

Inspection report for Heavitree and Polsloe Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon County Council
Inspection number	367811
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Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Christine Cottle
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
Centre address	Ladysmith Infant School Ladysmith Road Exeter EX1 2PS
Telephone number	01392 464754
Fax number	None
Email address	whiptoncc@actionforchildren.org.uk

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.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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 additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's management team, a representative from Action for Children, 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 documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre and the wider community.

Information about the centre

Heavitree and Polsloe Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in July 2009. It is run by Action for Children on behalf of Devon County Council. The centre is in an area which is not identified as deprived overall although there are some small pockets of deprivation where families are either dependant on workless benefits or low incomes. The centre serves the Heavitree and Polsloe areas of the city of Exeter. It operates as part of a cluster model alongside Beacon Heath, Whipton and Clyst Vale Children's Centres. Users are able to access services at all centres in the cluster.

The local population is mostly White British families with much smaller, but growing, percentages of other minority ethnic groups. Numbers of users who speak English as an additional language has recently risen. Typically, children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills expected for their age.

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

Heavitree and Polsloe Children's Centre provides good services which effectively promote positive outcomes for local families. Users have access to a good range of services because centre management make very good use of the cluster model. Families within the reach area access groups, activities and services delivered at any of the centres within the cluster and it is clear that they value the equality of access.

The care, guidance and support of users are outstanding, particularly when families are in times of crisis. Effective partnership working enables the centre to meet a range of complex needs. Staff and users show consideration to each other and there is an atmosphere of mutual respect. Users truly value the interaction they have with all staff. Family-life plans completed with users help them to focus on priorities and are regularly successful in bringing about positive improvement to the lives of users and their families. The inclusive ethos of the centre is felt across many of the centre's activities. A good example of this is the 'International Toddler Group' which has been specifically set up in order to support the growing numbers of families from multi-ethnic groups within the community.

A strength of this children's centre is the involvement of parents and carers at all levels. Centre staff and management clearly believe that users should not merely be passive recipients of services and demonstrate a true ethos of user participation at all levels. This means that users make a real difference to the quality and suitability of the services they receive. Many express their desire to '...give something back to the children and families within the community' and are supported to do so through an extremely well-organised and successful volunteer programme.

Staff implement a range of programmes to improve the health of users and their families. They work well with partners and outside agencies in order to deliver and reinforce positive messages in an enjoyable way. While staff have begun to develop users' understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, including good nutrition

and the benefits of exercise, this has not had a significant impact as rates of obesity remain high. Staff are very well trained in safeguarding issues through access to in-house training, local authority training and training provided by Action for Children. Safeguarding remains a key focus for staff and appears as a standing agenda item in all relevant meetings.

Staff and management show high levels of commitment and work extremely well together in order to meet the needs of users. They have a good understanding of the quality of the services they offer. Self-evaluation overall is accurate and informs the priorities set out in the development plan. Management makes suitable use of data that is available to it in order to plan services although it has not undertaken a detailed analysis of data in order to ensure that the services it provides fully meet the needs of the whole community. Plans are in place to track the outcomes for families over the time they engage with the centre in order to enhance staff's understanding of the impact of their services. Processes for managing staff and their development are effective in meeting current and future needs and the centre has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve healthy outcomes by implementing strategies aimed at reducing levels of childhood obesity.
- Maximise the use of data through more rigorous analysis to support the targeting of services and the measuring of impact on outcomes for children and their families.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Users have an increasing understanding of how to promote healthy lifestyles for their families. There is a positive uptake of breastfeeding at birth and new mothers are well supported to sustain breastfeeding. The 'Baby Oasis' groups provide very good support for breastfeeding mothers with opportunities to not only gain professional advice and guidance but to also share experiences. Users say that their experience of this group has inspired them to develop further by becoming breastfeeding peer supporters. The emotional health of parents and carers, and their children is given appropriate focus by staff. Good use is made of the in-house counselling service to support those who may be facing crisis. Users attend a range of groups designed to encourage the development of strong bonds between parents and their babies. Creative use is made of outside agencies in order to encourage parents and carers to be more active with their young children, for example through dance. Focused initiatives target specific health issues, such as the promotion of good dental health by inviting the dental service into the centre. This has successfully increased the number of children under five who have access to regular dental checks. Plans are in place to implement further healthy-lifestyle programmes aimed at reducing the rates

of obesity within the area. These include the development of allotments and the implementation of the Health, Education and Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY) programme; a county-wide strategy being funded directly by the local authority.

