

Inspection report for Four Villages Children's Centre – Sea Mills

Local authority	Bristol City Council
Inspection number	367800
Inspection dates	10–11 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Sue Russell Locality manager
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable (First inspection)
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sea Mills Early Years day care EY350407
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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 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

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's inspectors and one early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the locality manager and senior leaders of the centre, members of staff and parents. Discussions were held with a representative from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Sea Mills Children's Centre received its designation in March 2007. The centre provides a core offer of family support and childminder support. 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. Levels of worklessness and proportions of families on benefits are comparatively high. Children's levels of development on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage has typically been low, particularly in regards to their communication, language and literacy development and their personal, social and emotional development. The centre is located in a purpose-built building on the Sea Mills housing estate. The early years child care services were inspected in the same week as the children's centre and the report can viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk

The reach of the centre is relatively small and links with two neighbouring children's centres as part of locality working. There is centralised management and administration with one advisory board. Parent and family outreach support is provided across the whole locality by one staff team located at Avonmouth Children's Centre. The current leader manages two other children's centres in the North Bristol 1 locality. A working memorandum has been drawn up for the provision of early years education at the local schools. An advisory board acts as a link between the centre's users and the local authority, which is responsible for governance. At the time of this inspection there has been delay in re-structuring the provision within the locality that has disrupted the services offered.

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

Sea Mills Children's Centre offers a good service which effectively promotes good outcomes for families within its reach area and contributes well to the wider provision within the locality arrangement. The good outcomes are underpinned by effective assessment of users' needs, particularly gathered from home visits and the strong support of parents, carers and childminders. Staff are extremely skilled at

implementing the centre's comprehensive assessment procedures and sensitively assess the needs of individual families. As a result, users are very effectively matched to services which are tailored to meet their needs. Alongside the family, staff develop personal 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 are always available to offer help and advice. Many liken the relationship they have with daycare staff to that of an extended family.

Adults and children enjoy all the centre has to offer, in particular the opportunities to play and learn together. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores in communication, language and literacy are improving rapidly because there is very good emphasis on matching the provision to the learning and development needs of children attending the centre. Adults who engage with the numerous learning programmes are improving their skills at a good rate. This is having a very positive effect on adult users' confidence and self-esteem. Although, there are insufficient learning programmes available at the centre for the groups of users whose literacy and numeracy skills are low. This limits outcomes in this area.

Leaders and managers have a good knowledge of the needs of the local community and have access to the full range of services for children and young people. 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. There has been limited strategic involvement with health service professionals in recent years in tackling low immunisation rates and the oral health of children. This is beginning to be addressed with the opening of a specialist children centre, although a clear strategy for co-working on these issues has not been finalised. A strength of this children's centre is the central role it plays within the community. Staff deliver the vast majority of services from within the locality centres and community venues, providing most families with access to groups within a short distance of their home all year round, including Christmas. They target their efforts well within areas of high need and have, therefore, successfully engaged with the majority of those who benefit from services the most.

Users are suitably safeguarded and systems are in place to ensure the suitability of staff, volunteers and partner agencies. Safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented effectively. As a result, children and users at the centre feel safe and secure.

Staff and management show high levels of commitment and work extremely well together in order to meet the needs of users. Leaders undertake a cycle of self-evaluation in order to measure the quality of provision. Strategic partners, parents and staff are invited to contribute to this process and this feeds into the locality's strategic planning. 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. Some groups, typically fathers, remain harder to reach.

Whilst informal mechanisms for gathering information are well embedded, the managers are not making best use of data from e-start to help them evaluate the impact of their services on groups of users within their community. In the main, the centre has an accurate understanding of its strengths and the areas which require improvement. Despite a few remaining weaknesses, notably in the delivery of universal health services, leaders and managers show a very strong commitment to improvement. Some improved outcomes around key indicators such as mental health, domestic violence and communication language and literacy, along with good-quality joined-up working show 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
 - provide opportunities for families to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in order to support outcomes for their children.
- Improve health outcomes, particularly oral health of children and immunisation rates through:
 - devising a clear strategy in conjunction with health services to address health-related matters
 - providing an effective mechanism for promoting health messages in the community.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Healthy lifestyles are promoted satisfactorily. The importance of exercise is stressed through a varied programme of walks and farm visits. These are favoured by childminders and relatives who care for children and ensure users remain focused on weight management. The Forest Schools project is also very popular with parents and is part of the enhanced provision offer that brings families closer together and emphasises the value of outdoor learning.

The centre offers families a good range of opportunities to learn about healthy eating. Catering staff provide good role models by supporting the cooking from scratch programme. This allows users to progress from a basic level to greater confidence in offering their families healthier options. Those families who engage in this provision report an improved understanding of the components of a healthy diet. Rates of obesity in the reach area remain low. Rates of breastfeeding are lower in the reach area and compared nationally. Those who choose to breastfeed are supported through weekly sessions. This has had a positive impact upon rates of mothers who sustain breastfeeding. Oral health is increasingly promoted through the centre, but measuring the impact of the programme is not undertaken. The centre is aware of those parents in the reach area who are failing to follow up on routine vaccinations and who struggle to give up smoking, but the centre lacks a well

coordinated programme with health visitors to tackle this.

