

Inspection report for Winterbourne Children's Centre

Local authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	384224
Inspection dates	17–18 August 2011
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Centre governance	Local authority
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	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.

Published: August 2011



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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies, parents and carers. They looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

Winterbourne Children's Centre is situated in the village of Winterbourne on the outskirts of the city of Bristol. It is a phase two, part-time centre and serves a community representing one of the 70% most disadvantaged areas of the country. The centre is part of a cluster of three children's centres, and works closely with Cranleigh Court and Westgate Children's Centres. It was designated on 18 May 2007. Community-based activities take place at the centre and also at two local schools during term time.

The centre is located in an area of mixed housing. Within the reach area, there are small pockets of deprivation and disadvantage among relatively more advantaged areas. The Winterbourne ward is made up of a population of 8,623 people of which there are 960 children aged 5 and under. Unemployment is relatively low. Around a tenth of families within the local area are dependent on workless benefits and a similar proportion represents lone-parent families. The area is served by a number of local amenities such as the Parish Council Community Centre, medical centres and a hospital, a youth centre, out-of-school and holiday clubs and the local Wapley Woods. It has seven local schools, including five primary schools, a secondary school and an independent preparatory school. The majority of families using the centre are White British, with the remaining population being from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds including the Traveller community. A small proportion of users speak English as an additional language. The centre provides most of the core offer of

integrated services including health, family support and adult training. The centre does not provide early years childcare provision. It offers advice and guidance to parents on the daycare and childminding facilities available within the local community. The skills and knowledge with which children enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage are in line with those expected for their age.

The children’s centre is governed by the local authority. The advisory board is made up of a cross-section of professionals, members of the local community, parents and carers. It is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic 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

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

4

Main findings

Winterbourne Children’s Centre is inadequate overall in its effectiveness in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for the wider community. There are significant weaknesses in leadership and management specifically at strategic level.

Arrangements for the governance and accountability of the centre are inadequate. Although the local authority recognised and acknowledged in 2009 that the centre was not being held to account and that strategic planning lacked focus, planned improvements have yet to be realised and so have not yet had an impact on the outcomes for users. The impact of the centre’s work with the local community, in the four years since its designation, has not been evaluated by the local authority. The advisory board is willing, but has not been provided with the necessary training to ask challenging questions and provide the support that the centre needs. The new centre manager has accurately identified the main areas for improvement. However, she has not been provided with the detailed data about the reach area in order to target precisely its provision or measure the impact of their work.

Although the local authority understands what needs to be done to improve, there is insufficient impact on the services provided. In addition, governance and accountability are weak and as a consequence, the centre’s capacity to improve is inadequate.

Despite these significant weaknesses the centre's provision for the small number of families within the reach area with children under five leads to satisfactory outcomes. A period of significant staff changes have contributed to the centre's difficulties. The centre's manager, who has been in post for just over a year, has a clear and well-communicated vision for the centre's development. Since her appointment she has galvanised the staff team and raised morale. As a result, relationships between the team and the centre's users are strong. All users and partners spoken to were keen to explain the very positive changes and the difference the new manager has made. One centre user, summing up the views of many, said, 'The centre has boosted my confidence to look after my grandchild and I seek their help and guidance; it is fabulous.' A particular strength of the centre is its engagement with a small group of volunteers. The centre provided them with appropriate training and gave them opportunities to develop their skills and self-esteem. However, outreach work is very limited in its success, primarily because the centre is not provided with sufficiently detailed information to enable it to be sufficiently proactive. Staffing difficulties restrict outreach work to only a small handful of families. Although the centre has helped and supported families in times of crisis, this work is in response to the needs of the existing users who already attend the centre. Leaders are aware of the need to extend the centre's work to reach more of the local population.

The centre is appropriately focused on safeguarding and takes all the necessary steps to keep children safe. There is a clear understanding among all of the staff to ensure that those at risk of harm receive well-targeted support and guidance. The centre has a positive record of improving the safety of those children subject to a child protection plan. Its commitment to promoting equality and diversity is similarly clear. A bilingual Polish-speaking parent has volunteered to help the centre provide dual-language signs. Forms are available in different languages to enable parents from other cultures to take part in the centre's activities.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the take-up of services offered by the centre by reaching out to and engaging with members of the community who are not currently accessing services, particularly those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.
- Improve the effectiveness of the centre's evaluations by gathering pertinent and precise information and data about the impact of the services offered to outcomes for users.
- Work with the local authority to:
 - develop robust and rigorous governance and accountability arrangements to enable the centre to be both challenged and supported at a strategic level
 - provide training for the advisory board to enable it to challenge and

