

Inspection report for The Waterside Children's Centre

Local authority	Hampshire County Council
Inspection number	365749
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Armitage

Centre governance	Hampshire County Council
Centre leader	Lindsay Osman
Date of previous inspection	This is the first inspection
Centre address	Ashford Crescent Hythe Southampton SO45 6ET
Telephone number	02380 845247
Fax number	02380 849343
Email address	lindsay.osman@hants.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Waterside Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Fishes at the Waterside

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.

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 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, other staff, the representative of the local authority, and professionals working at and from the centre. They spoke with parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Waterside children's centre is a Phase Two full core offer children's centre which opened in January 2009. It shares its site with Waterside Primary School and the privately run Little Fishes at the Waterside nursery. It is located to the south of Hythe town centre.

There is a wide range of services including those provided by health visitors and midwives, outreach workers, psychologists, specialists in speech and language development, and education and employment organisations. There is an extensive programme of sessions aimed at improving parenting skills. Services are provided at the centre, in users' homes and in neighbouring community buildings. They are available during the day and some are available in the evenings and at weekends. The centre works very closely with local charities and other bodies.

The Centre is governed by the governors of Waterside Primary School on behalf of Hampshire County Council. The centre's budget is devolved in full to the governors and the headteacher is the line manager for the children's centre manager. The headteacher is responsible for the centre manager's performance management including target setting. There is a parents' forum and a practitioners' forum made up of professionals and others, including three parents.

The area is mainly White British. However, there are small numbers of Black and other minority ethnic families, including Poles and Fijians, the latter often linked to the army. There are a number of Traveller families living in permanent housing. Expensive owner-occupied housing often sits alongside social housing.

Unemployment overall in the reach area is 11%, although there is wide variation between wards. Eleven per cent of families are receiving benefits. Both percentages are rising. Children's ability level on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with national expectations.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Waterside Children's Centre is a powerful vehicle for improvement in the community. It provides many highly effective services to a large number of people. Its overall effectiveness is outstanding.

As a result of the outstanding quality of the services it provides in the centre, in homes and in its outreach accommodation, the centre contributes significantly to improvements in all aspects of children's health and the development of healthy lifestyles in families. Children and adults are given many opportunities to achieve and lay sound foundations for their futures. Particularly striking is the way in which staff help users to grow in confidence. Typical of experiences of adults at the centre is this comment from one user who said 'Once, early on, I was going through a really hard time and I phoned the centre to talk and within the same day the outreach worker

came round and phoned over the next few days to check and help me cope.'

Safeguarding procedures in the centre are outstanding, as are the help and support that vulnerable families receive from outreach workers and other professionals working in people's homes. The centre has excellent knowledge of the local community and so staff are able to identify need and deliver help quickly and efficiently.

There is much enjoyment at the centre. Drop-in services such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Songtime' are very much enjoyed by children and their parents. These and other activities also contribute to the excellent work that the centre does to support a respect of diversity. It is impressive to see the way in which people of all ages from very different backgrounds come together, talking, laughing and playing. Respect for, and understanding of, equality and diversity are at the heart of everything the centre does.

Leadership and management of the centre are outstanding. While this has much to do with the people in leadership roles, it also reflects the highly productive relationship with the local authority and linked primary school, which hold the centre to account very effectively and set challenging targets. The local authority's perspective also ensures that proper consideration is given to the needs of the wider community in deciding on the priorities for the centre. The governors give highly effective support. There are extensive links with charities and other organisations working in the reach area. There is regular consultation with centre users and partner agencies and this has had a big impact on provision.

The centre is very successful in all that it does but there are a very few areas where there is still scope to do better. This is recognised in the centre's service delivery plan, which is based on rigorous self-evaluation. Firstly, a lot of work has already gone into improving users' understanding of obesity, and outcomes of this work are good, but it remains a problem. Secondly, in relation to children's skills development, the support given to children's learning across the range of activities is good and outcomes are good. However, the absence of activity planning clearly linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage practice guidance on 'development matters' prevents even better outcomes.

Taking into account the very strong management, the ability to self-evaluate extremely well, the outstanding outcomes and excellent awareness of issues linked to change, equality and diversity, the centre's capacity to improve is outstanding.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In collaboration with health and other services, continue to address the problem of obesity so that all adult centre users have a very clear understanding of how to address it and how to avoid it.
- Where appropriate, link activities more precisely to the Early Years Foundation

Stage 'development matters' practice guidance in order to improve outcomes further.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Outcomes for users are outstanding overall. Parents are very clear about what the centre has done to support health and welfare and every activity provided is, in different ways, aimed at encouraging healthy lifestyles. Consequently, what the centre provides touches a large number of people.

A good example of successful outcomes is the baby clinic run by health visitors. It is very well attended and parents recognise its importance in supporting their child's welfare. 'Bosom Pals' is a very successful breastfeeding support group run by midwives where mothers are very pleased with the help given with feeding and other problems, such as the consequences of being tongue-tied. This is confirmed in a quote from a young mother who said, 'I wouldn't have stuck at breastfeeding if I hadn't had the 'Bosom Pals' for advice.'

