

Inspection report for Swalecliffe Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	365745
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Kubiak HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	David Stanley
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Swalecliffe Community Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	ABC Pre-school, Swalecliffe EY396471

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.

Published: June 2011



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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 centre staff, representatives from partner organisations, commissioned services, steering group, and the local authority representative. They spoke to parents and carers formally and informally around the centre.

They observed the centre's work, including a 'Coffee and Craft' group, parent and toddler sessions, toy library and crèche. They looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation, action plan, user evaluations and policies and procedures.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

Swalecliffe Children's Centre was designated in January 2008 and is governed by the local authority. It is located within the grounds of Swalecliffe Community Primary School. It has a separate entrance, apart from the school, which is shared with the on-site nursery provision. Centre staff are employed directly by the local authority. The centre works closely with other children's centres within the locality, particularly Joy Lane Children's Centre.

There is an advisory board, which covers all children's centres within the district. Membership includes users, stakeholders, partner organisations and the local authority. There is a parents' forum and centre steering group that feed into the advisory board.

The centre's catchment area is mixed in terms of deprivation with 27% of the population living in the most deprived areas. The local population is mostly White British, with small percentages of other minority ethnic groups including those from African backgrounds. Around 10% of children under five in the area are living in workless households, which is below the national average. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage around 68% of children achieve at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with communication, language and literacy the weaker elements. This is above the national average.

The centre is open all year round, from 9.00am to 5.00pm weekdays. The centre's facilities include a reception office, a number of multi-purpose/meeting rooms and staff room. There is access to two separate outdoor areas. The building is fully wheelchair accessible. The centre commissions a number of services from the voluntary sector including Homestart and Family Action.

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

The overall effectiveness of Swalecliffe Children's Centre is satisfactory, with some good features. The care, guidance and support offered by the centre are a strength. The small staff team demonstrates high levels of commitment and has developed an ethos of working well together in order to best meet the needs of centre users. This commitment and ethos are shared by the commissioned services at the centre. The centre works with a range of partner agencies in order to tailor services to meet users' individual needs; however, the effectiveness of these relationships is variable.

Parents and users at the centre report that they feel welcome and safe. Staff have worked hard to make the centre a stimulating and welcoming environment for children and adults. Staff know the users well, who in turn feel supported by the centre. The safety and well-being of children and users of the centre are given high priority. Staff ensure that risks are minimised in order for users to feel safe. Safeguarding procedures are in place. Health outcomes are good and improving. Parents' emotional well-being is supported by a range of activities such as the 'Coffee and Craft' group which allows parents and carers to meet informally. More structured groups such as parenting and family action also support parents and carers well, albeit in a more formal way. Parents and carers value the support they receive from the centre, as one commented, 'Staff have been absolutely wonderful, very supportive.'

Groups run at the centre are well attended. The parent and toddler group is now run for two different sessions due to demand from parents. The children and family information service regularly attends sessions in order to provide parents and carers with useful information. The centre staff work hard to break down barriers for users attending the centre. The provision of crèche facilities for some groups allows parents and carers to be more focused on their own activities.

Users' views about the services and groups offered are sought through discussion and questionnaires. Some parents and carers feel that their views are considered, however this varies. The parents' forum is a way that parents can be more involved in shaping the services; however, the centre does not have a systematic approach to seeking users' views. There is also no consistent process for ensuring that users receive feedback on their comments and suggestions.

The centre users benefit from positive relationships as they and centre staff treat each other with respect and consideration. The resources and displays at the centre portray some aspects of the community; however, the wider community is not yet fully reflected. There is minimal information in a range of languages. Opportunities to challenge discrimination are not always taken.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The self-evaluation, although complete, does not provide an up-to-date assessment of the centre. It does not always identify precisely where they need to target services. The action plan is not fully complete and does not always identify clear priorities for development. A strong

sense of teamwork exists among centre staff. They have worked hard since the centre opened to engage with the community and build relationships with users. The centre has recently introduced a new data recording system and is beginning to use this information to plan services. These successful actions taken to address deficiencies confirm the centre's satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the self-evaluation in order that it is:
 - concise and up to date
 - an accurate reflection of the centre's work
 - systematically and regularly reviewed
 - updated to reflect the changing needs and priorities for the centre.

- Link the action plan more closely to the self-evaluation and ensure that there is a clear cycle of target setting, monitoring and evaluation.

