

# Inspection report for Somerford Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	382092
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mo Roberts HMI

<b>Centre governance</b>	Somerford Primary and Nursery School
<b>Centre leader</b>	Judi Miles
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable.
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Somerford Community Primary School and Nursery 113736
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Little Explorers EY276185

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out the day before 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from partner services and the local authority, as well as talking to parents and carers. They observed the centre's work: activities provided at the centre, in nearby venues including Christchurch West Children's Centre and a local park play scheme; data, documents and policies and safeguarding arrangements.

## Information about the centre

Somerford Children's Centre, one of two children's centres in Christchurch, serves the wards of Purewell and Stanpit, Grange, Highcliffe and Mudeford, and West Highcliffe. This area is ranked within the 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. The centre is located in the heart of the Grange Ward and is an integral part of Somerford Primary Community School and Nursery which provides the governance of the centre in conjunction with an advisory board. This board includes representatives from the centre's partner agencies and parents. The centre provides a core offer of family support, health services, childminder support, adult learning and links with Jobcentre Plus; there are other specialist provisions working from the centre. The Grange Ward, and to a lesser extent the Purewell and Stanpit Ward, experience high levels of social and economic disadvantage; this in stark contrast to the surrounding area which has many retired people who have come to enjoy the coast. The Grange Ward has 4.2% unemployment compared to the borough average of 2.4% and 22% of families are on benefits. The majority of the families are of White British heritage. A high proportion of the children entering early years education do so with skills and knowledge that are below expectations for their age.

Little Explorers is the linked Early Years Foundation Stage provision offering full day care for babies to five-years-old children.

## 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

Somerford Children's Centre is a good children's centre. It makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for local parents and families. The centre takes a holistic approach to encouraging healthy lifestyles and is especially good at promoting enhanced emotional well-being for parents and children. Staff and management show high levels of commitment and are seen to be exceptionally helpful and friendly by the centres users. The centre is accessible and the accommodation is used imaginatively for numerous purposes. Centre staff know the local area and families well and have successful systems to identify and assess their specific needs.

The centre staff work well with other agencies to make sure families receive good joined up care and support. Antenatal classes have brought increasingly large numbers of mothers to be in contact with centre. The impact of the current proposals to reorganise this service require close monitoring to ensure that the centre does not lose this important early opportunity to make contact with local expectant women. This is especially important as breastfeeding rates locally did not reach the target set for 2010.

There is a strong commitment to inclusion, the centre has worked well with people from minority ethnic backgrounds and increasingly with those families who have a child with disabilities. The local authority effectively challenged the centre to improve its work with both disabled parents and carers and children with disabilities and it has succeeded. Data and case studies demonstrate that services are well targeted to ensure the centre reaches the most potentially vulnerable groups in the community.

Centre staff work closely with the on-site day care provision who has successfully piloted the programme for two-year-old funded places for the most vulnerable. This early intervention promptly meets the needs of some of the most potentially

vulnerable children in the community. Transition arrangements, onwards to either the school nursery or local school's Reception classes, are exceptionally good. The continuous tracking of children's learning and development as the children grow up is exemplary, especially at the on-site school. The headteacher takes a strong personal interest in the rate at which each child closes the gap with national expectations for their age. Pupils who started in the children's centre have made good progress. Nevertheless many children, despite their progress at the centre, enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge, skills and understanding well below those typically found.

The learning of parents and carers is excellent and leads to many improving their economic well-being through gaining qualifications through adult learning provided at the centre by various partner organisations.

Warm relationships between staff and centre users are evident and this means they confidently approach staff and talk freely about any problems and issues they face. Centre users reported that they particularly valued the welcome they received from reception staff. Families can have an input into the running of the centre and a notable example is reported later. However, the current governance arrangements do not sufficiently encourage less confident parents to consider participating.

The safeguarding of children is good because staff are alert and up to date with all their necessary training. There is a good referral and information sharing process. This means vulnerable children are quickly identified and referrals to appropriate agencies are prompt. The centre provides a secure place for families undergoing supervised contact and support.

The centre benefits from strong leadership and has demonstrated a good year-on-year capacity to develop and improve. Staff development is well supported and performance management is thorough. Centre users' needs are seen as of paramount importance and staff go the extra mile to help find solutions to the multiple disadvantages parents often face. There is no sense of complacency and the centre's vision is based on respect for all. As one partnership worker said, 'I am so impressed, staff are excellent and provide a non-judgemental place.' This is a centre where families can access highly professional and caring support. The pending reduction of the very skilled senior staff has the potential to impact adversely on the continuity of knowledge about the community and local parents/families unless action is taken to capture this information and sustain continuity.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- With the local authority and partners:
  - ensure the changes planned to maternity care do not have a negative impact on the centre's ability to locate and support mothers who would like to breast feed their babies
  - act promptly to ensure the maintenance and continuity of the good local knowledge about parents/families during the proposed reorganisation of the centre.
- Enhance the involvement of parents and carers in the running of the centre.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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Developing parents' and carers' self-esteem is seen as crucial to improving other aspects of health such as better family nutrition. The 'Incredible Years Parenting Programme' is particularly successful in reducing stress and improving the mental health of parents, carers and children. Parents spoke very positively about the resulting changes in their own behaviour and their relationship with their children. The STEPS (self-esteem course) programme also shows a good impact on all participants; allowing them to take the significant actions to improve their life. The 'Grow it, Cook it, Eat it' project has helped with families confidence in growing, cooking and eating more fruit and vegetables. Parents and children become more active as they take more walks and outings with the centre staff, join in the summer play schemes or participate in the exercise programmes offered for adults and children in the nearby schools.

