for Zig Zags this partnership is underdeveloped because it does not offer a similar range of opportunities.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

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

## How good is the provision?

**2**

The centre is highly effective in assessing and reviewing users' welfare needs, with data showing that the large majority of children within the reach area have benefitted from the centre's provision in some form. Clear procedures for sharing information and a very secure understanding of families within the reach area result in carefully planned and flexible support being available. This is very well supported by the quality of data on outcomes and provision and likely to be enhanced by the current development of the E-Aspire system.

Discussions with users and written evaluations from them show that they thoroughly enjoy the learning provision and have a wide range of opportunities to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. Users have opportunities to develop activities based on needs and interests and these have included first aid courses for young mothers and a range of parenting and health-related courses. Although there are courses and activities for young parents with a partner college, support for users to develop work-place skills is underdeveloped.

An outstanding range of care, guidance and support is offered by the centre. The Play Café is very effective in directing users to services and providing information, advice and guidance about services available, both within the centre and for outside agencies for health, social care and the benefits system. An example of the high quality outreach work undertaken by the centre is with vulnerable families at Stone Court, particularly in terms of improved parenting skills. Support for childminders is very good. A regular cycle of meetings planned to cover a range of issues means that childminders are able to develop their understanding of regulations and improve their skills.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>

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

**2**

Formal governance at the centre is good. The Review Group includes the full range of partners including parents, and is supported by a comprehensive range of data which is used well to monitor provision and hold leaders to account. Performance management by Action for Children is effective. An outstanding feature is the engagement by parents and users through the PAB. This group has a highly effective function in supporting, and challenging, provision, including a formal role in the governance of the centre.

The centre manager is totally committed to the development of services and benefits from the support of a highly motivated team. Staff have been effective in developing the multi-agency partnership approach adopted by the centre. In this they have shown the highest expectations and considerable drive developing good use of community venues to promote effective outreach work. This is seen in the ambitious targets found in development plans. Overall, resources of all kinds are used and managed effectively. Self evaluation is very comprehensive and accurate and is used effectively by the centre to develop a detailed development plans.

The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the work of the centre. Positive images, resources and tailored programmes highlight the centre's determination to support groups who may be subject to discrimination. For example, the centre has developed provision for parents and carers of children with disabilities, young parents, users from minority ethnic groups, including fathers, and the families of offenders currently in prison and on release. The centre's safeguarding, vetting and recruiting procedures are effective, as is its work with social care agencies.

Overall, the good outcomes and improving provision, backed by the high quality evaluation and leadership, mean that the centre provides good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
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<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<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>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>1</b>
<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>	<b>2</b>
<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>	<b>1</b>

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

Information from the recent inspection of Adagio Nursery was used to inform the judgements made during this inspection.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected Zig Zags Children's Centre, incorporating the Echo Centre, on 9–10 February 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. Some aspects are outstanding.

Your children's centre provides a good and improving range of services that are helping families and children in the area around central Torquay. During the inspection, some of you told us how you had benefited from the support provided by the centre and how you appreciated the work of the staff. An example of this effective work is the way you can use the Play Café to find out more about provision

offered by the centre and other agencies for health, social care and the benefits system. Excellent aspects of the centre include the highly effective evaluation of provision, including your views on the activities that you attend, the way that members of the Parents' Advisory Board are involved in the development of services and the quality of the care, guidance and support individuals receive, tailored to meet specific needs. When families find themselves in difficulty or even in crisis, the centre is able to help them well by providing information and support, including for general and mental health and welfare benefits.

The centre works in an effective way to ensure the safety of children and there are good links with social services. The centre itself is a very safe environment for users and their children. The manager and staff are committed to improvement and the good quality of relationships was mentioned by parents and users who spoke to inspectors. Your views are used effectively to develop provision and users told inspectors about improvements to activities following consultation with users. An example of this was the development of the Fun 4U2 group for young parents.

Although outcomes for parents and users are good overall, some aspects could be developed further. Provision to support improved health outcomes for parents and their children is good overall but indicators such as rates for breastfeeding and teenage conceptions remain high within the children's centre area. Likewise, the centre can show that provision to develop users' life and work skills are good, but links with Jobcentre Plus do not support this effectively.

As part of the report inspectors have made the following recommendations to help improve provision at the centre.

- Develop work with health partners to improve the percentage of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding and provide more effective health information and support to reduce the under-18 conception rate within the reach area.
- Engage with Jobcentre Plus to improve the provision of learning and work-place skills available to users, including young parents.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us; we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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