

# Inspection report for Potters Gate Sure Start Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Surrey
<b>Inspection number</b>	365833
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 June 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Graham Lee

<b>Centre governance</b>	School Governing Body on behalf of the local authority
<b>Centre leader</b>	Jane Whittington (Head of Centre) Mary Doody (Centre Manager)
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Centre address</b>	Potters Gate, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 7BB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01252 891250
<b>Fax number</b>	01252 718165
<b>Email address</b>	manager@potters-gate.surrey.sch.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Potters Gate Church of England Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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  
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W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This inspection was carried out by additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the Head of Centre, the Centre Manager, other staff, the Chair of Governors, the Chair of the Advisory Board and two representatives of the local authority. Inspectors also talked to groups of parents and a variety of professionals working in partnership with the centre.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection judgements

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

### Information about the centre

Potters Gate Sure Start Children’s Centre was designated to provide the full core offer in September 2007 but did not become operational until January 2009. It is open for 25 hours each week for 48 weeks per year. It is co-located with Potters Gate Church of England Primary School. The governing body of the school also manages the children’s centre on behalf of the local authority. The centre is located in its own premises within the school grounds. The accommodation consists of a reception area, an office and an activities room. The centre also provides activities in other parts of the school and in a number of other local venues.

The area served by the centre is relatively advantaged although there are pockets of deprivation in the reach area especially in its super output area. The number of children living in workless households is relatively low as is the proportion of families in receipt of benefits. Most residents in the area are of White British origin, although increasing numbers are of Eastern European heritage. Children’s skills and understanding on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage vary widely but are often below those typical of children of that age.

#### 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

Potters Gate is a good children’s centre which has made considerable progress in developing a good range of services in the relatively short time it has been designated to provide the full core offer. It is establishing itself at the heart of the community and provides invaluable support to increasing number of families and their children. Centre staff are highly committed and know the community extremely well. They provide outstanding care, guidance and support to parents and their families. The enthusiasm of staff is infectious and makes users want to come back again. As one parent said, ‘The staff’s enthusiasm is 10 out of 10. They are very approachable and it is fantastic here.’ This typified the views of many.

The centre’s staff work extremely creatively in partnership with a wide range of

statutory, independent and voluntary partners to provide a good range of high quality services. In particular, the partnership with the health services provides a support for many parents with their children from birth through to reaching school age. The children and adults attending the centre's activities greatly enjoy the activities provided for them. Children make good progress in their social and learning skills, which prepares them well for school. Similarly, activities such as the computer and cookery course prepare adults well for the future and enhance their families' economic stability.

The centre's commitment to the inclusion of all children and their families is central to its vision and evident in its everyday life. Centre leaders and staff are well aware of the different groups within the community and use a range of strategies to engage with them. For example, the centre has been successful in involving more fathers in its activities through, for example, the 'Dadz and Kidz Fun Club', which meets at weekends. Parents of children with disabilities have found the 'Last Wednesday' group invaluable in providing peer support as well as good advice and guidance. The centre is engaging with more and more families within its reach area, particularly in its higher need areas including its super output area, where around half of families are now registered. Nevertheless, the influence of the centre is still not as extensive as it could be amongst the most vulnerable groups, for example pregnant teenagers and isolated mothers. This is recognised by staff and is a central priority for improvement.

Everybody connected with the centre feels very safe, and arrangements for the safeguarding of children, adults and staff alike are exemplary. The excellent partnerships with health and social services ensure that vital information about families is shared and acted upon effectively in a confidential environment, through, for example, the Common Assessment Framework.

The centre is well led and managed and works very effectively on a day-to-day basis. Leaders evaluate the impact of their services thoroughly and take the views of their users very seriously. The centre knows itself well through accurate self-evaluation and sets ambitious targets for improvement. Staff are also using their own data with increasing effectiveness to demonstrate the reach and impact of their work on the community. However, the data provided to them is not always sufficiently up to date or accurate to be able to show the impact of the centre's work on the most vulnerable groups within the community. Nevertheless, the progress made to date and the increasing range of services based on an accurate understanding of the needs of families within the community show that the centre has good capacity to continue to improve.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Develop the range of strategies being used to ensure that the centre engages with increasing numbers of its most vulnerable groups, for example teenage

mothers and pregnant teenagers.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2

Many of the users of the centre report how much they enjoy and benefit from the activities that are offered. The centre engages with increasing numbers of parents from a wide range of backgrounds. The engagement of vulnerable families has increased significantly, although there is more to do to ensure that the centre is reaching the majority of its more vulnerable groups through its well-tailored courses and support.

Activities such as 'Baby Play and Rhyme' and 'Play and Learn' provide good opportunities for parents and their children to play and learn together as well as having fun in a safe and secure environment. For example, in one session children and their parents were seen playing happily together with a variety of stimulating toys, as well as having fun exploring shaving foam and the light and dark contrasts in a tent. Feedback from these courses shows that parents have developed more confidence and almost all report that they have tried some of the activities at home. As a result, they say that they are able to play more constructively with their children. This is invaluable in helping prepare children for entering school.