Centre staff place a good focus on the emotional well-being of parents and their children. The Mellow Parenting programme, now in its third year, is highly successful. Retention rates are high and attendance is very good. This programme, combined with My Time, helps parents recognise their needs and increase their self-esteem. Admissions to hospital are higher in the reach area than in the local authority, however, this is reducing. Staff support families who are at risk well to provide them with a place of safety and confidence to take steps to move their lives forward. The high-quality relationships between parents and family support workers help those who suffer from domestic violence develop the skills to manage the safety of their children. Courses on parenting skills (the Peers Early Education Partnership) are well attended and include most of the groups within the community, including other heritage groups and those who have recently arrived in the area. These sessions contribute effectively to the good behaviour of children in the centre. Parents' and carers' understanding of children's emotional well-being is growing as parents and carers see the enjoyment their babies get from the baby massage and play sessions.

Families learn about relevant aspects of safety through good-quality registration systems, accident reporting, fire drills and site risk assessments. The child-specific risk assessments undertaken at the centre are used as an exemplar for other settings. The community development workers promote health and safety well at the stay and play sessions and there is always plenty of interest in the paediatric first-aid training. They have worked successfully with families with child protection plans in the past, although there are currently no children with such a plan, or who are looked after, in the reach area.

Children and parents enjoy playing and learning together. Centre staff have rightly prioritised the development of children's communication and language skills and their social skills as these have been typically low. The toy and book libraries are well supported and there is regular engagement with speech and language therapists that improves outcomes for those who experience speech and language needs. Involvement in the Big Wide Talk, stay and play and community fun days has provided families with well-organised opportunities to understand and develop the home learning environment. Considerable emphasis is given to providing the right provision in the centre to help narrow the gap for some of the lowest achievers. This is a direct result of the centre's work in raising the quality of observation, recording, planning and tracking. As a result, there has been a rapid improvement in the proportions of children going on to meeting expectations in communication, language and literacy and in personal and emotional development. Parents and carers and childminders are developing their understanding of how children learn and develop well. Learning and development records are available to parents, with regular updates on their child's learning journey.

Parents and carers have a voice in the life of the children's centre. Those who attend focus groups say they feel their voice is heard and they are listened to. They feel like they are truly part of the team and welcome the opportunity to shape services. For

example, the Sea Mills play and nature area created by parents provided an opportunity for an under-represented group of dads to be involved in their children's outdoor learning. Users express their desire to give something back to the children's centre following their engagement with services and their positive experience. They do so through being part of the volunteer programme and engaging with level 2 training in childcare. For some this is leading to work supervising crèches.

The centre's role in the life of the community is good. The adults model inclusive behaviour and show respect for each other and are well supported to understand and respect diversity. The staff's obvious enjoyment at being a part of the August fun day, for example, is welcomed by parents who say it makes it easier for them to take part. There are strong links to the minority ethnic groups within the reach area who attend community events and groups. Users have opportunities to develop their skills for employability through volunteering their services within the centre and some are successful in gaining employment. Families experiencing financial difficulties are signposted by staff and are able to access debt management counselling. In the past the centre ran accredited courses for adult literacy and numeracy, but funding streams have dried up. The centre recognises this is a gap in its offer, given that these skills in the area are lower than average, and some users economic stability remains limited.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

2

There are strong and well-established systems for reviewing and responding to adults' and children's needs. Family support workers are extremely skilled at implementing the centre's comprehensive procedures to sensitively assess the needs of users. Alongside the family they develop future plans and show a good understanding of the short-term goals that will strengthen self-esteem and personal confidence. Support workers play a key role in helping families with children with special educational needs, those whose safety is at risk as a result of domestic

violence or who are isolated because they speak little or no English. They use the strengths of individuals to support others in a non-threatening manner, for example through supporting breastfeeding groups, and routines welcoming new users into the centre. Families are effectively matched to services and parents and carers take ownership for improving outcomes for themselves and their family. Centre staff are very well versed and confident in the completion of Common Assessment Framework assessments, as appropriate, which ensure that families with complex needs are able to obtain the multi-agency support they require. Community development workers effectively assess the needs of community groups to ensure they meet the needs of the majority of those who live within the locality.

The achievements of children and adults are recognised and celebrated. Children have their art work displayed in the centre and at community venues. A group of adults from the centre travelled to London to share the impact of a collaborative art-based project, The Big Wide Talk, with Members of Parliament, an experience 'they would never forget'. Events such as a graduation leavers' day celebrate attendance at daycare. The small steps in children's development are regularly captured in photographs displayed in the drop-in room. These serve as an example of how parents can promote young children's learning and development. There are regular exit assessments carried out to help parents on enhanced provision focus on what they have achieved, at groups and workshops. Aspirational targets are in place for language development, supported by key worker observations, speech therapists and regular contact with reach childminders. The good working with local schools to share resources and take part in book weeks is also having a very positive impact on children's language development.

