

# Inspection report for Parliament Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Gloucestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	365715
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Lorna Brackstone HMI

<b>Centre governance</b>	Barnardo's
<b>Centre leader</b>	Megan Kenneally-Stone
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	This is the centre's first inspection
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<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Parliament Children's Centre EY422068

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 representatives of the centre's management group, the advisory board, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of the centre.

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

## Information about the centre

The centre is a phase 2 centre which shares the same site as the primary school. Since September 2010 it has been operated by Barnardo's on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council. The centre manager is managed by an assistant director from Barnardo's South West and there is a partnership advisory board. The centre is in an urban area that serves small pockets of deprivation where families are either dependent on workless benefits or low incomes. It operates as a cluster model alongside Painswick and Nailsworth Children's Centres and users are able to access services at all the centres in the cluster. The local population is of mostly White British heritage. Typically, children enter the Nursery with skills well below that expected for their age, particularly in regard to their communication and language development. The centre has a multi-agency approach to working with health professionals, the voluntary and private sectors, the local college and other adult education providers.

## 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

Parliament Children's Centre satisfactorily provides for the children and their families in its area. It has a number of good features, including the ambition, drive and commitment of the centre manager and her team, the safety, care and guidance of families and both their personal and social achievement and enjoyment. The centre works well with partner agencies in order to provide integrated and cohesive services.

This is a popular centre and users speak highly of the services available. Centre staff have taken positive steps to include groups of the community known to them, including young people and vulnerable groups. It meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and diversity. All the services provided are enjoyed by the children and families who attend the centre. Many of the activities focus successfully on soundly developing parenting skills in the local families. These are having a positive impact on developing parents' confidence and the security of their children. Outreach activities provide good levels of support. The needs of vulnerable families are successfully identified by health visitors and they provide guidance and support to them in their own homes. Parents are very appreciative of the friendly approach of the staff and always feel that their concerns are carefully listened to. They comment on the sensible advice which is offered to them and the way that they are directed to seek additional help and guidance. Parents truly value the advice, guidance and support they are given, and as one summed up, 'They have set me right.'

The safeguarding of children and vulnerable users is given good attention because well-trained staff are knowledgeable in these issues. By pointing out dangers in the home and outside, they help parents to understand how to keep their children safe. Centre staff monitor vulnerable children and adults well and this enables them to make an early identification of where support is needed. In times of crisis families are able to remain together because centre staff work closely with social care partners to support them.

Following a period of instability in the management of the centre, senior leaders are gaining a secure understanding of the strengths of the services provided and are developing a satisfactory awareness of what areas need to evolve and further improve. Day-to-day management of the centre is smooth and staff work together as a committed and effective team. Although well placed to offer the centre support and advice, the advisory board has yet to develop an approach which challenges the centre and drives improvement. Data are not used to best effect to support the targeting of services or measure the longer term outcomes on children and their families. Nevertheless, plans for the future are well targeted to bring about improvements and show a satisfactory capacity for future development.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- With the local authority and partners, improve the quality of data to enable effective strategic planning, focused evaluations and a measurement of success.
- Strengthen the role of the advisory board in driving improvement and providing the centre leaders and managers with challenge.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>3</b>
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Parents are beginning to understand how to promote a healthier lifestyle for their families. The 'Healthy Living Adds Up' programme not only provides parents with guidance on how to cook well-balanced meals within tight budgets, but it also supports basic mathematical skills such as weighing and calculating proportions. Children in the nursery provision and those who attend 'drop in' sessions are also developing a satisfactory understanding of healthy lifestyles. The frequent access to a well-equipped outside play area, regular sessions from a specialist sports instructor and the provision of fruit snacks help to prevent obesity in these youngsters because they are exercising and eating sensibly.

The emotional development of both children and their parents is improving. Users report increased levels of confidence because of the support they receive from staff and the activities they engage in, such as working with the Forest School, smoking-cessation support and signposting to specific hospitals and clinics. The monitoring of the progress of any child who has a protection plan, including looked after children and those who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework, is thorough and records are updated with appropriate frequency. Those who are vulnerable to domestic violence receive good support from staff through the 'Freedom' programme and at a personal level. One mother explained that the centre 'actually saved my life' by supporting her through a traumatic abuse situation. Staff sensitively recognise where a user may be at risk and offer appropriate levels of help and support. Information is discreetly accessed when appropriate because it is readily available to users. For example, free condoms are always available in the toilet cubicles.

