

Inspection report for Kinson and West Howe Children's Centre

Local authority	Bournemouth
Inspection number	367825
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Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Anna Batty
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Park View Day 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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's service manager, senior leadership team, centre staff who work directly with children and families, representatives from the advisory board, Action for Children, the local authority and some of the centre's partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The children's centre developed from a Sure Start Local Programme and was designated as a phase one children's centre in March 2006. The local authority commissions Action for Children, a charitable organisation, to manage the centre. Governance is through an advisory board, which includes representatives from the community, parents, local authority, health and other stakeholders.

The centre operates from three sites: the main centre, a community library and a nearby primary school. It provides the full core offer. Full day care is provided through an on-site nursery. This was inspected two years ago and its overall effectiveness judged good. The service manager has responsibility for the centre, the nursery and another children's centre in the local area.

The centre's designated area falls within the top 30% most deprived areas in the country. Housing mostly comprises large local authority housing estates. The proportion of workless households in the area is high in comparison to the borough and many families are in receipt of a range of benefits. Figures for teenage pregnancies and young people not in employment, education or training are also high. Most families are from White British backgrounds and the proportion from minority ethnic groups is low. An increasing number of European migrant workers is joining the community whose home languages span a wide range.

Many children start in the nursery with skills and experiences that are below the expectations for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

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

Kinson and West Howe Children’s Centre offers good services and support to the children and families who access its services. The centre manager provides clear leadership and management. In just under a year, she has guided the centre’s work effectively and forged good relationships with key partners. Teamwork is strong. Centre staff work closely and effectively with other partners and agencies to provide integrated services. Good partnership working is a key factor in the centre’s success and brings new users to the centre. Links with health workers are particularly strong. Registrations have increased and the new site at the Hub has encouraged more users across the reach area to engage with the services. The good leadership and provision and the clear impact both are having on improving outcomes for many users puts the centre in a strong position to improve further.

The leadership team’s own evaluation of the centre’s effectiveness is accurate. There are many examples of the centre’s work having a positive impact on family lives. Staff reflect on their successes and there is no sense of complacency as they seek to find ways to develop further. Sessions and activities are routinely and systematically evaluated to find out what has worked well and what might need changing. This is a strong feature of the centre’s evaluation. Measuring and evaluating the longer-term impact of the centre’s work, such as the proportion of users continuing to participate in volunteering, or those that take up work, are not quite as well established.

More up-to-date information from health partners is just starting to come through to help the centre plan where it needs to focus future priorities. However, this is at an early stage. Some data that the local authority can access, and which would be useful for the centre manager, are not readily available or pulled together in a coherent, usable format. Information that the centre holds is starting to be used to check the impact of the centre’s work and to inform quarterly reviews, but this is not yet sufficiently embedded and used to full effect.

Parents and carers know that the centre is a place where they can come for a range of support to improve their child's well-being and their family lives. They find the centre a warm, welcoming and safe place, especially when encountering challenging times or crisis. Staff assess users' needs carefully to determine the services that will be of most benefit. Many parents spoke of the valuable parenting programmes, which had led to improved confidence and parenting skills. Parents are listened to, encouraged and fully included. Their suggestions are welcomed and given careful consideration.

Good arrangements are in place to reduce risks and avoid harm to children and users. The centre has effective procedures for ensuring that the required recruitment checks are carried out for their own staff and those from partner agencies.

Staff know the area and its needs well. Much of this comes from local knowledge, experience and good communication with partners. The family support team is proactive in reaching out to the community and channelling support for individual families, according to their particular needs. There is good signposting to specialist support when appropriate. The team has, until recently, had limited involvement in the Common Assessment Framework process. A clear action plan is in place, in response to the local authority decision to ask family support teams to focus more on early intervention for vulnerable children and families.