- Strengthen equality and diversity across the centre by:
 - ensuring that the centre is more reflective of the wider community
 - making it welcoming to all groups
 - planning activities to promote equality and diversity that are meaningful
 - developing staff's knowledge in order that they can challenge discrimination effectively.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The centre has not fully developed the evaluation of the impact of its work, and as a result, the evidence is limited. However, where information is available, it demonstrates some positive contributions the centre is making to improve the outcome for its users through good quality services. Evaluations of groups run by the centre and discussions with users show high satisfaction rates. Parents and carers show a greater understanding of healthy eating through the provision of healthy snacks at the centre, which have included growing and eating fruit and vegetables by children and their parents and carers. The open access from the main children's activity room to the secure outside play area encourages children to exercise, supporting their health and well-being. Specific groups such as 'Loco' and 'Locomotion' encourage children to participate in physical exercise. Breastfeeding rates are good and increasing and the breastfeeding support group and breastfeeding mentors offer guidance and information to parents.

Staff are committed to promoting safety at the centre and as a result children and families feel safe when accessing the centre. There is a shared entrance with the

private day-care provision and reception staff are vigilant especially at busy times. Staff act as good role models for the parents and carers and support them to manage their children's behaviour. Fire evacuations are regularly undertaken; however, the time taken to evacuate the building is not always recorded. Information about safeguarding procedures and expectations of parents and carers at the centre is available although it does not clearly set out the centre's responsibilities with regard to safeguarding reporting procedures. There is some evidence of good outcomes of children on child protection plans; however, the overall numbers are small. Staff are familiar with the Common Assessment Framework procedures but have had limited experience of undertaking assessments. Home safety is discussed at home visits and packs are available to parents and carers that include safety equipment that can be used in their homes.

Children actively engage and enjoy the variety of activities offered at the centre. The crèches, which are run by commissioned services, are well planned and take into account children's individual needs and interests. The staff are beginning to link activities more closely to the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre is not fully linking with the on-site nursery and school nursery class to provide a cohesive package of early education. There are, however, developing links between the services, and work on supporting children with their transition between the different services is effective. Parents and carers also enjoy the opportunity to play alongside their children. The parents' forum is established and some issues have been raised at the advisory board following discussions at the forum. The centre has worked hard to become a central part of the community.

Staff have been active in the community promoting the work of the centre and have undertaken work targeting specific geographical areas. Outreach work is undertaken by a commissioned service, with a small amount of outreach work completed by centre staff. This has had some success in engaging some users who had not been previously served by the centre. The centre has not yet introduced systems to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its targeted work.

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, and 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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

There is a range of services and activities that meet the needs of those users who currently access the centre. Groups are well attended and attendance levels are increasingly steadily. Services have been developed based upon staff's understanding of the community. The centre is aware of hard to reach families and there has been some success in engaging these areas of the community. Groups such as the 'Dad's behaving Daddly' have been set up to engage male carers more effectively in the centre.

Good links with some partner agencies are effective in identifying users who are not accessing the centre and the provision of joint home visits ensures that parents and carers can initially be supported in their own home. Parents and carers who may feel anxious or nervous about attending the children's centre are sensitively supported in making their first visit. Although the centre recognises the need to extend this aspect of their work, available data are not sufficiently detailed to identify where resources should be targeted to ensure that they have the most impact. Centre staff have been trained in using the Common Assessment Framework for individual users to assist in signposting to appropriate services; however, they have not had the opportunity to instigate this with any families.

The care, guidance and support offered to all users are good. In times of crisis families value the support they receive. As one parent commented, 'I don't know where I would be without this place.' Established links with some partner organisations ensure staff effectively signpost users to other services such as benefit and housing advice. Where links are not so well established, such as with adult education and Jobcentre Plus, this impacts on centre users. The centre staff are aware of the need to build these relationships and put these strategies in place.

The centre runs some services on a locality basis and therefore identifies the most appropriate centre from which to run them. For example the Young Active Parents Group runs at the nearby Joy Lane Children's Centre. Users are encouraged to attend any centre. However, many parents and carers reported that they prefer this centre as they find it friendly and welcoming. Centre staff celebrate achievement of users through their own publications, and features in the local and national press and radio.

Evaluations of groups, satisfaction surveys and data are analysed by staff but this analysis is not linked effectively to improving the provision and information is not clearly communicated back to users.

Information is available throughout the centre and on its website about services and activities, both at the centre and within the wider community. This information is not representative of the wider community and there is insufficient literature in languages other than English. Images around the centre promote some areas of the community although the centre does not fully promote the wider community.

