

# Inspection report for Flying Start Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	367796
<b>Inspection dates</b>	July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jane Burchall HMI

<b>Centre governance</b>	Exeter Community Initiatives
<b>Centre leader</b>	Gentian Sheer
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<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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## 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 Exeter Community Initiatives, 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

Flying Start Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in April 2008. It is governed by Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI), a local charity, on behalf of Devon County Council. It serves an area which, although not deprived overall, has significant pockets of deprivation where families are dependent on either workless benefits or low incomes. The centre serves the St Leonards, Newtown, St David's, St James and Duryard wards of the city of Exeter.

The children's centre building acts mainly as an administrative centre and services are delivered from a range of community venues within the reach area. The local population is mostly White British families with smaller, but growing, percentages of other minority ethnic groups. Numbers of families within the area who speak English as an additional language are increasing. Children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage have typically been low, particularly in regards to their communication, language and literacy development and their personal, social and emotional development.

## Inspection judgements

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

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**2**

## Main findings

Flying Start Children's Centre offers a good service which effectively promotes outcomes for families within its reach area. Staff are extremely skilled at implementing the centre's comprehensive assessment procedures and sensitively assess the individual needs of families. As a result, users are very effectively matched to services which are tailored to meet their needs. Working with the families, staff develop family life plans which empower parents and carers to improve outcomes for themselves and their families. Good relationships between staff and users are evident. Users report that centre staff are warm, welcoming and approachable and say, 'All lovely, right down to the receptionist.' Many liken the relationship they have with staff to that of an extended family.

The centre is governed by a local charity that undertakes a diverse range of work across Exeter. As a result, leaders and managers have a very good knowledge of the needs of the local community. They draw upon this successfully to inform the development of children's centre services. Leaders and managers strive to complement existing provision within the community, developing new services where the need arises. A strength of this children's centre is the central role it plays within the community. Staff deliver the vast majority of services from community venues, providing most families with access to groups within only a short distance from their home. They target their efforts well within areas of high need and have, therefore, successfully engaged with those who benefit from services the most. Management make suitable use of data that is available to them in order to plan services, although they have not undertaken detailed analysis of data to support them to engage all groups within their community.

Users are suitably safeguarded. Leaders ensure that those who have not been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure are never given unsupervised contact with children. Systems are in place to ensure the suitability of staff, volunteers and partner agencies. However, these have not been implemented consistently. While staff working directly with children and their families have undergone checks to ensure their suitability, leaders have not always monitored

procedures sufficiently to ensure that all members of the advisory board and the parents' forum have undergone relevant checks.

Staff and management show high levels of commitment and work extremely well together in order to meet the needs of users. Centre staff regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the services they offer and identify areas for improvement. These are acted upon in order to improve service delivery. The quality of these evaluations varies however, as not all staff evaluate the impact that services have on outcomes for users. Leaders undertake a cycle of self-evaluation in order to measure the quality of provision. Strategic partners and staff are invited to contribute to this process and this feeds into the centre's strategic planning. In the main, the centre has an accurate understanding of its strengths and the areas which require improvement, although, on occasion self-evaluation is too generous. Despite a few remaining weaknesses, leaders and managers show a very strong commitment to improvement. They act swiftly to rectify gaps in provision. As a result, the centre has good capacity to improve further.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Make more effective use of the centre's information and data to ensure services and activities focus on increasing the participation rates of those who have not yet engaged with services.
- Improve the effectiveness of the system of evaluation in order to monitor more explicitly the improvement in outcomes for users.
- Monitor the implementation of recruitment and vetting arrangements to ensure they are consistently applied.

## **How good are outcomes for users?**

<b>2</b>
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Users' understanding of how to promote their good health and that of their families is developing well due to the range of opportunities provided for them to learn about the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Rates of breastfeeding are high in the reach area and those who choose to breastfeed are supported by the centre, for example through a free electric breast pump lending service. Centre staff are proactive in taking health and safety messages out to community groups, and users show an improved understanding of the components of a healthy diet and the importance of exercise. Young parents and children learn how to grow their own food when 'The Harvest Project' visits their 'Little Angelz' group. However, despite concerted efforts, levels of obesity within the reach area remain high. Together with the local authority, staff are developing strategies aimed at addressing this trend, for example delivering the 'Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY)' programme in conjunction with other children's centres. Users' emotional well-being is given good attention. When needed, parents and carers access counselling services and play therapy is provided for children who may require additional emotional support.

