

Inspection report for Outlooks Children's Centre

Local authority	Dorset County Council
Inspection number	382105
Inspection dates	June 2011
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Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Teresa Bowden
Date of previous inspection	June 2010
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sunbeams Day Nursery (Portland) URN EY333103

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.

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 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

Outlooks Children's Centre was designated in March 2007. Governance is provided by Action for Children on behalf of Dorset County Council. The centre operates as part of a cluster model alongside Mulberry, Westham and Bincombe Children's Centres in Weymouth and is in an area which is within the top 30% most disadvantaged. Its reach area covers the whole of the Isle of Portland and the Wyke Regis area of Weymouth. The centre offers the full range of core services and early years provision is commissioned through a local private provider. The centre also provides on-site crèche facilities for parents attending activities and training.

The local population is mostly White British families with much smaller but growing percentages of other minority ethnic groups. The area has few employment opportunities and a high proportion of families are dependant on low incomes or workless benefits. Typically, children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills just below those expected for their age, particularly in relation to their communication, language and literacy skills.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

3

Main findings

Outlooks Children’s Centre now provides satisfactory services for families as centre leaders and staff have worked hard to make relevant improvements since the last inspection. The care, guidance and support received by users are a particular strength of this centre. Users say they appreciate staff ‘going the extra mile to be helpful’. They truly value the time staff take to listen to and support them when they are at their most vulnerable. The centre offers families some very practical support such as facilities for taking a bath or shower and for washing their clothes; invaluable to families particularly those who may be in temporary accommodation and may not have access to suitable facilities.

Users report they feel very safe while attending the centre. They value the building’s effective security system and a clean, well-maintained environment for their children to play and learn in. The safe and attractive outdoor learning environment is particularly valued by users. Children are kept safer within their homes through the implementation of a home-safety scheme and training for parents in first aid. Parents are supported to conduct risk assessments and suitable equipment is provided in order to reduce risks and prevent household accidents. Staff make good use of records such as the recording of existing injuries to identify appropriate families who would benefit from these services. A comprehensive range of policies and procedures is in place to guide staff in the safeguarding of children and vulnerable families. Overall, staff have an appropriate understanding of how to implement these as they are suitably trained. Families who are subject to child protection intervention achieve satisfactory outcomes as they receive appropriate support.

Centre staff work hard to provide an inclusive service. Since the last inspection, work has been undertaken to identify and engage with a range of families, including those who may be hard to reach. Through consultation with the community, leaders have identified a number of potential barriers to the involvement of more families and are beginning to implement plans to remove these. The number of families known to the centre and accessing services, however, is only a small proportion of families in its reach area. Leaders now make better use of data to identify vulnerable areas of their community. However, they have yet to analyse data sufficiently in order to be

assured that they are targeting their resources appropriately towards those who would most benefit from services. Staff appropriately signpost users to relevant agencies such as Jobcentre Plus for advice on benefits and seeking work. However, given the high levels of unemployment within the reach area, leaders have yet to develop a cohesive strategy to support users to develop the skills needed to increase their employment potential.

Through improved evaluation of service delivery, leaders have a suitable understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and this together with successful actions taken to address deficiencies, shows that the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve further. A suitable service delivery plan is in place which covers most of the centre's key priorities. Action plans have been drawn up in order to inform service delivery. However, not all action plans are of consistent quality and they do not yet include specific, measurable targets in order to drive improvement still further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Sharpen action planning to include specific, measurable targets in order to securely drive improvement and ensure they are all of a consistent quality.
- Develop and implement further strategies in order to improve the numbers of families registered with the centre and those who actively engage in services. Analyse data more rigorously in order to support the targeting of these strategies to ensure the most vulnerable are reached.
- Improve users' economic well-being by implementing strategies which support them to develop skills which increase their potential to secure employment.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Centre staff provide adequate support to users in improving aspects of their health and well-being. Parents are learning about how to provide their families with a healthy diet through initiatives such as 'Grow It, Cook It, Eat It' and 'Creative Cooking'. Several are inspired to develop this further and have cultivated a vegetable patch in the centre's garden where they grow their own vegetables and take them home to eat. This is particularly valuable for those families who do not have access to a garden at home. Parents are beginning to recognise the benefits of physical exercise and make good use of the centre's outside space. They value the improvement to local play parks as a result of the centre's involvement with a local organisation. Users' understanding of the risks from the sun and sea is enhanced as staff provide them with good quality information regarding beach and sun safety. For example, through 'Happy, Healthy, Lifestyles' users look at the importance of using sun cream to protect them from the risk of skin cancer and local lifeguards talk to them about how to keep themselves and their children safe when using the beach. Children develop an awareness of how to keep themselves safe through relevant play