In turn, many parents, from a range of backgrounds report that these groups help to increase their confidence and the quality of their family life. In some cases, they help to reduce the sense of isolation felt by some. For example, one commented, 'I have grown in confidence a lot. I used to find it hard to find things to do as I was new to Farnham.' The confidence gained from these activities often encourages users to go on to access other activities, such as the popular computer club. This helps parents to develop skills in information and communication technology from a variety of starting points. There have been examples of this course being a stimulus for parents going on to further and higher education as a result, thus enhancing the economic stability of their families and their skills for the future. Parents feel valued and that their views are taken into account. They have a very clear influence on decision making in the centre through, for example, the Parents' Forum, their representation on the Advisory Board and the regular feedback they provide about activities within the centre.

There are a range of activities provided by the centre which successfully promote the physical and emotional well-being of parents and their families. There were many examples of parents indicating how activities such as Baby Massage, Baby Play and Rhyme and the La Leche Breastfeeding Café had helped to improve the lives of the families. Many parents report how these sessions help them to develop stronger bonds with their children. For example, one father reported how it had really made a difference to his family by providing 'quality time within a fun environment'. Vulnerable and isolated parents, in particular, report that the centre develops their confidence and self-esteem. It also enables them to share their concerns and develop friendships. One reported, 'It is like having counselling.'

Feedback from parents shows that many mothers have been able to sustain breastfeeding as a result of the support they have received. Others say that the Baby Massage sessions have been invaluable in dealing with issues such as excessive crying and sleeping issues. One commented that the sessions are 'a fantastic tool for parents and babies physically, mentally and socially'. The cookery classes have also been invaluable in helping some parents to improve their confidence in cookery and, in turn, developing more healthy lifestyles for their families.

A strength of the centre is the way that it enables children and adults to feel extremely safe and well looked after. Children behave very well and have a growing awareness of keeping themselves safe. Adults from a range of backgrounds treat each other with great respect and show a very good understanding of how to keep their families safe. Most of the parents who speak English as an additional language are reasonably fluent in English. Others are signposted to translation services. The safety of families is enhanced through activities such as the first aid course and 'safety week'. Centre staff work very closely with other agencies to support children on child protection plans through the Common Assessment Framework and there is evidence of significant improvements in outcomes for children as a result.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre knows its community well and assesses the needs of users effectively. Every activity is evaluated by both the staff and the users extremely thoroughly and changes to the content and organisation of activities are often made as a result. For example, staff and health visitors have identified that the appointment system at the clinic does not suit the needs of some of the most vulnerable parents and there are plans to change this to a 'drop in' session in consequence. The 'Baby Play and Rhyme' group was oversubscribed so rather than restrict the numbers, the centre moved the activity to Farnham Museum where more could be accommodated, enabling the centre's activity room to be freed up for other uses.

Places on courses and other activities are often reserved for the most vulnerable groups. The centre staff work successfully with health and social services to share information and to target particular parents to come to activities. This helps to ensure that the assessment of the needs of individuals and groups within the community is robust and targeted at the most vulnerable. This is supported effectively by the outreach workers, who make home visits and encourage parents to engage with the centre's services. Thus the centre is able to engage with an increasing range of users, and activities are often attended by a wide cross-section of the community in terms of economic and social backgrounds. The courses for adults have helped parents to access training and employment. In one case, the parent was encouraged to volunteer and has since secured employment as a maternity care assistant. One single parent expressed the view that she was 'setting a good example for my girls' by acquiring more qualifications and developing future employment prospects. The centre's assessment rightly highlights the need to develop further the strategies to engage some of the harder to reach groups in the community, such as pregnant teenagers and isolated mothers.

The centre is inviting and welcoming. Many of the activities for children and their parents are often well planned around the different elements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are supported by good quality books and toys which celebrate the increasing diversity of the local community. Provision for parents of children with special needs is evident in many activities and particularly the the 'Last Wednesday'. The group provides support and advice and often brings in speakers on a range of topics. This work is also supported by the Toy and Box Library which enables parents to take home and use very good quality resources to which they may not otherwise have access. The centre is working with increasing numbers of new childminders in the area, although they have not been as successful in engaging some of their more established colleagues.

The exemplary care, guidance and support provided by the centre were evident in the warm and welcoming atmosphere. Staff know their users as individuals and many told inspectors that they would be confident to turn to the centre in times of crisis. The centre has supported a number of families with difficult situations, involving support through the food bank and citizens advice bureau, for example. In one case, they helped to secure funding from a local charity to help a family who were moving house.