Users' understanding of how to keep their children safe is developing well because of the good attention paid by staff to this outcome. Many users have successfully reviewed the safety of their home environment such as moving sofas away from windows and keeping windows that open on a latch. The paediatric first-aid training has been well received, particularly by parents who have twins. Children who use the centre's facilities are becoming increasingly aware of their own safety. For example, they are developing an understanding of why they must take turns on balancing equipment. Effective security measures within the centre mean that both children and users are kept safe and this is much appreciated by the families. By highlighting the dangers of too much exposure to the sun through posters and advice on trips out to the zoo and the seaside, the centre is appropriately focusing on a specific priority which has been identified within the locality.

Parents and children enjoy learning together in the 'Twins Time', 'Early Start', and the 'Play and have Fun' sessions. Discussions with users show that these courses are thoroughly enjoyed and they appreciate the opportunity to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. Centre staff and partner agencies have accurately identified a need to focus on developing the communication and language skills of children in the reach area. As a direct consequence of a greater focus on children's language development, the nursery staff report improved standards in communication skills. The close links with the adjacent school enable a smooth transition into schooling. Positive parenting classes and nurture programmes are highly valued because, as one parent reported, 'Talking and listening to other parents helps you to understand it is not just you in the situation.' By attending classes, users improve their ability to make appropriate choices and decisions and gain confidence as parents. As one parent explained, 'I feel better about myself. I am more positive and have the confidence to deal with the challenges of being a mum to a very active toddler.' Users say that they feel that their opinions and suggestions are valued through the Parents' Forum meetings. As one mother explained, 'We feel part of the decision making in the centre – other parents give us ideas – they know who we are – and we can talk to a manager at any time.'

Through the strong, established link with Stroud College some users of the centre have successfully accessed opportunities to engage in training and adult education such as literacy and numeracy courses. Some parents have developed sufficient confidence to move on to achieving formal qualifications. One parent explained how proud she was of the certificate she had achieved. 'I used to get kicked out of school – didn't get kicked out of 'Parents with Prospects'.' The centre reports that the economic stability of some of their users is improving because they receive support with managing their finances. Parents learn how to effectively budget for the weekly shop and families who are in debt appreciate the support they are given by the centre's partnership agencies.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</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>2</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>3</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>3</b>

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

<b>3</b>
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Centre staff and outreach workers develop good relationships with users who describe the children's centre as 'warm and welcoming'. They act as good role models, are sensitive in their approach and know the families who use their services well. Good partnerships exist with a range of key agencies such as health and social care. This means that families who are identified as being in need of support are effectively referred to the children's centre where they access an appropriate range of services. This is exemplified by the proactive referral of vulnerable parents by midwives and health visitors who encourage them to use the services on offer.

There is a good range of courses and activities that promote purposeful learning and development. Centre staff and partner agencies have accurately identified a need to focus on developing the communication and language skills of children in the reach area and have introduced a structured programme to support this. The need to support parenting skills has been accurately identified as a key focus for the centre's activities and the provision in this area is good, both in the centre and as part of the outreach activities. The centre also provides support and friendship for single parents and this helps users to feel that they 'are not alone'.

Multi-agency working ensures that those users who access the services are well supported. There is effective tailored support for parents with children with special educational needs so that users make good personal development and improve their well-being. For example, 'Allsorts' appreciate that the centre not only provides them with a meeting place with good facilities, there is always specialist advice and support on offer. The family activity days during the school holidays are particularly appreciated by parents of children with special educational needs because it helps them feel less isolated as carers. Local childminders appreciate the opportunity to share ideas, help their children to meet other children and for them to participate in fun activities that extend their language and creative skills. There are good links with the adjacent primary school which enhance the children's transition into the

Reception class.