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

Governance arrangements are secure at all levels and the recently reconstituted district advisory board now holds the centre to account and sets targets. The local steering group, which is newly established, has undertaken some good work at centre level such as a safeguarding audit. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The centre manager has developed a staff team who are enthusiastic, committed and passionate about their work. They are keen to develop the services further; however, the lack of an accurate self-evaluation and clear action planning is impacting on the centre's ability to become more effective. Data are not sufficiently specific to the centre and are not used to identify where services will have the most impact on improving outcomes for families.

The premises are secure and staff are vigilant in maintaining a safe environment. Rigorous recruitment procedures for staff and volunteers are in place to ensure that all are appropriately checked and cleared to work with children. Staff from the commissioned services are required to undergo recruitment checks through their respective organisations. Safeguarding arrangements are in place and these have recently been revised to ensure that staff are now aware of any child attending the centre who may be subject to a child protection plan.

Equality and diversity are promoted appropriately throughout the centre, although the inclusivity of this varies. The centre has been proactive in promoting diversity in relation to culture and disability. Publications available in the centre are not available in community languages. There are some books available for families reflecting the wider community. Children and parents and carers with disabilities are well supported at the centre. The centre is working hard to narrow the achievement gap between all groups. Although the numbers are small there is some evidence of success as the gap between the most disadvantaged children and other children is reducing. Disadvantaged groups such as older people, travellers and lesbian and gay people are not consistently promoted at the centre. The centre has a calendar of awareness weeks that it promotes through the year; however, there is no systematic way of deciding how to prioritise these. Staff also miss the opportunity to address issues as they arise and some lack the confidence to be able to challenge discrimination effectively.

The centre encourages feedback from parents and carers, users and partners. This information is sometimes used to shape and improve services. For example, following feedback from users the parent and toddler group was split into two different sessions. Parents and carers are encouraged to make comments on services and these are evaluated and any concerns addressed or taken forward to the parents' forum. Systems for feeding back on discussions and decisions as a result of parents' and carers' comments and feedback are not systematic and do not feed into the centre's self-evaluation.

The centre is collecting a wide range of data and this area is developing. The centre has recently begun to record and collect its own data on the 'e-start' system. Staff are beginning to use this data to look more clearly at the centre's work but data are not used effectively to set priorities or feed into the centre's self-evaluation and action planning.

The centre has been successful in working with some areas of the community which are hard to reach. The sharing of information and close working relationships ensure that some services are targeted where there is the most need.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. It ensures that commissioned services are good value. The centre works closely with other centres within the locality on planning services. Some of these services may be offered at specific centres to avoid duplication and ensure that resources can be effectively targeted.

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	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 the Swalecliffe Children’s Centre on 18 and 19 May 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We found that the centre provides you and your children with a good level of support. The centre’s staff team and staff from commissioned services work well together and are committed to improving the lives of children and families in the community. They know you and your families and have worked to ensure that you feel able to use the centre regularly. However, the centre’s evaluations of its services are not yet clear and concise. The action plan that will support bringing about further and sustained improvements for you and your families is not yet complete. We have asked the centre to improve these.

We agree with you that staff are warm and welcoming. You told us that centre staff have very good relationships with you and your children and they act as good role models. As one of you told us during the inspection, ‘Staff have been absolutely wonderful, very supportive.’ Staff have also worked hard to establish good links with other professionals and organisations. Some of you have benefited from these close links, for example through having a joint home visit from your health visitor and a centre worker.

Staff do all they can to make you and your children feel safe at the centre. They are vigilant at the reception about who is entering the building and are not afraid to challenge anybody they do not know. The centre completes risk assessments and regular fire evacuation practices are undertaken, although the centre does not always record the time it takes to evacuate the building. Staff are trained in how to safeguard children and this training is kept up to date.

Although satisfactory, the centre is limited in its success in promoting equality and diversity. There are some books and images that represent aspects of the wider community and the diverse society that we live in. We have asked the centre to be more proactive in looking at the range of resources that it provides and how it promotes equality and diversity. We have also asked it to look at what information is available for children and families who speak English as an additional language.

Some of you are part of the parents’ forum that meets regularly to look at what the centre is doing. There are standard agenda items and staff talk to you about the

work of the centre and listen to your views and take them forward. The parents' forum contributes ideas to other groups that are responsible for governing the centre including the steering group and district advisory board.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to come and talk to us. We wish you and your children all the best for the future.

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