

Inspection report for Forest First Children's Centre

Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	367799
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Janet Rodgers HMI

Centre governance	Totton College
Centre leader	Tracie Currie
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Forest First Children's Centre nursery

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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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 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.

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 leader, staff who work directly with children and families, representatives from the partnership board, Totton College, 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

Forest First Children's Centre is located in two adjacent buildings on a large housing estate in Fawley, in the New Forest in Hampshire. The centre is a phase one children's centre and received its designation in August 2005. Outreach activities are provided at a village hall in Calshot and a local primary school. Full day care is provided through an on-site nursery. The nursery was inspected in the same week as the centre and its overall effectiveness judged as good.

The local authority commissions Totton College, a sixth form college, to have overall responsibility for the centre. Governance of the centre is provided by a partnership board that includes representatives from Totton College, community groups, a local school, parents and carers and practitioners. The centre leader manages the nursery manager and a team of two outreach workers, an early support coordinator, play worker and administrator. A Children's Centre Support Teacher (CCST) who is employed by the local authority, is attached to the centre.

The centre serves an area in the south east of the New Forest which has 440 children aged four and under. The area has small towns with a mix of social and private housing alongside very rural, isolated areas. The proportion of workless

households is slightly above that in the New Forest as a whole, and is particularly high for those aged 18 to 24. Although the majority of local families are of White British heritage, one area, Calshot, has a high number of service families, who are predominately Fijian, and Traveller families. Holbury and North Blackfield falls within the top 30% most deprived areas in the country.

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

Forest First Children’s Centre is a good centre that is well led and managed. The centre leader thoroughly and enthusiastically involves staff, partners, parents and carers in devising the delivery plan. Because of this, the wide range of services and sessions being delivered are what local people want and the number of people who are using the centre has increased significantly over the last year and is very high. Staff are very successful in bringing different groups together and encouraging a cohesion and sense of purpose that have not always existed in some local areas. They promote diversity well through sessions, events and celebrating festivals thus increasing parents’ and carers’ awareness of different cultures.

Staff have excellent partnerships with a broad range of organisations. This greatly enhances the range and quality of sessions that are held. An exceptionally large number of partners are on site regularly to meet parents and carers in a convenient location. This is significantly helping parents and carers to access good quality health, safety and education services very locally. Centre users have a big influence on how services and sessions are structured. This has enabled them to take part in complementary activities on the same day or progress with their peers onto further support groups. Staff are outstanding in how they use the views of their users and those not yet accessing the centre. The parents’ forum is highly effective. It represents the views of local people exceptionally well and is proactive in organising holiday activities and fund raising.

Many parents, carers and children have benefited from using the centre. They

successfully develop their confidence and skills through taking courses. Some have progressed into employment, further education or volunteering roles. Through the positive parenting programme (Triple P) and stay, play and learn all together (SPLAT) courses, parents and carers are better able to manage their child's behaviour and use a wider range of play activities. Generally, children's behaviour is good and they are confident. The centre's cookery courses are very popular and parents and carers use what they have learned to create healthier meals, budget more effectively and use fresh ingredients. The CCST has developed effective links with local schools, nurseries and speech and language specialists to better prepare children for transition to school. This work is still at an early stage and has not yet improved the Early Years Foundation Stage profile data for the children's centre's area, which is relatively static.

Staff make considerable effort to discuss the individual needs of parents, carers and children. They use this information well to ensure they offer flexible and individual services and sessions. The quality of the provision offered is good, being well structured and managed. Parents and carers enjoy attending the centre and many are keen to take additional courses, having had a positive experience. They make good use of the specialist advice and services offered by health professionals on site. The centre has a good on-site nursery. Staff provide excellent care and support for all users in a very welcoming environment. They use their expertise very well and bring a wide range of professionals together to help solve individual problems. Their work is further supported by the effective policies and procedures in place such as the safeguarding policy. Parents and carers value the high quality advice and guidance they receive from the centre's partners like Jobcentre Plus, housing associations, Citizens Advice Bureau and the police.

The centre leader and staff know the centre's strengths well and are constantly striving to bring about improvement. Along with partners, parents and carers, they are fully involved in self-evaluating the centre. The centre leader has a strong focus on quality improvement and routinely checks the progress being made. All of these developments, together with the centre's effective procedures for self-evaluation, demonstrate that the capacity for future improvement is good.

Although the centre leader places a high priority on working with partners to obtain more useful data that is specific to the centre, this is at an early stage. The centre does not have sufficient measurable targets or systems for measuring the long-term impact, including outcomes, of sessions, services and initiatives for users.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the assessment and evaluation of users' long-term progress and outcomes through:
 - working with partners to gain more appropriate data for the local area to establish baseline figures and set measurable targets for the centre
 - fully establishing a system that evaluates the long-term impact, including

outcomes, of sessions, initiatives and services for users.