Other examples include 'Love and Cuddles Baby Signing', which supports children's mental and emotional development successfully. Centre users are also very pleased with 'Saints Tots' which, run by Southampton Football Club, provides 45 minute exercise sessions for two- and three-year-olds. The sessions contribute, at an early age, to establishing the habit of taking regular exercise. Obesity is a recognised problem in the reach area and the centre does a lot to address it, with a good deal of success. For example, children benefit from parents and carers attending six-week courses such as 'Cook and Eat' and outreach workers and health visitors collaborate well in addressing nutrition and related issues when attending families in their homes. However, more still needs to be done to engage all users in the issue of obesity and to ensure sustained improvement.

The safety of children and their families is paramount at the centre. Families benefit from a well-integrated, highly responsive service provided by outreach professionals who are based at the centre and elsewhere in the reach area. The service is outstandingly good at identifying vulnerable children and their families and then responding quickly and effectively to their needs. This was very evident when inspectors accompanied outreach workers on home visits. 'Teams around the Child', made up of professionals relevant to individual cases, successfully identify and support children with either physical disabilities or safeguarding problems. Professionals are quick to identify where Common Assessment Framework processes are required. The interests of children on the child protection register are very well monitored and supported.

The desire to achieve is present amongst all users of the centre, but centre staff recognise that securing achievement is a difficult path for most. Staff are outstandingly skilful at finding the best ways of helping people of all ages to move forward. So, for example, unemployed single parents overcome fears, gain confidence, meet people and make friends. Users readily report how they have

moved from being an isolated mother to someone now thinking about, or already engaged in, further education and finding a job. The knock-on implications for their children in areas such as emotional health are very clear. The activities of the 'Young Parents' Group' have considerable positive impact on the lives of both parents and their children. There is big demand for help from Jobcentre Plus which is based in the centre; it has considerable success in helping people into employment and providing benefits advice. A good number of adults successfully use the further education facilities at two local colleges, including courses in English as a second language (ESOL).

Users enjoy the centre and there are many examples of how it contributes significantly to personal development. One mother confirmed this when she said, 'My children have made friends. It is a great place to come and have fun.' 'Stay and Play' is very popular with adults and children, as is 'Boogie Mites', where little ones take their first steps in understanding rhythm. 'Buddies' provides a good opportunity for parents and carers to find a friend and supporter to advise on bringing up a child. Parents and children also very much enjoyed the recent gardening course. It covered nutritional and related issues but had double significance in that for some adults, it illustrated for themselves that they could achieve.

Equally evident is the high quality of the centre's contribution to the development of children's skills for the future. All activities for children encourage cooperation and respect and support the development of children's behaviour, which is excellent. More specifically, the centre monitors local profile results at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and links its teaching and other activities to address weaknesses. What the centre does in relation to children's skills development is good. However, the lack of clear links in planned activities to 'development matters' prevents the quality of outcomes being even better. Connections with the linked primary school are excellent. Because of the links, the primary school has an excellent understanding of children and their families as they transfer from the centre. The primary school is able to adjust its provision accordingly to meet children's needs.

Users contribute substantially to decision-making. They are regularly asked what they think about provision in post-provision questionnaires and in an annual review. There is also an active parents' forum which presents views to management. Staff place considerable emphasis on these opinions when planning future activity.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1

The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
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?

1

The centre has excellent knowledge and understanding of the community it serves. The centre has a wealth of data, both from its own sources and the local authority. Feedback from users and the close cooperation and communication between professional staff working in the reach area ensure highly effective assessment of the needs of local families. Excellent links with local charities and other organisations, including schools and pre-schools, also provide accurate information.

The range of activities is wide and their provision at different locations throughout the reach area ensures excellent accessibility. Listing only a few examples of provision aimed at adults illustrates the breadth and its responsiveness to the needs of users and the wider community. The National Childminding Support Group provides an excellent opportunity for otherwise often isolated childminders. It also helps childminders to take higher level qualifications and to support them in applying what they learn to the benefit of the children they care for. 'Reach Out' supports adults as they prepare to return to work and 'Relate' explores with adults how to repair relationships and understand the impact this can have on their families. ROSPA 'Safe at Home' sessions address important safeguarding issues. Outstanding support is provided for children and adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Physical access to the centre and all its facilities is very easy.

Purposeful learning is well illustrated in a programme delivered at an outreach centre for women who have suffered domestic violence. As a result of the course, the women understand better what is happening to them at home and grow in confidence and are better equipped to deal with the aggression. The centre is active and resourceful in attracting hard-to-reach groups. One excellent example is the now popular Dads' Group which meets on Saturdays and the increasing number of fathers who feel comfortable at attending other sessions at the centre. They learn about themselves and how best to support their partners and relate to their children. Outreach workers report increasing involvement of fathers in the work that the outreach workers do with vulnerable families in their homes. The only small weakness in provision relates to the absence of clear links to 'development matters' in the planning of activities for children.