Children are kept safer in their homes through the implementation of a 'Safety at Home' scheme run in conjunction with the fire service. Families are provided with a range of free home safety equipment in order to prevent accidents within the home. Users' understanding of fire, home and sun safety is developed as staff deliver 'Travelling health and safety topics' within groups. Families who are at risk of experiencing domestic abuse are supported by trained staff who help them to find a place of safety and instil them with confidence to move their lives forward. Safeguarding of children is adequately promoted and staff work well with those families subject to a child protection plan in order to improve outcomes.

Children and parents enjoy playing and learning together. Through opportunities provided by the centre, parents' understanding of how their child learns and develops is increasing well. Through access to '2gether funding', parents and carers have developed an understanding of how to provide a learning environment at home. With this increased understanding, parents provide their children with improved opportunities to develop independence and confidence by, for example, allowing them to use a camera to capture their view of the world. Children are inquisitive about the world around them. 'Treasure basket' groups enable the very young to explore natural materials and art projects, such as those delivered via the 'Child Forum' which give children good opportunities to express their thoughts and views creatively. Centre staff have rightly prioritised the development of children's social and communication, language and literacy skills as these have been typically low. This has contributed to a rapidly improving picture of children's development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Parents and carers have a voice in the life of the children's centre. Those who sit on the parents' forum say they know their views are '...going to be listened to and implemented'. They feel as though they are truly part of the team and welcome the opportunity to shape services. Parents and carers are empowered to influence provision in the wider community. For example, through campaigning, they have increased opportunities for mothers to breastfeed when they are out and about.

Users express their desire to give something back to the community following the positive experience they have had engaging with the children's centre. They do so through being part of the volunteer programme. As volunteers, users develop skills for employability and some have been successful in gaining employment. Working alongside Jobcentre Plus, Exeter College and Community Volunteering Services (CVS), the 'Money Matters' programme provides a multi-agency approach to support users to improve their financial position through benefits advice and support to secure employment. Users develop their literacy and numeracy skills by attending relevant training programmes provided in conjunction with local providers.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

<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>
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<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</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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Centre staff know users well. This is because they understand their needs as they are very well versed and confident in the completion of assessment procedures. They work particularly effectively alongside health professionals and joint working means that staff have a very good understanding of individual families. Family Support Workers make very good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedures with families who have complex needs. They ensure that they obtain the multi-agency support they need. Community Development Workers effectively assess the needs of community groups and work with them to develop provision that successfully meets the needs of those who live within the locality.

Users' aspirations are raised through their contact with the centre. They are supported to access further training and development, such as literacy and numeracy courses. Children's and adults' achievements are recognised and celebrated. For example, adults receive certificates for their attendance on courses and children have their art work displayed in community venues. A successful volunteer programme has resulted in users developing confidence and the skills needed to return to work.

The centre is well placed within a wider charitable organisation. This enables leaders to access a breadth of information regarding their community to ensure they build services which meet local need. Centre management is creative in the ways in which it develops its services. It engages well with outside agencies and local community groups in order to provide comprehensive and relevant programmes. The members are keen to engage those who are not currently accessing services and, for example, are working with a local housing charity to do so. This good partnership working means that services are well integrated.

Users express how valuable they have found the support offered by the staff in the children's centre, particularly in times of crisis. 'The centre really changed my life. I am really grateful to have them in my life.', 'They will help us with anything,' was not uncommon of the views expressed by users. Staff support users well with practical matters, such as securing accommodation and resolving financial difficulties.

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>1</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>2</b>

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

**2**

The centre is managed by a committed manager who leads a passionate and dedicated staff team. Management systems provide staff with good levels of professional supervision and continuing professional development ensuring they are sufficiently skilled. The centre is governed by a local charity whose senior leaders support the centre's manager in both day-to-day and strategic management. Together with the advisory board, they monitor the quality of services and the implementation of the centre's policies and procedures, although this has not always been fully successful in ensuring consistency in implementing vetting procedures. The membership of the advisory board reflects relevant partners in the locality well. They bring relevant service specific knowledge to the group to influence the direction of the centre, although they do not always present a joined-up view of strategic priorities.