Children are kept safer within their homes due to the implementation of a home-safety scheme. Parents and carers are supported to assess risks within their home and are provided with a range of equipment to prevent accidents, such as stair gates and fire guards. Users' understanding of how to respond to illness and injury has been further enhanced through the provision of first-aid training. Children learn how to keep themselves safe as they are supported by staff to take risks in their play. The good sharing of information between centre staff and other professionals enables early identification of children who may be at risk. Good monitoring by staff means those who are subject to a child-protection plan are kept safe.

Users' skills as parents and carers are greatly enhanced through the provision of a comprehensive programme of parenting and carer courses. Emphasis is placed upon embedding the foundations of good relationships between parents and carers and their children in order to promote positive behaviour. The 'Here's Looking at You' programme successfully educates parents and carers on how their child learns and develops. Parents and carers are well supported to understand how to enable their very young children to explore and learn. Access for some children to the '2gether pilot' has successfully accelerated their progress. These strategies have contributed to an improving picture of children's overall achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Through the parents' and carers' forum, users pro-actively engage with, and shape, services. For example, to support the healthy lifestyles agenda, plans are in place to contact local celebrity chefs in order to obtain their input and expertise. Forum members canvass the views of other users in order to help develop the adult-education programme. In addition, users have recently been involved in campaigns to raise awareness of cuts to local services, including lobbying their local Member of Parliament.

Users report how much they value the fact that they can access good-quality services through the centre without a significant impact upon their family budget. They are supported to manage their own finances through the provision of a credit union scheme and are encouraged to save in order to improve their economic position. Short courses in money management support this further. Many users rise to the high aspirations of centre staff and improve outcomes for themselves and their children through the acquisition of recognised qualifications. They are encouraged to build on their achievements and several have travelled from being a user, to volunteering and then onto paid employment. Those who face challenge in their personal life receive practical support from centre staff in order that they can maintain a reasonable standard of living, such as being supported to access funding and grants when in hardship.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff know their families well. They have good access to information which they make suitable use of in order to build a picture of the needs of the community. However, centre management recognises that closer scrutiny of data is required to enhance service planning and delivery. Staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework process for families who present as needing specific, targeted support in order to provide this. In addition, staff have a very clear understanding of the needs of the families who may not meet the threshold for this method of assessment and ensure that systems are in place to monitor and support these families. The management team makes good use of staff's local knowledge of their reach area as residents in order to help them highlight potentially 'hidden' areas of deprivation within an overall more affluent community. Staff make good use of evaluation of services to improve services in line with the needs of users.

Centre staff and management regularly celebrate the achievement of users, who are clearly proud to share their achievements with others. Users receive certificates to acknowledge their success at celebration events and their success is often more widely shared through the local press. Those who volunteer have their contribution regularly acknowledged through local and county-wide events, such as attending the Bishop's Palace in recognition of their services to volunteering.

Good planning and coordination of services enable users to access a range of services with ease. For example, the health clinic, 'Baby Oasis' and toddler group all run at the same time, on the same site. This means that parents and carers can have their child weighed, seek some advice on breastfeeding and then take an older child on to play at the toddler group. Users express their appreciation of staff's coordinated approach and the attention staff pay to accommodating their individual needs where possible.

Outreach services are effective in engaging some harder-to-reach members of the community. This has resulted in some of the most vulnerable families accessing

relevant services. Staff are skilled at engaging with families as early as possible in order to empower them to face life's challenges. For example, a good focus is placed upon developing parental bonds in a baby's early days in order to secure a positive parent/child relationship. Those at risk of isolation are very well supported to socialise and access services beyond the centre.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

This centre is led by a strong senior management team. Individuals' areas of expertise and skills are used well so that, together, they are a cohesive and effective team who inspire both staff and users alike. Management and staff show clear commitment and passion to improving the life chances of their service users and adopt a proactive approach to service development and delivery. Clear line-management arrangements and effective supervision mean that staff are supported well. This includes clear governance arrangements provided by Action for Children. Centre management has a good understanding of the strengths of the centre and its areas for improvement. Alongside the local authority, it has developed an ambitious service plan which sets out clear priorities and challenging targets for improvement. Processes are in place for the centre, the local authority and Action for Children to monitor the centre's success. The centre's advisory board includes good representation from a range of stakeholders, including parents and carers. They use their good understanding of priorities for the local community well to influence service development.