- Ensure that children in the area have the best preparation for the transition to school and raise the achievement across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile through:
 - ensuring the initiatives and links started by the CCST are continued, to enable them to fully impact
 - increasing the proportion of children that the centre reaches from the under-represented area within Fawley, Blackfield and Langley
 - setting and monitoring measurable targets for achievement of children across the Early Years Foundation Stage for the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre has very effective courses to improve healthy eating and the fitness levels of children. It also offers very popular cookery courses. These have been particularly successful in helping parents and carers to budget, plan their food shopping, try out new recipes and introduce healthier food to their children. During SPLAT sessions, the play worker gives good encouragement to children to play outdoors. Parents and carers say that 'snack time is always healthy' which helps them to consider and incorporate healthy food within their children's own meals. Children demonstrate good behaviour and generally are quite confident. Parents and carers who attended the Triple P and Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) programmes feel better able to cope with their children's behaviour and more confident in using different parenting techniques. The play worker maintains a scrapbook for each child detailing their activities at the centre, which parents and carers keep at the end. However, this does not provide a sufficient record or observations of the progress that the child is making.

Parents and carers are very satisfied with the improvements to the health, lifestyles and confidence of themselves and their children. Some parents and carers, who feel isolated and depressed, have greatly improved their morale and lifestyle through the early intervention of centre staff and their links with external organisations. One group of parents and carers greatly benefit from developing their own social group and regularly meet up for breakfast before they attend a SPLAT session. Parents' and carers' comments include 'we have now made new friends' and 'my child is now very sociable and likes to play with other children'.

Parents, carers and children say they feel safe at the centre. Children are carefully supervised and monitored by parents and volunteers. Play workers very effectively raise awareness of safety issues with parents and carers. Partners are very active in promoting safety of children, for example, through the Police Community Support Officers discussing 'stranger danger' with children during their weekly drop-in session. Staff carry out very useful checks of parents' and carers' homes making

suggestions for improvements to safety and security. As a result of these, many homes are much safer for children through window locks and stair gates being installed and toiletries placed in safer cabinets. Within the area there are very few children with child protection plans; however, centre staff have contact with both the current families. Centre staff, who have only recently been involved in using the Common Assessment Framework, are thorough in discussing children's needs with a wide range of external professionals and providing support.

Partners from the college offer highly relevant literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) courses at the centre, which are well subscribed. These courses improve parents' and carers' confidence and skills often leading to further education or work. The on-site Jobcentre Plus advisor has been particularly effective in enabling nine parents from the centre to gain employment since August 2010. The centre has a small number of volunteers who are significantly improving their employment prospects and personal skills. Some groups have good progression onto further courses. For example, parents and carers who attended the Triple P programme have progressed to a parenting support group which builds well on the skills and techniques they have already developed.

The centre leader and CCST recognise that the achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is relatively static in their area. They know that this is affected by one district that has a very transient population and another where a lower proportion of children attend the centre. The CCST has taken significant action to work with speech and language specialists and local schools and nurseries. However, this work has not yet had sufficient time to demonstrate an improvement in children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage profile or narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest.

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, and 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	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre offers a wide range of good quality provision. Staff know their users very well and take great care to ensure their individual needs, and those of their children, are met. They work very closely with parents, carers and partners to tailor the services and courses accordingly. The parent forum is making good use of its contacts to extend the summer programme to include older siblings so the whole family can join in, in response to feedback. The centre now offers different literacy, numeracy and ICT courses after parents and carers said they wanted a course to develop their own learning rather than to purely support their children's development. This year's courses have a formal qualification thus increasing their employment chances.

Outreach workers are particularly effective in finding out what the local community needs and wants. They routinely carry out successful 'door knocking' activities to find out what parents and carers who do not use the centre would like. As a result of this, new courses like baby massage have started.

The centre offers a wide variety of opportunities for purposeful learning and development across a good range of different age groups, from babies and toddlers to teenage parents and adults. Courses are highly individualised and many are on a drop-in basis to suit childcare arrangements. Parents and carers say 'sessions are structured really well' and 'the play worker uses some amazing ideas – my child often says, wow'. During a SPLAT session, the play worker gives children choices about what they would like to do and then adapts the session well to develop their number and social skills. The centre leader enables parents and carers to participate in courses through negotiating funding for childcare or providing a crèche at outreach venues.

The centre's outstanding partnerships have a big influence on the wide range of services that are delivered on site and at outreach centres. Partners, like Southampton Football Club and portage, are proactively sought to ensure courses are of a good quality. The centre leader productively works with other local children's centres to ensure that sufficient people join groups to make them work. This has resulted in a young parents' group and a programme for victims of domestic violence, which are jointly facilitated with other centres.

Staff provide outstanding help and support for parents and carers in a very welcoming environment. As a result of this, families know they can go to the centre for help in times of crisis. 'The support I have received is amazing', 'staff are always so willing to help' and 'the centre is a lifesaver' are typical comments from parents and carers. On site there are a wide range of partners who give immediate and good quality help, advice and guidance. The centre displays extensive information that signposts parents and carers to external organisations.