The centre promotes children's early learning and development well through a varied and well-resourced programme of activities. These are much enjoyed by children, parents and carers. The early years team at the centre has played a strong role in promoting communication, language and literacy as this has been a weaker area in children's development. Talk and language are promoted well by all staff, through modelling, specific projects and through home visits. This team approach is an example of the centre's strong commitment to equality. Outcomes are improving. The proportion of children in the reach area working at a good level of achievement showed a marked increase in 2010 and was near the figure for the borough.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In conjunction with the local authority, develop the way data are collected to build knowledge of the reach area, especially the most vulnerable and excluded groups. Use these data and other information held by the centre effectively to set priorities for planning future delivery of services.
- Further develop and embed the role of the centre's family support team in using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).
- Develop ways of measuring and evaluating the centre's work to find out the longer-term impact of the centre's services in improving outcomes particularly those relating to users' economic well-being.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

There are many examples of parents and carers benefiting from a range of support that they access within and through the centre. The centre promotes healthy lifestyles well. Cookery courses are popular and many parents talk about how they have used new recipes and different ingredients at home to broaden their family's diet. Parenting courses have been particularly successful. Many speak of how the various approaches have helped them to cope with difficulties in managing their children's behaviour and improved the quality of family life. Two parents' comments were similar of many, 'I feel like they listen to me and understand,' and, 'It's good to talk to others and know you are not alone.'

Midwifery, breastfeeding support and health visitors work from two of the centre's sites. Sessions are popular. Numbers of parents and parents-to-be attending appointments have increased and more are accessing the centre's other activities. Imaginative approaches are used in Weigh and Play sessions, with fun activities such as taking footprints of babies' feet, which encourage and entice parents to keep coming to see how they grow.

The centre plays a key role in promoting safe practices in homes. Over 90 families have benefited from a home safety check through the centre to raise awareness of possible risks and access relevant safety equipment. The family support team has, until recently, worked closely with social care in supporting children in need and those with a child protection plan. A change in policy at local authority level has necessitated a shift of focus and the team is being asked to focus more on early intervention work. This is necessitating greater involvement in the CAF process. The centre manager and family support team have already identified this aspect as a priority for improvement and have drawn up a clear action plan to bring this about.

Children and parents enjoy the activities organised by the centre to promote purposeful learning and play. These encourage good interaction between parents and children. They provide an opportunity for all to meet socially in a supportive environment. Children are happy, settled and feel 'at home' in the centre. They are keen to come into sessions and this gives parents the confidence that the centre is a safe and happy place where their child's learning and welfare are in good hands. Take up of formal child care by families on low incomes is good. The centre is very successful and proactive in alerting families to this funding and supporting them with applications.

The centre promotes adult learning satisfactorily and the users who enrol on courses are pleased to have the opportunity. One parent commented, 'If I hadn't been told about the children's centre I would not have even thought of going on courses.' Another parent, learning English through a course, reported how it had helped to reduce the feeling of isolation and provided a valuable social network. Outcomes for this aspect of the centre's work are rather mixed. Those who enrol on level 1 and 2

courses achieve extremely well, with 100% success rates in literacy and numeracy, whereas success rates on courses for users who are learning English, for example, have fallen. Arrangements for giving users advice and guidance on employment and benefits are developing steadily.

Parents' and users' views are sought, respected and considered carefully in the centre. The centre encourages users to share any concerns, make suggestions and put forward ideas on how things could be changed for the better. A range of methods are available, from simply talking to staff informally to filling in evaluations or representing the parent community on the parents' forum or advisory board.

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

Partnership working is effective. The integration of health services, such as ante-natal care and breastfeeding support, has led to health and medical staff working closely together to identify any health, social or welfare problems and provide or signpost support effectively. Another good example of joint working is a programme run to help parents make the most of learning opportunities in everyday life at home, delivered by family support workers, early years staff and health partners.

Early years workers use observations of children skilfully to build up a picture of children's learning and development from the beginning. They involve parents fully in this process. The longer-term crèche for families who are learning English is a good example. Children make good progress through well-planned play and learning opportunities, with staff actively participating in children's learning. Parents are encouraged to join in as well, which in turn supports their understanding of English. In all early childhood activities, staff assess the needs of children effectively. Play plans are drawn up, based on children's individual interests and observation of what particularly enthuses them. These are used well to plan for the next stage of children's development.

The centre manager has encouraged a culture where staff reflect on the centre’s provision to move beyond the ‘what are we doing’ to ‘why are we doing it’. This helps staff to review the impact of their sessions on outcomes and raises questions about when provision might need to be adapted or developed. For example, specific sessions for dads were stopped because few were attending, yet most were already accessing services by coming to the centre’s routine activities.

The centre works closely with partners from the Youth Service to provide good quality support for young parents. Joint visits take place with staff from the family support team and there are clear success stories, with some young parents gaining in confidence from the initial contact stage, to feeling comfortable about accessing sessions at the centre. In some cases, this has led to young parents attending training, participating in the volunteer programme and becoming regular attendees.