activities such as role playing how to be safe on the 'road' in the garden.

Some users are supported to cease smoking through referral to the 'Smoke Stop' service. However, centre leaders recognise that more needs to be done to promote smoking cessation as levels of smoking remain high within the community. They have begun to develop plans to address this. Parents are making good use of the skills they are learning at the centre to promote their children's emotional good health such as using baby massage to settle their child to sleep.

Parents and their children enjoy learning together. Parents' understanding of how their children develop is increasing through their attendance on parenting programmes and at activities such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Sing and Sign'. Appropriate focus is given to the development of children's communication, language and literacy skills as children's centre teachers give centre staff and local early years providers good support in implementing appropriate programmes. Users are developing key skills in literacy and numeracy through the provision of relevant adult education courses where appropriate provision is made for those who may require extra support. Many users are developing increased confidence in how to manage their children's behaviour in a calm and positive manner due to their attendance on parenting programmes such as 'Incredible Years'. As a result, children show a developing understanding of expectations of behaviour.

Users' views are actively sought; they are listened to and their views taken account of. For example, baby massage courses are provided following a request from a parent; these have proved to be extremely popular. Parents contribute to the governance of the centre as they are well represented on the advisory board. The parents' forum works together well, for example with centre staff, to influence policies and effect change, to enable them to have access to the outside play space at all times. Centre leaders are aware that users have limited opportunities to give back to their community and are working to increase these opportunities by introducing a volunteer programme.

Some users are improving their life chances due to their motivation to move on to further education. A few have developed their confidence to a sufficient level and have been successful in seeking and obtaining work. However, overall support for users wishing to secure employment is limited. In times of financial crisis, families are supported by staff who link with local charities and businesses to obtain furniture, kitchen equipment and shopping vouchers.

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	3
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	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

Centre leaders now make better use of data in order to identify the needs of their local community and develop services to meet these. They have yet to rigorously analyse data in order to fully ensure they are focusing their efforts in the most appropriate places. Outreach workers undertake comprehensive assessments for families who require specific services to ensure their needs are understood and that appropriate services can be delivered.

The centre promotes purposeful learning which is having a positive impact on outcomes for families. For example, parents are empowered to manage their children's behaviour in positive ways as they develop the required skills on parenting courses. Through attendance on a young parents' course, some young parents have been given the motivation to improve their educational development. Despite having left school with no qualifications, they have been inspired to go on to more formal learning and some have moved onto degree courses. Centre staff celebrate users' achievements through the issue of certificates and the recording of 'Wow Moments' for the children. An 'Achievement Tree' has been successfully employed to enable users to recognise and share their own achievements.

Centre staff now make better use of their growing knowledge of the needs of the community and users' views in order to develop services. They provide a suitable range of both universal and targeted services to meet the needs of users. This includes taking services out to the community, for example taking 'Stay and Play' sessions to outreach venues. Centre staff make good use of the partnerships they have developed to ensure users access effective care, guidance and support. For example, families are signposted to the Citizens Advice Bureau which offers practical help and guidance to families in crisis. Families at risk of isolation are well supported to access play provision for their children in a warm and safe environment.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