Leadership is strongly focused on promoting a good range of services which are matched to the needs of the community. The strategic direction of the centre is driven by a secure understanding of current community need and already existing local provision. This is supported by information gathered through evaluation of activities and feedback from parents. The local authority challenges leaders and managers to improve. They set relevant, challenging targets in respect of local authority priorities. These are complemented with targets set by the centre. These targets are appropriately based on the priorities for the reach area, although they are not fully grounded in a detailed analysis of data. Progress towards targets is monitored by the advisory board. Members make good use of their local and professional knowledge to question and challenge leaders and managers to improve.

The centre offers good value for money. Staff make very good use of local venues to deliver their services at the heart of the community. A good knowledge of existing provision within the reach area means that services are not duplicated by the centre and that staff are able to suitably signpost users to services that meet their needs.

Centre staff and management have an understanding of the diverse make up of the local community. They draw upon the expertise of Exeter Community Initiatives to support their understanding of how to engage with diverse groups. The reach area



has an increasing population who does not speak English as its first language. Staff have taken some steps in order to ensure their inclusion, for example, by translating key documentation into community languages and engaging translators when speaking with those with little or no English. Staff are aware that barriers to engagement remain for some groups of the community; they have not been fully successful in engaging those from all multi-ethnic groups in their area. Centre staff ensure families who have children with special needs are supported and signpost them to suitable services, such as speech therapy and 'Step-by-Step' groups at neighbouring children's centres. Good use is made of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process to ensure families access the support they need from a range of agencies. Young parents are well supported through the provision of 'Little Angelz', a group specifically designed to meet their needs.

Staff at all levels are trained in child protection procedures. Managers and staff collaborate effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Staff monitor concerns well. Their open and honest approach with families has enabled them to continue to engage with families despite the need to refer safeguarding concerns.

Users' views on the quality of services are regularly sought. These feed into staff's regular evaluation of the effectiveness of the services they offer. Staff act upon identified areas for improvement. Whilst work with individual families is evaluated to measure the impact on outcomes, this approach is not consistently adopted when evaluating all activities. Staff have developed effective partnerships with a good range of relevant agencies in order to provide a range of services to meet the needs of the community. Centre staff work particularly well with health professionals who are sited alongside them, working together they provide relevant support packages for identified families.

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>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>3</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>2</b>

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

Not applicable.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Flying Start Children's Centre on 27 and 28 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that both staff and managers are truly committed to providing you all with a good service and they make a good contribution to improving outcomes for you and your families. Staff understand the needs of the individuals and the community very well. This is because they are very skilled in assessing exactly what you need in order to improve your lives. Staff work closely with other professionals and organisations so that they can offer you the correct support, advice and guidance. You told us how much you value the support you receive and how much you value the good relationships you have with staff who are warm, welcoming and approachable.

We noticed that you make a strong contribution to the running of the centre. You help make decisions through the parents' forum and the advisory board. Staff regularly seek your views about the quality of the services they offer and you tell us that your views are listened to and valued. Many of you wish to give something back to your community and volunteer your services to do so. These experiences and the other activities provided by the centre help you to develop confidence and give you skills to help you find work.

Staff work hard to support you and your families to improve your health. It is clear that many of you have taken positive steps by learning about healthy diets and the benefits of exercise. The centre takes appropriate steps to make sure you and your

children remain safe. Some of you have benefited from the 'Safety at Home' scheme. You have an increased understanding of how to prevent accidents in the home and have been provided with relevant safety equipment to keep your children safe. Others of you have developed your understanding of how to keep your families safe through the 'Travelling health and safety' topics which have been delivered within the groups you attend. The centre has systems in place which ensure those who work directly with you and your families are suitable. However, leaders have not always been consistent in implementing these systems for members of the advisory board or the parents' forum.

We were particularly impressed that staff make sure that almost all of their services are provided from buildings in the heart of your community. This means that they are easy for you to access as many will only be a short distance from your homes. Leaders and managers of the centre know what steps they need to take to improve their services even further and they are determined to make your lives the best they can be. To do this, we have asked them to make sure that all of the services they offer have a positive impact on the lives of you and your families. We have also asked them to make sure that they work even harder at encouraging those who do not yet use their services to do so.

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. We wish you all the best of luck for the future.

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