Nevertheless, the data shared between the children’s centre and the local authority are in the early stages of development. Consequently, the baseline profile of local needs and the links to national indicators is limited at present. This means that the centre’s management team is unclear about assessing the precise nature of some of the most vulnerable groups in the area which limits its ability to target services more closely to improving the engagement of these groups. Senior leaders are beginning to gather and record data on the different groups of users they are already reaching in order to target services more effectively. However, the rates of engagement for some users, such as parents who have twins or multiple births who find their sessions invaluable, report that they only heard of the service by word of mouth.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</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>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The centre runs very smoothly and all staff work as a cohesive and experienced team who are fully focused on seeking to improve and recognise the priorities for those who access their development. Leaders and managers know the centre’s major strengths and have a developing understanding of the areas requiring improvement. Plans are suitably targeted and aimed at improving relevant outcomes. Evaluations at the end of sessions gauge parents’ and users’ responses to services. However, this information is not consistently used to monitor the outcomes of target groups or inform the centre’s own self-evaluations of the impact of the services it provides. Clear governance exists with an advisory board providing appropriate levels of support. Nevertheless, its ability to act as a ‘critical friend’ is in the early stages of development. The local authority regularly monitors the centre’s progress and provides both challenge and support. It recognises that the centre’s use of data is not yet sufficiently refined to enable centre staff to have a rounded picture of the needs of the whole community or measure the success of the provision offered.

The welcoming, safe and stimulating environment is used well to ensure that outcomes are never less than satisfactory. This includes the provision of outreach services, which have been effective in engaging some hard-to-reach members of the community, such as fathers, by organising sessions on a Saturday. Although not directly involved, the centre also provides a suitable environment for supervised



meetings between parents and looked after children. The centre satisfactorily allocates its funding to match the needs of the users so that they have the best chance of improving their opportunities in life. For instance, they recognise that users need to develop confidence and self-esteem before accessing return to work programmes. Users' views are sought in order to develop the range of provision within the centre and they have regular opportunities to evaluate the services. This is exemplified by the 'Twins Time' group who have self-funded a session to enable them to maintain consistency in accessing the centre. However, links have not yet been fully exploited to reach out and engage with a wider range of families.

There is a sound focus on promoting equality and diversity. Young parents are supported to access services through groups designed specifically for them. Adults and children with special educational needs and/or difficulties and/or disabilities receive relevant, targeted support in order to improve their skills and life chances. Staff make appropriate use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) when they consider a family may be in need of extra, targeted support. Good relationships with social care and close working relationships with families who are at risk result in children being effectively safeguarded. Those subject to a child protection plan receive good support and services, which has improved outcomes for children and enabled many to remain within their families.

The centre's safeguarding arrangements are good. Common protocols and procedures are used to share concerns with other relevant agencies. There are rigorous procedures in place to recruit and appoint staff who are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</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>2</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>3</b>
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## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

Both the report of Parliament Children’s Centre in March 2008 and the report for Parliament Primary School March 2011 were used to inform judgements.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected Parliament Children’s Centre on 27 and 28 July 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall, with some good features. During the inspection, we talked with parents, staff, partners and a member of the advisory board.

All of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoyed using the centre. It has made a big difference to the lives of many children and their families. For example, families who have experienced domestic abuse are well supported and directed to people who can help. Parents are given good support, especially if managing their children’s behaviour is a difficulty or a child has special needs. These families make good progress in developing a range of strategies that help the family work together. The centre works well with its partners to deliver services such as health and to help parents access employment and further education. You told us how helpful the first-aid courses were and how much you enjoyed meeting other parents. We were impressed how well you developed your knowledge of weighing ingredients and calculating how much a healthy meal would cost whilst learning how to cook at the same time!

The centre is a safe and secure place to visit. Staff are well trained in how to safeguard children and management has taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable.

We noticed that you make a contribution to the running of the centre through the Parents’ Forum and by completing evaluations when you have finished courses. Your suggestions and ideas are listened to and valued. Leaders and managers are determined to make your lives the best they can be and are supported to do this by an advisory board. We have asked the leaders and managers to take greater consideration of the information available to them to improve the services they provide. We have also asked that the advisory board provides a better level of challenge.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak to us to share your thoughts about the centre. We are very grateful and we wish you very success in the future.

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