The centre is well placed within a wider locality partnership which enables it to access a breadth of quality information regarding its community to ensure it builds services which meet local need. This includes the range of community needs from 0 to 19. Less is known by centre managers about the universal health services accessed by the families in the area and hence the centre finds it difficult to precisely match what is required in this area of its provision. The structure of this children's centre means that the majority of services are delivered within the local community. This means that most families can easily access groups within a short distance from their homes. Home visits are a part of the parents and families support team's work and this extends to the community special educational needs coordinator's role in supporting families with additional needs. These meetings explore the care and support needs of the whole family.

Users express how valuable they have found the support offered by the staff in the children's centre, particularly in times of crisis. They particularly value their interaction with staff who they say 'make everyone feel welcome' and 'are there to listen to you'. Others commented that 'the staff really care about the families' and 'are always there to offer advice'. 'They will help us with anything' was not uncommon of the feedback received. Staff support users well in securing accommodation and help with financial matters. Robust systems for safeguarding are in place and children are cared for well. The quality of daycare is good. It is tailored

well to the learning and development needs and social skills of the children. As a consequence, behaviour is good and attendance is high at 98%. This has had a positive impact on rapidly rising attainment in communication and social skills.

These are the grades for the quality of the provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

There is clarity about the role of the centre, both at local level and at local authority level. Good-quality strategic planning and service provision are embedded after a period of change. Staff are well supervised and there are clear lines of accountability for the range of users' needs, supported by job descriptions and regular performance management. Service level agreements, as managed through the Common Assessment Framework processes are clear and well understood and there is determined commitment to undertake preventive action as soon as the need arises. The centre has suffered from a lack of capacity within health services and, as a consequence, improved outcomes for health have been slow to develop. Collaborative working with schools is a strong feature of the centre's good approach to inclusivity. Local headteachers attend management board meetings and lend excellent support to transition arrangements and the drive to narrow the gap in children's communication, language and literacy skills.

The strategic direction of the centre is driven by a secure understanding of current community need and already existing local provision. For example, centre managers have a good knowledge of the provision in the city accessed by teenage mothers from the reach area who are not regular users of the centre. The managers have acted swiftly to rectify a shortage of childminders in the area, so enabling more lone parents to access groups. They have been very successful in engaging those from ethnic minority groups, in the stay and play sessions. Community development workers support local community projects to develop their services for families in the area. 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. This is resulting in strong improvements in outcomes, particularly for families in greatest needs. However, the evaluation of activities, largely gathered through observations and feedback from parents, is not sufficiently linked to its impact on outcomes for users. Managers are not yet rigorously using the electronic data that is now available to them, to ensure that they

can track the impact of attendance at groups by different users within their community. The centre completes a cycle of self-evaluation and all relevant parties are invited to contribute, including staff and parents. Self-evaluation feeds into strategic and service delivery planning. However, it does not fully identify the rationale for action that is planned.

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 and the staff monitor concerns well. Early intervention is secure and based on a good knowledge of families in the community and knowledge of those families moving into the area. The discretion and confidentiality of engagement with families dealing with domestic violence build confidence within the community.

Leaders and managers show a strong commitment to improvement and have well-developed plans for the future as part of the wider locality. Morale, despite a period of turbulence, is good. The regular training, which is enabling staff to gain specialist skills, is valued and makes a relevant contribution to safety and care of children. The local authority provides clear steer and direction and maintains a rigorous challenge.

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	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made

during this inspection

The early years and childcare inspection report at Sea Mills Children's Centre on 8 August 2011 was used.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sea Mills Children's Centre on 10 and 11 August 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 help you to improve your lives. Staff work closely with other professionals and organisations so that they can offer you the correct support, advice and guidance. The centre has systems in place which ensure those who work directly with you and your families are suitable. 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 friendly, welcoming and approachable.

We noticed that you make a strong contribution to the running of the centre, for example creating the community garden. It was good to see so many of you involved in helping make the August fun day such an enjoyable and positive experience for everyone. You help make decisions through the discussions held at Chill and Chat, and informally when talking with staff. Your views are valued by the centre managers who take note of them when improving the quality of the services they offer. 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. The centre has successfully encouraged you to take 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 Mellow Parenting scheme and other groups. You have an increased understanding of how to prevent accidents in the home and developed your understanding of how to keep your families safe. We considered that not all of the health-related services are carried out effectively and have asked the centre to strengthen its working with health visitors.

Staff work hard to support you and your families to improve your children's learning and development and prepare them for school. It is clear that many of you have benefited from observing your children at play and this has helped you understand how you can help them make good progress with their communication skills. For some of you this has encouraged you to think about your own futures in returning to education or into employment. We have asked that managers continue to find ways that help you improve your own literacy and numeracy skills.

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 check that all of the services they offer have a positive impact on the lives of you and your families.

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 for the future.

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