This centre offers good value for money. Effective planning of services makes best use of resources; for example, staff run a parenting programme alongside the '2gether' funded sessions in order that parents and carers can access childcare. A key strength of this centre is the extent to which effective use is made of the cluster model. This means that parents and carers access a much wider range of services than those immediately provided within their reach area through access to services at neighbouring centres. Good use is made of staff development activities in order to ensure high-quality provision and enable staff to learn from each other. Support and staff development has led to good retention of staff. The management team has successfully managed resources in order to minimise the impact of recent cuts to key

front-line services.

Members of the wider community value and treat each other with respect. For example, within the 'International Toddler Group' sessions, they learn about each other's varied cultures and languages. This group not only provides a very valuable introduction to children's centre services for families who are new to the area but also raises awareness of, and respect for, cultural diversity within the community. Good support is provided for children who have additional needs and their parents and carers through the provision of the 'Step-by-Step' group. The good use of the cluster model means that all users, including those who work, have equal access to a range of services. Centre staff have had some success in engaging fathers, grandparents and young parents and carers in the life of the centre.

Robust recruitment procedures ensure that those who work with children and their families are vetted. Comprehensive procedures support staff with safeguarding issues, including a clear reporting procedure which staff closely follow. An open and transparent approach is undertaken with parents and carers to ensure they understand the centre's role in keeping children and their families safe.

Centre staff highly value their strong links with a range of other agencies, with whom they work closely to meet the needs of users and their families. These good working partnerships means that all agencies work towards common aims and are clear about the contribution they make. As a result, services are integrated and cohesive. Overall, staff have a good understanding of the impact and quality of their work. This is because they are reflective practitioners who are keen to incorporate the views, needs and wants of the users. They regularly canvass the views of users and act upon recommendations made. Management makes suitable use of data that is available to it in order to plan services, although it acknowledges that more rigorous analysis and tracking of outcomes for users will enhance its understanding of the impact of the services it provides.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2

The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Heavitree and Polsloe Children’s Centre on 11 and 12 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that staff and management are committed to providing you with a good service and they work well together to do so. We agree with you that being able to access groups, activities and services at any of the centres in the local area is particularly beneficial to you and your families because it gives you a wide range of choice.

We judged the care, guidance and support given to you to be outstanding, especially for those of you who may, at times, face particular difficulties. Staff work closely with you to help you focus on priorities for you and your families and support you to make relevant changes. Staff and management have developed some strong partnerships with other professionals and organisations so that they offer you the correct support, advice and guidance. We agree with you that staff are very approachable and it is clear that you have very good relationships with them.

We noticed that you make a strong contribution to the running of the centre and the services it offers. You are given regular opportunities to present your views and thoughts and you help to make decisions through the parents’ and carers’ forum and the advisory board. Many of you show a clear desire to give something back to your community and do so most effectively through volunteering your services within the centre and beyond. You are well supported by staff to do so.

Centre staff work hard to make sure you and your children remain safe. They help you to ensure that your homes are safe places for your young children and many of you have benefited from home safety advice and equipment. Staff are regularly trained in how to safeguard children and management has taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable. Staff help you and your families to improve your health. Mothers who choose to breastfeed their new babies are well supported by staff to do so. Centre staff provide some opportunities for families to understand about the benefits of healthy eating and being active. However, we have asked staff to extend the work they do in order to encourage more families to adopt healthier lifestyles.

Staff and management have a good understanding of the quality of the services they offer and what they need to do to develop further. They collect a range of relevant information to help them understand what services they need to provide to ensure they meet your needs. It is clear that they are determined to make your lives the best they can be. Therefore, we have asked them to make even better use of the information they collect in order that they can be certain that they are delivering services to you in the best possible way.

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.