Centre leaders and the staff team show a clear commitment to improving provision and outcomes for users and the wider community. They are well supported through suitable governance arrangements provided by Action for Children. A clear line management structure is in place and staff receive appropriate levels of professional supervision. Since the last inspection, an advisory board has been established which is fully reflective of key partners. Good use is made of the expertise of board members to help centre leaders understand the needs of the local community and inform the strategic planning of relevant, targeted services. While such planning is appropriate, it is not yet driven by quantifiable targets in order to clearly measure success and ensure it is sufficiently challenged. Systems are now in place to enable staff and leaders to evaluate the suitability and quality of the services they offer. For example, pre- and post-evaluations are carried out for many of the centre's activities to evaluate their impact. The centre canvasses the views of parents, partners and the wider community in order to identify ways in which they can move services forward. They have made a good analysis of the information received and are beginning to develop plans to address the key issues identified.

Centre leaders have recently had to respond to a significant cut in funding. Overall, they have been successful in maintaining a suitable level of service while meeting budget restrictions and the centre represents satisfactory value for money. Leaders are aware that better use of the cluster model and drawing upon expertise centrally from Action for Children will support service delivery still further. Good use is made of the building to deliver services and to host partners. Staff also make good use of local venues to take services out into the community.

Staff sufficiently focus upon promoting equality and diversity. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive appropriate support. Knowledgeable practitioners guide staff in the early identification of children with particular needs who access provision through the local opportunity group. Young parents are well supported through groups dedicated to meet their needs. They value the opportunities these groups give them to form friendships, share their concerns and develop their skills as parents. The provision of a crèche supports parents of young children to access services such as adult learning. Staff have had some success in engaging with fathers, a number of whom are involved in the life of the centre.

Systems are in place to ensure staff suitability and agreements exist with partner agencies to ensure those who work within the centre are suitable to do so. Suitable recruitment procedures are in place and centre leaders ensure staff's ongoing suitability by regularly updating Criminal Records Bureau checks. Risk assessments of both the environment and activities are carried out to ensure the safety of staff, parents and children.

Since the last inspection centre leaders and staff have developed a much improved

relationship with health partners. The centre now has a named health visitor who works closely with staff to identify and support some of the most vulnerable families. For example, she makes suitable referrals for support for families and joint home visits are conducted with outreach workers at the start and finish of targeted pieces of work. The health visitor and midwife now conduct appointments with clients within the children's centre and this has led to an increase in families accessing the centre's services.

Centre leaders have worked hard to engage with the wider community in order to improve community engagement. For example, a community consultation was undertaken and identified a number of barriers to engagement, particularly for some of the more vulnerable members of the community. Participation rates are beginning to increase; however, staff have yet to fully address these barriers in order that they are more successful in reaching out and engaging with a wider range of families.

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	3
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

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

The findings of the inspection of Sunbeams Day Nursery (Portland), the centre's commissioned early years provider, were taken into account when reaching the judgements during this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Outlooks Children's Centre on 8 and 9 June 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Leaders and staff have worked very hard in order to improve the quality of your children's centre since its last inspection. They show clear commitment to developing the services they provide for you and your families. We agree with you that a great strength of this centre is the care, guidance and support that staff provide for you. You told us how much you value the support they give you and that staff are always willing to listen to you and provide you with practical help and guidance when you need it the most.

Centre staff work hard to make sure you and your children remain safe and ensure the building is safe and secure. They also help you to ensure that your homes are safe places for your young children; many of you have benefited from home-safety advice and equipment. Staff are trained in how to safeguard children and management have taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable.

The work of the centre is now guided by a group of parents and professionals who all understand the needs of your community. Together with centre leaders they are developing plans to ensure suitable services are offered to you. However, they now need to make sure that these plans contain clearer targets to ensure that the services they provide are as good as they can be. Centre leaders are beginning to use information about people who use the services at the centre to help them to understand whether or not they are making a difference to your lives. However, at present, an insufficient number of families who live in the area access services at the children's centre.

Staff work well with a range of other professionals in order that you are able to access the support you need. They have worked particularly hard at building a partnership with health visitors and midwives who now offer you appointments to see them in the centre. Staff are also good at directing you to Jobcentre Plus for help with benefits and seeking employment but they now need to do more to help those of you who wish to seek employment to develop relevant skills.

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.