Outreach workers play a key role in ensuring parents and carers receive a high level of very relevant support from a wide range of health, welfare and education professionals. They do this by instigating discussions between all parties at the centre and keeping thorough records of meetings and agreed actions and priorities. Parents and carers greatly value this support as it brings all the people that will help them improve their lives, and those of their children, to one very convenient location.

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

The centre leader has placed a high priority on ensuring the delivery plan and centre actions focus on parents, users and children from areas with the highest level of deprivation and identified need. The centre's activities and services are planned exceptionally well and make excellent use of feedback from users and those not yet accessing the centre. As a result of this, the proportion of people from the reach area who are now using the centre has increased dramatically over the last year. The centre has excellent partnerships. The centre manager and team work very productively with a wide range of partners who speak highly of how this enables them to provide a local service.

The centre leader has a very open style of management where staff, partners and users are fully involved in decision making and the self-evaluation process. Staff know the centre's strengths and issues well and take appropriate action for improvement. The partnership board and the line manager at Totton College provide sound governance, challenge and support. Staff are set appropriate targets during their appraisal. These are typically linked into the targets within the quality improvement plan. However, the lack of useful localised data from partners and the local authority is affecting the centre leader's ability to identify a starting point and set measurable targets for improving outcomes for the centre as a whole.

Staff are outstanding in the way they encourage, collect and use the views of parents, carers, children and partners. Parents and carers have extensive ways to give their views, including through the parents' forum social networking page. The parents' forum is well established and maintains excellent contact with the local community. Its members are excellent at organising events and fund raising. The forum is highly effective, dynamic and has the resources to respond and act swiftly

to requests. Parents and carers on the forum say that 'support from the centre for the parents' forum is excellent, their views are always listened to and they make it really easy for all parents to take part'.

The centre offers good value for money. Staff are well trained to meet the current and future needs of the centre, enabling many services to be delivered in-house. The centre works exceptionally well with other children's centres to share resources and expertise, including a very successful toy library and securing joint funding to deliver new programmes.

The very established team knows its community well and makes a considerable effort to bring cohesion between groups that have previously discriminated against, or had little trust in, each other. In particular, the SPLAT sessions in Calshot have successfully integrated different communities into one group with a common purpose. Parents and carers trust the staff team and find the centre welcoming and inviting. Staff promote diversity well through good practical activities and sessions to raise awareness of other cultures. Managers have thoroughly analysed courses accessed by hard to reach groups and use this information well when deciding what to offer in the future.

The centre has clear safeguarding policies and arrangements. Staff have been trained regularly in how to recognise those at risk and reporting procedures. Staff recruitment procedures are thorough and all new staff and volunteers are checked with the Criminal Records Bureau.

The centre leader is working with partners and the local authority to obtain local data to set more specific and realistic targets for outcomes. Staff have introduced systems for checking the progress of parents and carers at the beginning, end and three months after completion of courses. However, the centre does not have sufficient data to assess the longer term impact of their initiatives, interventions and courses on outcomes.

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	2

adults	
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	1
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	1

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

The findings from the concurrent nursery inspection contributed to the children’s centre inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Forest First Children’s Centre on 18 and 19 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we talked with a number of you, visited some of the sessions and met the professionals who work with the centre. We would like to thank all of you who contributed to the inspection.

The centre is very well led and managed. The centre leader has a thorough awareness of what the centre does well and where improvements can be made. The whole team is enthusiastic about inspiring parents, carers and children to achieve their full potential. Centre staff have a good understanding of the local community. We found really good examples of where centre staff had brought together different groups, some who would not usually meet, for purposeful activities. The centre leader and staff use their local knowledge very well to offer a programme that is aimed at a wide range of different age groups and needs. Because of this, the number of people who now use the centre has increased dramatically over the last year.

The courses that the centre provides are of a good quality. Many of you told us how much you have gained from taking courses and attending sessions at the centre. This is helping you gain confidence and some of you are now volunteering or have gained a job. The centre offers many successful courses that help develop healthier lifestyles and children’s ability to play and socialise. We saw that you and your children enjoy what the centre offers. You are keen to take additional courses and

improve your own, and your children's, prospects. The revised literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) courses provide an effective route into further education or work.

Centre staff currently evaluate the success of their courses and sessions with you. We have asked the centre manager to devise a system for looking at the effect that the centre's courses and sessions have on you after they have finished. We have also asked the centre leader to ensure that the links and work being carried out by the Children's Centre Support Teacher are continued so that children are prepared well for the transition to school.

The centre staff are excellent at listening to you and using this to make changes and start new courses. You have a highly effective parents' forum, who take a very active role in fund raising, collecting your views and running holiday activities.

Many of you told us that you felt the support you receive from the centre staff is amazing, and we agreed with you. The staff and partners give excellent help and guidance, which many of you are using. The family outreach support workers are very good at listening to your needs and working closely with other services to ensure you receive all the help you need in one place.

The centre has outstanding partnerships which greatly enhance the programmes that are available to you. Many of these partners base themselves at the centre, ensuring they are regularly available for you when you need help, advice and guidance.

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