The centre provides appropriate support for breast feeding through a group called 'Breast Friends', as well as good provision for the babies to enjoy quality play opportunities in the under one group. However, early contact with pregnant mothers is essential to build new mothers' confidence in the centre as a place to seek support.

Children are kept safe in their homes through the support of centre staff who visit homes and help reduce hazards. The centre runs first-aid courses and is in regular contact with the ambulance service located on the adjacent site; this builds centre users' and staff confidence in how to react in an emergency. Parents report that they are confident that their children are safe whilst attending the centre as staff are alert and there are good security arrangements. Safeguarding arrangements are good and made clear to all participants. Excellent support is given to families who are subject to child protection plans and other potentially vulnerable children.

'Stay and play' helps children and adults to enjoy each other's company. Parents said they get ideas they can use at home. Younger parents are also well supported in their joint programme with the other Christchurch children centre. Currently antenatal clinics and parent-craft classes help parents to become comfortable in the

centre and to learn about the changes involved in having a child, but there are health-driven plans to switch to a postnatal-only service at the centre. Children and families are well supported as they make the transition from the centre to day care, nursery or into school. The websites of the centre and the school provide a vibrant and accessible view of what is on offer. They also celebrate the centre users' many successes. This information is also shared through a regular illustrated newsletter.

Parents and carers are supported in making appropriate decisions for their children through the family support provision which is of a particularly high quality. Users say they gain confidence due to the support and opportunities provided by the centre staff, this includes the younger parents. Centre users are able to influence and change aspects of the centre, either by direct approaches to staff or through the parents' forum and then the parents' representation on the advisory committee of the school's governing body. The delightful garden created outside the Solent room came about as a result of parents' requests and sustained involvement. It also successfully involved the local community through sponsorship.

The economic position of some families has improved substantially through the excellent support they have been given by the training partners working with the centre. Brockenhurst College and Dorset Adult Education have had well above average success in helping parents obtain additional qualifications. This in turn has led to a high number of parents re-entering the workforce.

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>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, 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>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>1</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

Very good attention is given to understanding the needs of users through the well-developed assessment procedures. Family support workers spend time getting to know families on a one-to-one basis through home visits, observation and thoughtful discussions. They then identify the best possible support to offer. This often shows imagination and perseverance to ensure that specific needs are identified. Staff are

experienced with and make good use of the Common Assessment Framework process, as well as local preventative programmes which aim to stop children going in and out of social care by focusing on those newly out of care or child protection as well as those close to the threshold for care.

Services have been well honed to meet the local need and are based on the good use of a variety of statistics and data as well as staff's good local knowledge. Customer satisfaction surveys are also well considered. Groups have high attendance levels and the centre is constantly buzzing with people who often progress through a number of groups as their confidence increases. This incremental approach accounts in large measure for the good recruitment to adult education. Centre staff are adept at engaging with groups in the community who have been traditionally hard to reach. The outreach work and the family support workers are used creatively to support those most in need, including the small number of potentially isolated families from other cultures.

Opportunities for personal development are good. The centre is successfully tailoring training provision to meet the needs of specific groups such as the young parents and breastfeeding mothers. Staff are effective at signposting users to local job information, including via the job centre electronic booth in the centre. They are astute and use the next steps programme to help build parents' confidence. Crèche facilities are tailored to provide effective support for parents and carers on courses of varying length. Children show a significantly improved readiness to learn due to attending classes with parents or the attached day-care facility.

Parents could not speak highly enough of the support and guidance provided by the children's centre. Families reported that staff are caring, kind and go the extra mile to support them no matter what the difficulty. This includes families where drugs and/or domestic violence have been an issue. Parents and carers of children with a disability feel supported and the Downs Syndrome Parents' Group especially appreciate the use of the facility and the support they receive. Work with disabled children and the disabled community has been a high priority for the centre in recent months.

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



## How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is well managed on a day-to-day basis. It has clear strategic goals but these are in danger of being undermined as the local authority restructuring of centres takes place and local knowledge is potentially lost. The centre manager is also an assistant headteacher of the school and this has resulted in a coherent and thoughtful approach to providing early support and intervention for the most vulnerable families in the area. The headteacher is proactive in supporting the centre and has supported the vision and implementation of high-quality early interventions, with the specific aim of narrowing the gap in childhood development and learning at the earliest possible moment.