- support the centre’s work
- provide the centre with relevant local data to enable it to target and tailor its services appropriately to drive improvements.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Users are enthusiastic about the centre’s promotion of healthy diets and regular exercise sessions. Parents and carers acknowledge that their children’s attitudes to healthy eating have improved for example, by encouraging fussy eaters to try out new foods. One parent commented, ‘My child was mainly having pureed food, however the introduction to baby led weaning revolutionised my approach to weaning and opened my child to a new world of food... even enjoying eating olives!’ Physical play sessions, such as ‘Bouncing Bunnies’, are well attended by the core of centre users, who enjoy the opportunity to be active. ‘Buggy Walks’ are undertaken frequently. Evaluations with parents and carers show that users enjoy the sessions on offer. They were able to identify some improvements to their family’s health, such as better diet and increased levels of exercise. The centre’s staff have begun to track outcomes, but it is too early to identify the full impact of the centre’s initiatives. However, the lack of appropriate data from the local authority, such as local live birth data, is hindering the centre’s work to target improvements.

The centre takes appropriate steps to keep children safe, and has clear strategies to instigate child protection arrangements for the small number of children that need them. Common Assessment Procedures are effectively implemented. A range of activities are provided to help parents and carers keep their children safe, which they say help them to feel more confident in looking after their children. Parents and carers are able to improve their own skills in looking after their children through the regular ‘Stay and Play’ sessions.

Children’s progress in their communication, language and literacy skills is particularly well supported by the local library services. The results of local schools’ Early Years Foundation Stage Profiles show an increasing proportion of children are reaching a good level of skills development. Children’s good behaviour is supported through the centre’s activity sessions and individual support from the staff who effectively implement routines and set boundaries. The dads’ group enables fathers to enjoy the centre’s many facilities and take advantage of opportunities to improve their parenting skills. The proportion of dads attending is low but increasing. The centre’s users are represented by a Parents’ Forum, which works in partnership with the staff to improve the centre’s available provision. The group’s membership reflects the social and ethnic backgrounds of the centre’s users. Adults who initially felt isolated or lacked self-confidence now contribute actively to the group’s work. Volunteering opportunities further develop centre users’ personal skills. One parent volunteer has been accepted on an accredited childcare course, supported and guided by the centre, as part of her ambition to become a Sure Start worker. Anecdotal evidence shows that despite the lack of strategic direction, the centre is effective in making a difference to the lives of its core users.

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, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The provision offered by the centre meets the needs and wants of its current users. The adult users' voice is listened to and helps to inform future provision, for example, the planned increase of 'Bouncing Bunnies' sessions, and external visits. 'Stay and Play' sessions are popular with parents and carers, and staff effectively assess and address the needs of families who do attend. The recently started baseline assessment system will enable the centre to measure the impact of its work in partnership with parents and carers. One parent commented, 'The variety of play ideas at Sure Start has given me ideas to use at home and how to stimulate my child further.' However, the proportion of local families engaging with the centre is low. The challenge for the centre is to engage with the large proportion of families in the reach area who are not currently registered, particularly those who may be vulnerable or whose needs are not known.

The centre has established a dads' group, which meets late on a Friday afternoon to enable both working and non-working fathers to attend. This group published a booklet 'Dad's favourite fun activities', written specifically for fathers by fathers, as part of a research project in partnership with Exeter University. Centre staff respond sensitively to feedback from the centre's users. For instance, a debt management course arranged by the centre had a minimal uptake. By renaming the course 'Making more of your money', and removing the stigma of debt, take-up increased dramatically. The centre organises courses to enable parents and carers to gain qualifications, for example in literacy and numeracy, as well as paediatric first aid. Speakers of other languages have opportunities to take courses in English, and the take up of these is increasing. The achievements of both adults and children are recognised and celebrated in the centre and through the local press.

Most of the centre's referrals come from the health visitor, who works closely and effectively with the centre. Other referrals come as a result of growing partnerships

with local schools. Outreach work, led by the centre's own staff, has resulted in six referrals during the past two years. The centre acknowledges the need to increase the rate of this referral work, particularly to draw in vulnerable families, and has recently appointed a further outreach worker.