The early years team has been proactive in supporting children’s communication, language and literacy, in response to data from the local authority. Everyone is aware of this need and contributes through their roles, whether this is through setting up programmes to promote talk, including opportunities in play sessions, or promoting speech and language development through home visits.

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	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?

2

The centre uses the resources it has to good effect and gives good value for money. Clear arrangements are in place for governance and accountability. Supervision arrangements are effective and all staff are clear about the procedures and the arrangements for accountability. The advisory board has wide representation and brings its knowledge to bear in support of the centre’s work. Members are involved in the centre’s own evaluation of its effectiveness and the centre manager works closely with them. There is regular discussion of financial matters to oversee the extent to which the centre is working within its allocated budget.

Quarterly reports produced by the centre’s leadership team are becoming increasingly detailed in referring to the numbers of users from different groups engaging with the centre, but the full effectiveness of this is somewhat hindered by limitations in the amount of data and information from partners.

Staff are alert to the need to assure users' safety and are appropriately trained. The policies and procedures for safeguarding are well known amongst staff, and followed efficiently. A good system is in place for recording staff training for safeguarding children, which shows clearly when training is due for renewal. Daily checklists to remind staff of safety issues are in place and regularly used. The centre keeps well-organised records when supporting children and families who are encountering difficulties which may place them in vulnerable circumstances.

The centre staff place good emphasis on valuing and including all individuals who come into contact with the centre. There are many examples of staff reaching out to parents and carers through meeting them in the community or their homes, or through forging effective links with other workers from, for example, youth and health. The centre effectively supports users from the groups at most risk of exclusion, such as teenage parents, dads and children with disabilities. Partnership with the agency providing courses for users who are in the early stages of learning English is well established and these attract participants across a wide range of languages. A new course has been established this year, in response to some participants not coping with the accredited course, to broaden engagement and match the range of learners' needs more successfully.

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	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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Kinson and West Howe Children's Centre on 18 and 19 April 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre is well led and managed. Staff at the centre place the welfare of your children and families at the heart of all that they do. They are experienced and skilled and are very committed to making things even better than they are. This shows that the centre is constantly striving to improve.

Staff provide a listening ear and many of you told us how much you appreciate the opportunities and support that are on offer at the centre. Sessions, such as Tea and Toast and Let's Play, are providing valuable opportunities for your children to learn and play in a supportive and safe environment. Sessions are well planned to encourage children's enjoyment as well as their learning and development. They also enable you to meet other parents. Many of you told us how these, and other sessions such as the parenting programmes, help to break down a sense of isolation, bring you into contact with other parents who may be encountering similar situations, and provide valuable networking opportunities.

A distinct strength of the centre is the way that staff work in partnership with other agencies to make a difference to children's and family lives. The links with health workers are particularly strong. More people are coming to the centre as they hear about it through word of mouth or through family support team or health workers telling them about it. The number of registrations has increased and through using The Hub as a site, it has brought even more people from the community into contact with the centre.

The centre staff are good at involving you. They listen to your suggestions and welcome them. They adapt things, where appropriate, in response to your suggestions and, if things are not changed, they explain why. You will know that they evaluate the sessions, projects and services, and ask you for your feedback as part of this. We have asked the centre's leadership team to develop the way that it evaluate its work to check whether any particular groups that could benefit from

services are less involved than others. The centre manager needs help and information from the local authority and health to be able to do this properly as the centre does not yet have enough information on the area. This is an aspect we have asked the centre and the local authority to improve.

The family support team works closely with their partners in other agencies to support children and families who are encountering particularly difficult and challenging times. The local authority has asked all family support teams to work with families encountering situations that make them more vulnerable at an earlier stage. To do this, the team needs to follow a process called CAF. This helps the family support workers to gather information and assess the children's and families' needs so that a good plan of action and support can be put into place. This shift of focus has meant the team has had to make a few changes to their way of working. The plans are well under way and are going well so far. We have asked the team to continue working on this so that its involvement in CAFs becomes well established and an effective way of improving outcomes for families.

We enjoyed talking to many of you during the inspection and would like to thank you for your cooperation and time. Your comments and contributions were very valuable and helped us in our work.

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