The team is skilled and astute. Its good understanding of the needs of the local community means the team is successful in meeting local needs. The staff have worked hard to develop good partnerships with other agencies. The committee of the governors who formed the centre's advisory body is effective, but this organisational structure means decision making can seem remote to some centre users. The centre is good at promoting equality and diversity, including very encouraging and thoughtful inclusion and support for families with disabilities. The staff also support those who have had problems with substance abuse in the past. The small percentage of families from ethnic minorities finds a friendly welcome.

Professional supervision of staff is exceptionally well organised and includes good use of clinical partners especially where staff are dealing with complex and distressing issues. Centre staff systematically evaluate the effectiveness of their programmes. This work is of an exceptional standard as staff use participant self-reports as well as their own reflective analysis to get to the core of what has worked well and what needs to improve. The management team has correctly identified priority areas for development and its self-evaluation is good, if at times too modest. The local authority, as well as the advisory committee of the governing body, offers the centre appropriate support and challenge that result in prompt action by the leadership team.

Centre staff are well qualified and their good academic knowledge is used to adapt and tailor programmes based on up-to-date and relevant research. Good value is achieved by sharing resources with the school and the day care facility. A toy library is in regular use. Staff actively encourage fathers to participate and have listened to their concerns and plan to relocate the venue for the fathers' group session to a more central location.

Staff are well trained in safeguarding issues and the designated person, from the school's governing body, checks thoroughly to ensure all procedures and processes are of good quality. Checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are thorough and child protection arrangements are secure and updated regularly. The partnerships with agencies to support some of the most vulnerable children in the

reach area are effective. Multi-agency monthly meetings endeavour to ensure no-one slips out of sight. Domestic violence is tackled effectively.

Although centre staff have built a good range of effective partnerships, especially in relation to children's transition into various local schools, the strategic work with the health partners regarding the redevelopment of services is less satisfactory. Users have often been introduced to the children's centre during antenatal visits, and the imminent withdrawal of this service appears to be at odds with the government's vision, as set out in recent guidance, for the health service and children centres.

The wider community supports the centre well. Local businesses helped with the garden redevelopment and centre users felt empowered as their ideas had been implemented. Ideas are taken from the users via the parents' representative to the governing body committee that forms the advisory body. This is too long a route for all parents and users to generally feel fully involved in decision-making.

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

The inspection of the day care provision called Little Explorers on 25 July 2011.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

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

We found that Somerford Children's Centre provides you and your children with good support. The manager and staff work well together and are totally committed to helping you improve your lives. They know you well and are creative in finding the right services and ways to help you. However, we think there is more that can be done to encourage you to help run the centre. The current governance arrangements are quite complex and therefore, despite the useful parents' forum, do not always encourage parents who are more hesitant to have a say in how things are run.

Centre staff have very good links with other agencies and professionals. As a result, they can access a good range of support and guidance for those that need it. We have asked the centre to check that, as the maternity services on offer change, it does not lose the chance to meet expectant mothers before the baby is born. The next group of new mums needs to be as comfortable with the centre as many of you are. They need to visit the centre before the baby comes so they can get help if they need with breastfeeding afterwards. There is currently good support and the 'Breast Friends' group is a very supportive group.

We agree with you that staff are warm and welcoming, even when things have not gone well for you. There is a special commendation for your receptionist who is a cheerful and encouraging presence; she is much appreciated by everyone we spoke to.

Some of you have worked hard on the delightful garden project that the children now enjoy outside the Solent room. I liked the 'yellow brick road'. The 'Grow It, Cook It Eat It' group has also had a good impact on your willingness to introduce some new foods to children and to encourage healthy eating.

The centre staff work hard to establish good links with the schools that children go on to from the centre or from the day care. This means the children have a smooth transition and go on learning as quickly as they can. The staff offer good continuity

for children with specific needs to make sure they get the best support possible as they move on. The headteacher of the local school is exceptionally good at following the progress of all his pupils, including ones who have had help from the centre. We found many of you have done very well in the courses and qualifications offered at the centre – congratulations! It was good to see how many people had gone on to get good jobs and improve the economic well-being of their families. This good adult learning was the single most outstanding element of the centre. The local college has done a good job.

Staff do all they can to make sure you and your children are safe. The road safety campaign and the traffic-calming measures, as well as the first-aid courses, help everyone to look out for children's safety in the neighbourhood. Staff are well trained in how to safeguard children and they diligently check on everyone's appropriateness to be with your children.

We would like to thank all of you who spared time to speak to us and those who came to classes even though it was the first week of the holiday. We would like to extend special thanks to the staff who made us welcome despite the school holidays and the impending changes in the organisation of the two centres in Christchurch. They have worked hard and are doing a good job. The local authority will have recognised that care needs to be taken to ensure all the good local knowledge of the needs of the community that has been built up over the years is not lost as the proposed changes in staffing take place. We wish you every 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).