Families known to the centre are well supported particularly through difficult periods of their lives. 'I would be absolutely lost without the centre,' one user commented. Many parents and carers commented positively about the impact of male staff, particularly in facilitating controlled and safe 'rough and tumble' play and, in the words of a mum, 'promoting positive strategies to divert aggressive behaviour which may have been learnt from other not so positive role models'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

The centre's manager has used her leadership and management experience effectively to ensure the centre's smooth operation on a day-to-day basis. In the short time she has been in post, she has forged a strong staff team that works together cheerfully, with a common purpose. She provides a good level of supervision, including clear and purposeful performance management arrangements. Her appointment is making a clear difference to the centre's effectiveness. She has recognised the need for an ambitious development plan but her work has been hindered by the absence of analysed data and precise information about the reach area.

Although the day-to-day leadership and management of the manager are having a positive impact on the centre's effectiveness, there are serious weaknesses at a strategic level in the role of the local authority and the advisory board. The centre has not been held to account for improving outcomes, and has not received adequate challenge and support to improve the quality of its work, particularly with families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. This lack of strategic direction has meant that most of the centre's work has been reactive. In the past, too little time has been invested in directing the centre's aspirations for improvements or developing ambitious targets. Changes to the local authority's structure, and the absence of any processes to date to determine the centre's

impact, mean that the current governance, accountability and evaluation procedures are ineffective.

The centre’s advisory board is well intentioned, but not all members are confident to challenge and support the work of the centre. Members are insufficiently trained and therefore lack the necessary expertise, for example to take ownership of the centre’s self-evaluation procedures. The board’s composition rightly includes professional partners, members of the community and the centre’s users. However, some members rarely attend board meetings and as a result, there is a lack of continuity and purpose in the board’s work.

Resources are used satisfactorily to provide services for the limited range of users who access the centre’s services. Staff are deployed effectively given the constraints placed upon them, for example their part-time posts at the centre and their responsibilities to all three cluster settings. The environment within the centre is safe and welcoming. However, the partnership with the parish council, as the centre’s landlord, is currently underdeveloped and opportunities are missed to benefit fully from this relationship, for example to improve the physical resources available to the centre. Other partnerships are satisfactory, and improving, as evidenced in the recent productive meeting for headteachers of local primary schools. The partnership with the childminding development worker is also productive, and regular support sessions for local childminders are planned in order to develop expertise and share resources. The partnership with the local authority does not currently provide the centre with enough relevant local data to enable it to target and tailor its services appropriately; this is the main reason why ambitious targets are not set to drive improvements.

The centre’s inclusive ethos is displayed in positive images of a diverse society. This ethos is reflected in the way the staff welcome and support all centre users, whatever their social background, ethnicity or gender. Recent work with the local Traveller community was effective in engaging a more diverse population, although this work ceased when targeted funding was withdrawn.

The centre’s safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. The vetting of staff is secure, and staff are well trained. The centre’s staff are aware of key safeguarding policies and are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that users may encounter. Information is shared appropriately with the relevant agencies, and the centre supports multi-agency working well in order to support vulnerable families and keep children safe. The centre provides information to support victims of domestic violence, although the extent of any instances is unclear.

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	4
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is	4

integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	4
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
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	4

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Winterbourne Children's Centre on 17 and 18 August 2011. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Like you, we were greeted with a warm welcome when we arrived at the centre and found the staff to be very helpful and cheerful. Many of you were keen to talk to us about the services that the centre offers. We were impressed by the very positive comments that you made, especially about your centre's manager and staff. We gathered evidence that you are very satisfied with the service you receive from them. We also talked to the staff, a range of partners and members of your local authority linked to the centre.

Those of you who use the centre say that you have learnt about staying safe and being healthy. Staff provide you with access to training and give advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your homes to keep your children safe. They

are helping you to keep yourselves and your children very healthy by encouraging you to take regular exercise and eat healthy foods. We have asked the centre to keep a careful check on the difference that this is making to your lives.

We think that the centre could do more to reach out to others in your community who could benefit from its support. Currently, only a small proportion of Winterbourne families come to the activities that the centre offers. We understand that there have been many staff changes recently. Once you have a new outreach worker in place, we would like the centre to increase the number of families it helps.

To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked the local authority to strengthen its challenge and support. We have asked the authority to give the centre better information about people who live locally, so that it can make a difference to more young children's lives. We have also asked the local authority to provide training for the advisory board, to help it to support your centre. We were impressed with the work of your Parents' Forum, and how closely you work with the centre staff to improve the activities you can do.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to meet so many of you during the inspection. Those of you that spoke to us are strong supporters of the centre. We hope that you, your children and many more parents and carers in Winterbourne and the surrounding areas will continue to enjoy and benefit from all of the services in the future. Thank you for contributing to our evidence base by sharing your comments and thoughts so openly.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Arnison
Additional inspector

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