

Inspection report for Culm Valley Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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 visited a range of provision at the centre. They held meetings with the manager and staff from the centre, the chair of the Core Purpose Group and partners, including health and early years providers. Inspectors spoke to parents using services provided by the centre or its outreach facility and with senior managers from the local authority responsible for early years and childcare services in the area. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a wide range of relevant data and documentation.

Information about the centre

Culm Valley is managed by Barnardo's on behalf of Devon County Council. It has delivered the full core offer since its designation in October 2009 as a Phase 2 children's centre, serving an area judged to be within the 70% most disadvantaged in the country. The centre serves a large rural area of some 85 square miles with 13 super output areas within its boundary. The largest settlement is Cullompton but there is also an outreach facility based in Uffculme; the population in the reach area has increased by almost 20% in the last ten years.

The socio-economic background of the reach area is mixed. In the index of multiple deprivation, about one quarter of the super output areas fall into the 75% most deprived areas nationally. However, although levels of worklessness and benefit take-up are not high, a feature of the area is that many of the families have low incomes. Most families in the reach area are of White British heritage but there is a significant population of Polish and Lithuanian families living in and around Cullompton.

The centre is based in high quality purpose-built accommodation. It is managed by a core purpose group representing the range of partners working in the centre and

wider reach area. Formal monitoring and evaluation is through the local authority area management structure.

Data from the centre indicate that children's levels of achievement on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision within the reach area is broadly in line with expectations for children of that age, but that there are significant weaknesses relating to communication and language skills.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Culm Valley Children's Centre provides good support to the children and families in the reach area. This reflects the hard work of the staff in developing effective relationships with partners across the range of services provided in this large rural area since the centre was opened. As a result, outreach work at Uffculme and throughout the reach area is a strength. The leaders and staff in the centre use effectively a broad range of outcome data available from the local authority, as well as local knowledge, to develop provision which meets the changing needs of families. This creative provision is appreciated by families using services. An example of this is the commissioning of specific support for families with low incomes regarding the benefits and tax credits available to them.

Provision is increasingly focused on target groups and, as a result, outcomes overall are good, although there is some variability. For example, specific support has been developed for the significant number of families from eastern Europe, particularly Poland, in the area. As a result, over 85% of this group use the services provided, facilitated by a Polish-speaking project worker. However, although the centre has worked with health partners and early years providers on a range of aspects relating to healthy living, the impact of this is yet to be seen and the percentage of children in the Reception year classified as overweight and obese in the area currently remains above average.

The centre is based in high quality accommodation with good resources in a safe environment. Parents who spoke to inspectors appreciated the open and welcoming

nature of the centre and the easy access to advice and guidance, especially at times of crisis.

The core purpose group provides a good level of support and challenge for the centre and represents all partners. The structure of meetings is organised well to ensure that the group receives the information necessary to make decisions about the strategic development of the centre. There is clear evidence of strong parental support through the evaluation of courses and the centre is re-launching a parents' forum, although this is at an early stage. The local authority provides good support and challenge for the centre through a support and monitoring programme, leading to the annual conversation which is securely based on outcome data.

Given the good outcomes overall together with the strong provision and leadership, the centre's overall effectiveness is good and improving. This, together with staff commitment and drive leading to effective team work, good partnerships and accurate self-evaluation, which is increasingly focused on target groups, indicates that the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with partners to reduce the percentage of children in the Reception year classified as overweight or obese.
- Develop the newly formed parents' forum to support further improvements in provision at the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre plays an effective role in the provision of health-related courses and activities with a range of good quality services, offered in partnership with the health authority, that are reaching the large majority of families in its reach area. The centre has used its own survey data to improve services and provide more accessible provision. An example of this was the development of drop-in breastfeeding groups at the centre and an outreach facility on a twice weekly basis. There has also been a focus on supporting breastfeeding amongst the mothers originally from eastern Europe. Mothers appreciated the range of support. As one said: 'The breastfeeding café was invaluable to me. The support I got enabled me to continue breastfeeding. The leader gave me one-to-one help and phoned me at home to offer additional support. It was due to this group that my child's medical condition was picked up. I now come more for the social side and everyone is so kind and supportive. It's good to know I can raise any concerns and not just with feeding but anything.' The overall result of this is that breastfeeding rates across the area have increased and the centre has met its target of supporting the majority of mothers.

However, not all health-related issues currently show this clear impact. The centre continues to work in partnership with health professionals and early years providers on initiatives such as HENRY, a programme for exercise and healthy nutrition, but

the impact of this work has not had time to work through to five-year-olds. Therefore, currently, the percentage of Reception children classified as overweight or obese is higher than the average for the local authority and nationally. Centre leaders are aware that a reduction in the rates of childhood obesity is a priority.

Procedures for ensuring children are safe and their welfare concerns addressed are effective. Project workers across the centre are trained to use the Common Assessment Framework and this is used effectively to ensure integrated support. There are good procedures for all staff on safeguarding requirements. Assessment and recording procedures are comprehensive and secure, including those for children on a protection plan. Effective links with partners have developed aspects of safety and welfare, including Homestart, providing emotional support for parents and SAFE, focusing on domestic violence issues. Most parents feel they can approach centre staff at times of crisis for support. As one said: 'It's really good to discuss issues and not be judged, to share problems and get support.'

The centre has worked effectively with partners to develop children's communication and language skills. Provision has been developed in the centre and outreach base on language development through activities such as 'Sing it Say it' and the programme 'Every Child a Talker', which has involved outreach work with early years providers across the area. The latest outcome data show that there has been a significant improvement in the percentage of children achieving the overall national benchmark in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile so that it is now above the local authority average. Furthermore, outcome data show a narrowing in the achievement gap between the lowest achievers and the rest.