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users is outstanding. Staff in the centre, including those involved in outreach work, are very caring, very knowledgeable and very well trained. There is sympathy for users, but also pragmatism and suitably-tuned challenge. Staff respond well, and often

imaginatively, to the wide range of problems and issues that they meet.

Users recognise the richness of provision. For instance, one said 'There is so much you can do. It gives our baby the opportunity to learn new skills at an early age and gives us the opportunity to meet new people.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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	1
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?

1

The effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels is outstanding. Day-to-day management arrangements run smoothly and are effective. Users appreciate the fact that administration is effective. For instance, one commented that 'staff are very welcoming when you arrive and the room was set up really well and the outside is kept lovely'.

Line management arrangements at every level ensure accountability. Managers have an excellent understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses; the quality of self-evaluation is high. In large part, this is due to the close, critical but supportive relationship between the centre, the linked primary school and the local authority. The relationship ensures that priorities are correctly identified and are well focused on the needs of the vulnerable. Targets are challenging. The proactive involvement of the local authority, which has a county-wide overview of needs, ensures that the interests of the wider community are taken into account when making strategic decisions involving the centre. Equally valuable are the views of users and partner agencies including the local children's partnership. These views are listened to very carefully when deciding provision. The strategic service delivery plan is a suitably challenging document which reflects well the extent to which provision is integrated across different services, with a balance between national and local issues.

The governors provide excellent effective oversight of the centre's business. This includes their significant involvement in helping management address issues arising from the current reorganisation of children's centres in Hampshire.

Safeguarding arrangements at the centre are outstanding and ensure that all

children and adults are safe. The steps the centre has taken to moving towards best practice in its recording and storage of information on staff checks are impressive. There is now a single central register with entries evidenced and checked. It is supported by personnel records held locally by the centre. All staff, volunteers and supply staff have been Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checked. All staff, including the designated person, have received safeguarding training at the appropriate level. There is a clearly written centre child protection policy which serves as an appendix to the local authority's policy. In the wider community, the excellent cooperation between the centre, partner agencies and professionals ensures that the application of safeguarding policies and procedures is very effective.

Equality and diversity are celebrated outstandingly well. A striking feature of sessions is the social mix and the fact that most adults and children, irrespective of background, get on very well with each other. Where there are problems, such as someone new feeling nervous, staff work effectively to find ways of helping them. Books and dolls used in drop-ins such as 'Little Splashes' and toys in the new Toy Library reflect Britain's ethnic diversity. The centre is now working hard to link with increasing numbers of families from minority ethnic groups by home visits and activities such as 'World at The Waterside', which is advertised as 'our new social group for international families. Whether your English is good or limited, we would love to see you'. Midwives and outreach workers on home visits are becoming increasingly skilled at understanding the needs of Fijian and Polish families, and those who have more recently migrated to Britain.

Overall, resources are exceptionally well used; the centre offers outstanding value for money.

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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the	1

integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	
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

Discussions with the reporting inspector for the linked primary school; the headteacher of the linked primary school; and evidence from the inspection of the linked nursery. The purpose of discussions was to examine cooperation with the centre and the impact of this cooperation on outcomes for children.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected The Waterside children's centre on 29–30 June 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for the help that you gave us during the inspection. We spoke to many of you during our time in the centre and other places, and what you told us was very useful. It was clear to us that all of you greatly appreciated the help and advice of many different kinds that staff provide. We agree with you about the outstanding quality of this support.

We were very impressed with the range of help on offer to support your families' health. We saw midwives, health visitors and providers of courses such as 'Cook and Eat' all working very effectively to help you understand how to do the best for yourselves and your children. But obesity is still a problem and we agree with the centre's management that more still needs to be done and we have suggested this as a point for improvement.

We were also impressed by the activities available to help children learn and be ready for school. The outcomes were impressive, with children obviously growing in confidence and understanding. However, we think that this is an area where the centre could still do a little better so we have suggested linking activities more to the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. We also thought that the opportunities for adults to learn more were excellent. It was really good to see how many of you, often in quite difficult circumstances, have used these opportunities to move into more formal education at local colleges and also to find a job.

We looked very carefully at safeguarding arrangements in the centre and in the wider community to make sure that the centre is making sure that you and your children are as safe as possible. We were satisfied that the arrangements are excellent. In the wider community, the work of outreach workers and other professionals working in homes and elsewhere is of very high quality. An excellent feature is the way they cooperate and tailor what they do to the needs of individual children and families.

We saw a lot of fun and happiness at the centre. It is nice to see children from very different backgrounds playing together at sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and equally, it is nice to see adults enjoying their time together and sometimes supporting each other through a difficult moment.

The people who lead and manage the centre do this outstandingly well. There are lots of reasons for this but one of them is the way in which they seek your opinions on how well the centre is doing and whether it is providing the right services to help you. What you say has a big impact on what the centre provides.

Finally, I would like to repeat my thanks and to extend to you and your children my very best wishes for the future.

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