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



## How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Lines of accountability between the local authority, governing body, centre leaders and staff are clear and effective. The head of centre and the centre manager work productively together and the latter manages the centre well on a day-to-day basis. Staff feel valued and supported by the rigorous supervision arrangements. Consequently, morale is high and staff are clear about the centre's priorities for improvement. They have high expectations of themselves and the users of the centre. Services are fully integrated and the staff share ambitious targets to increase the centre's impact and range even further, for example in relation to vulnerable groups. Governors hold the centre to account well and the newly reconstituted advisory board provides a good range of expertise and is able to offer wise counsel as a result.

A considerable strength of the centre is the extent to which a range of partnerships enhance its provision and improves the lives of significant and increasing groups of users. For example, a productive partnership with a private partner is providing the very popular and effective computer course and the 'Family Links Parenting Puzzle' is delivered effectively in partnership with the Farnham Community Christian Community Trust. The centre also works very closely with its statutory partners in health and social services to support the most vulnerable members of the community. The good sharing of intelligence is helping to increase the centre's engagement with these groups significantly, although there remains more work to do. There is an effective partnership with the host school, which is evident in the shared use of resources and expertise.

The centre's arrangements for the safeguarding of children and users are exemplary. Everybody working at the centre, including volunteers and governors, are checked to verify their suitability to work with children. Similarly, procedures are in place to make sure that all partners, both statutory and voluntary, are also checked. Policies and procedures are executed consistently and staff are trained regularly on matters related to child protection. Risk assessments of the premises and all activities are extremely rigorous and regular. The centre ensures that issues of safety and safeguarding are reinforced through all its activities. Procedures for sharing information with statutory partners are exemplary and result in early intervention when concerns are raised. All staff are trained in the Common Assessment Framework and this results in significant improvements in the lives of many families.

The centre's commitment to diversity and providing equality of opportunity is evident in its increasing engagement with different groups in the community. A particular focus has been the development of links with the increasing range of users speaking English as an additional language, particularly from Eastern European backgrounds. These groups are now well represented in the work of the centre. Similarly, the 'Last Wednesday' provides invaluable support to parents with children with special needs. The centre meets the duties ascribed to it and in many ways goes beyond them, although the level of engagement with some of the more vulnerable groups, such as

teenage parents and isolated mothers is still developing.

Resources, both human and material, are managed well within the centre, which results in good outcomes for users. The services provided by the centre are accessed by an increasing range of users. The environment is welcoming and safe. Hence the centre is providing good value for money.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The Section 5 inspection of the school was taking place at the same time as the inspection of the children's centre. Inspectors found that children made good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage from generally below average starting points. This judgement was taken into account when assessing the children's centre, although none of the children engaged with the centre have yet gone on to school.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Potters Gate Sure Start Children's Centre on 9–10 June 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

I would like to thank all of you who took the time to talk to my colleague and me and who told us your views about the centre. It is obvious that you are very proud of your centre and many of you told us what a good job it is doing for you and your families.

In the relatively short time that it has been established, we found that the centre and its work have become highly respected and an important reference point in the community. We found the level of care, guidance and support to be outstanding and this is obvious from the moment you walk through the door. A very warm welcome is given to everybody irrespective of their background or needs. The centre does a great deal to bring the community together and it is a very harmonious place where everybody is respected. Many of you told us what a support it has been to you and your families in times of difficulties. Others told us how it had helped you to become more confident and better parents as a result.

You and your children feel extremely safe in the centre because the staff make sure that you are all very well looked after. The arrangements for making sure that everybody is properly safeguarded are exemplary. All the staff and volunteers have been checked to make sure they are suitable to be working with children and all have been trained regularly on child protection.

The centre makes sure that it works very effectively with other agencies such as health and social services to target the right support in time of need and to make sure that children are protected. A particular strength of the centre is the way it works in partnership with a wide range of partners to provide a range of services that are helping you and your children. Many more of you are benefitting from these services every year, although the centre staff are well aware that more needs to be done to make sure that it is reaching even more families and helping all those who are experiencing difficult challenges in life. You can help with this by spreading the word!

We found that the centre takes your views very seriously and acts on them to improve the services they provide. As parents, you also told us that your views are valued and expressed very clearly through the Parents' Forum and the Advisory Board.

You told us how much services such as Baby Massage, Baby Play and Rhyme and the La Leche Breastfeeding Café are helping you to become more confident parents and to bond more easily with your children. Similarly, we found that activities such as Family Links Parenting Puzzle and Play and Learn are providing you with many ideas for playing with your children in more constructive ways. The centre goes out of its way to engage with different groups within the community. For example, the

Saturday 'Dadz and Kidz' club is enabling fathers to spend more quality time with their children.

Activities such as the computer club are helping you to develop more confidence as well as improving skills in information and communication technology. Some of you told us how this has helped you go back to training and into the job market, which is improving the economic stability of your families.

We found that staff are committed and enthusiastic and work very well as team. They are keen to make the activities offered by the centre even better. They are using data well to show that more of you are engaging with the services on offer. Given what has been achieved so far, we are confident that everything is in place for the centre to continue to improve.

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