Most parents using the centre express their views and contribute well to decision making whilst undertaking activities through good opportunities for informal evaluations and surveys. For example, a development day held at the beginning of this year involved parents in activities to share their views on planning for improvements at the centre. The centre is developing the role of a parents' forum to support the flow of information about provision although this is at an early stage. The highly creative approaches to support parents and children are helping the majority to develop life skills, economic stability and independence. These range from very specific advice for, for example, families from eastern Europe on employment issues through to commissioned individual support on dealing with debt and living on a low income.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target 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	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal	2

and social development	
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has a good approach to the assessment and review of families' health, welfare, learning development and support needs, with data showing that around three quarters of children aged up to four years within the reach area have benefitted from planned provision in some form. The centre has a good range of data relating to the contact with target groups. This shows excellent engagement with families from eastern Europe and good engagement with young parents, disabled children and fathers but relatively less take-up from lone parents.

Discussions with parents and evaluations from the centre show that parents, including those from target groups, thoroughly enjoy the learning provision and have a good and developing range of opportunities to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills. Activities are firmly based on the needs and interests of families, including parenting, child development and health-related courses. Where appropriate, activities are developed further on a one-to-one basis. Taken overall, the centre is effective in promoting purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for those families who access provision.

An effective range of care, guidance and support is offered by the centre. It is welcoming and bright, with a range of information displayed and shared with parents by centre staff. They are very knowledgeable about the range of services available and skilled in signposting users to appropriate agencies, supporting them further individually if appropriate. This comment from a parent sums up the view of many: 'Being new to Cullompton, the centre enabled me to make friends. It gives me an incentive to get out of the house and gives me somewhere safe to introduce my baby to other children and get support or advice over all things baby related.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Formal governance at the centre is good. The local authority has an effective system of support and challenge, based on the centre's annual conversation and underpinned by a wide range of outcome data, with a strong focus on target groups. The centre manager uses the range of data and information well, with a clear concentration on improving provision. He leads a committed staff who are experienced and qualified to lead on a range of areas. The core purpose group is effective in supporting and challenging the centre to develop provision further and improve outcomes. They are well served by information from the centre manager in order to make strategic decisions. The re-launch of the parents' forum represents the opportunity to develop the information about provision available and use this to improve it further.

The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the work of the centre. Positive images, resources and tailored programmes highlight the centre's determination to support groups who may be subject to discrimination. For example, the Rainbow group supports families from eastern Europe very well. Young parents are supported effectively through a range of activities and fathers are involved in activities on Saturdays, and those spoken to felt included in all other sessions attended. All accommodation within the building is accessible to those with disabilities. A good proportion of children with disabilities in the reach area access the activities offered.

The centre's safeguarding, vetting and recruiting procedures are good. All systems to ensure that children are safe and protected are effective, involve multi-agency cooperation if appropriate and are firmly based on early intervention. Secure and robust recording systems mean that individual records for families are comprehensive and up to date.

The standard of accommodation at the centre is very good and resources of all kinds are used and managed well. Self-evaluation is accurate, based on the effective analysis of outcome data, with an increasing focus on target groups. Overall, the good outcomes and engagement of users, backed by effective leadership and partnership working, mean that the centre provides good value for money.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated,	2

illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

Inspectors used information in the Children's Centre Profile prepared by Devon County Council to make judgements about the outcomes for children and their families in the Culm Valley Children's Centre reach area.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Culm Valley Children's Centre on 28–29 September 2011. We judged the centre as good overall, with a clear focus on improving provision further.

Your children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping families and children in the community. A large proportion of families access the services offered by the centre across the wide area it covers and it was clear that they are well supported to improve their parenting skills and enjoy the opportunities available to them. During the inspection, some of you told us how you had benefited from the support provided by the centre and how you appreciated the work of the staff, often helping you on a one-to-one basis. You told us that centre staff are approachable and welcoming and that relationships are good.

The centre works well to develop services right across the area, linking effectively with the outreach base at Uffculme. That so many of you are registered at the centre is a credit to the commitment of the staff and the strong work with partners from, for example, health and early years providers.

Strong aspects of the centre include the programmes to ensure children are safe, the work to support learning for young children, and support for parenting and

breastfeeding. Support for families who have moved into the area from eastern Europe is excellent. The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the work of the centre. When families find themselves in difficulty, or even in crisis, the centre is able to help them well by providing information and support, including for general and welfare benefits.

The centre manager and staff are good at using the information from families who use provision to improve services provided. The centre itself is a very safe environment for families.

Although outcomes for parents and carers who use the centre are generally good, some aspects could be developed further. For example, the work undertaken by the centre and partners to support healthy living has not had time to work through to show significantly reduced percentages of five year olds who are overweight or obese. However, the centre and its partners need to continue to focus on this to ensure that rates of obesity fall. The newly re-launched parents' forum has an important part to play in developing the provision at the centre by helping leaders understand what you think about the services offered and how these can be improved.

As part of the report, inspectors have made the following specific recommendations to help improve provision at the centre.

- Work with partners to reduce the percentage of children in the Reception year classified as overweight or obese.
- Develop the newly formed parents' forum to support further improvements in provision at the centre.

You can help in improving the work of the centre by continuing to take part in activities that take place there and throughout the wider area, together with offering your views on how they can be made better.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us; we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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