

# Inspection report for St Martin's Garden Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Bath and North East Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	384108
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26–27 October 2011
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	St Martin's Garden Children's Centre EY339058

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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**361**

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

The inspectors held meetings with parents and carers, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, the management and advisory boards, and the local authority.

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

## Information about the centre

St Martin's Garden Children's Centre is on the same site as St Martin's Garden Primary School in the heart of a 30% deprived area. The primary school is inspected separately and inspection reports can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). The centre was originally the nursery for the school, but it was extended and refurbished and was designated in September 2006 as a local authority run children's centre. Of the Lower Super Output Areas the most deprived and least healthy is Foxhill North. In 2008 the centre developed one outreach site at Foxhill Community Centre.

The centre has a nursery on site which offers full daycare 48 weeks of the year from 8.00am to 6.00pm Mondays to Fridays for children aged 3 months to school age. In addition, the centre runs a crèche when needed, an after-school club for children aged 5 to 11 years and provides seasonal care for children until the age of 11. When children join the centre their levels of development are often much lower than would normally be expected for their age. These provisions are inspected separately and inspection reports can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Most families come from White British heritages. However, there is a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds within the community; 15% of the population have a Black or ethnic minority heritage. In the reach area around 5% of the population are children under 5 and around 15% are between the ages of 5 and 15 years.

Locally, 27% of people aged 16 to 74 have no qualifications and about 30% of this age group are economically inactive. Housing is a significant issue with high-priced housing and a lot of poor-quality privately-rented houses; 28% of the population live in rented accommodation. There are diverse levels of affluence. Pockets of the area are extremely wealthy but the majority of households receive benefits, being unemployed or of low income. The centre also serves families facing issues of debt, domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, and lone parenting.

The local authority manages the centre. It has an advisory governing board which has responsibility for the local cluster of three children's centres. The board is made up of representatives from the local community, professional partners, parents and carers.

## 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

This centre ensures good provision for its users and meets the needs of the community it serves well. At St Martin's Garden good well-integrated services are effective in ensuring that arrangements to help the large majority of children learn and develop well. Safeguarding arrangements are particularly thorough and are used exceptionally well to ensure users and staff remain and feel safe at the centre, at home and when out in the community. Nevertheless, the achievement gaps for children across all areas of their learning are not closing rapidly enough for the overall effectiveness of the centre to be outstanding.

Overall, the proportion of children in the reach area are working securely within the range of skills and abilities typically expected for their age and those gaining a good level of development continue to increase above the local and national averages. In the last year the centre has moved away from providing a largely universal service to specifically target those children who are most vulnerable due to their circumstances. Although the impact of these changes cannot be seen in the recently published national data, evaluations of interventions and support, centre data, and partnership feedback clearly demonstrate that greater improvements in achievement have been

made over the last year with these children and their families.

There are good participation rates for all services, and users include the targeted groups and those families that are hardest to reach. Nursery attendance rates at the centre and in the early years services in the community are very high. Parents and carers trust staff to help them and to take care of their children diligently. Because the centre's staff listen carefully to everyone's views, parents and carers are empowered to make important decisions and changes to the centre and their lives. For example, the development of the Foxhill site has reduced family isolation and increased community cohesion. Another example is that children in the nursery learn how to keep themselves safe and use this knowledge very effectively to protect themselves from harm.

Overall the centre provides good care, guidance and support to families and young children. However, when they are most in need of help or protection the service provided is prompt and highly effective. The targeting of services for those who are particularly vulnerable or who have high and complex needs is increasingly precise and successful. This has resulted in significant improvements to the quality of life for those disadvantaged, those vulnerable due to their circumstances and for children or families who have members with a disability.

The centre's leaders and managers have a clear and accurate view of the quality of provision and its impact on improving outcomes for families in the target groups. Nevertheless, some evaluations of interventions and support, provided by partner organisations, are insular, lack sufficient focus on the intended outcomes for individuals, and tend to drift into unnecessary narrative and generalisations. These are in stark contrast to the best in the centre which are succinct, holistic and sharply focused on all of the intended outcomes for children. Centre evaluations highlight what other services are needed by the family including how these have been provided, for example from the Be Happy Be Calm group to the Play Buds group. A trail of provision and outcomes can easily be followed; allowing leaders to reveal what provision or combinations of provision provide best value for money and a good capacity to improve.

The outreach services and Foxhill provision have made a substantial impact on improving the future life chances for families in the area. Nevertheless, the centre is aware that more work needs to be done on improving family literacy and numeracy skills and their understanding of how sounds link with letters. It has already developed provision at the Foxhill site to engage parents in its services, while the planned involvement of teaching staff in January 2012 aims to develop skills which will support lifelong learning. This is an extension of the highly successful work already focusing on families and children that need support to achieve through a home learning environment.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that the quality of self-evaluation by all partners enables them to accurately demonstrate the impact they have on:
  - narrowing achievement gaps across all the outcomes for children
  - increasing levels of access to the children's centre services for those families who need them.
- Enhance the levels of family literacy and numeracy and their understanding of linking sounds with letters, particularly in the Super Output Area.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2
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The centre staff have worked hard to improve the mental and emotional health of families through highly-effective targeted interventions. Closer relationships with midwives over the last year are complemented with the good partnership with health visitors. The centre now has a much earlier contact with families so it is more able to support families before the transition into parenthood. This is clearly demonstrated by the increased number of referrals from health professionals, the earlier rates of families accessing services, and preventative interventions on improving levels of attachment within families. Breastfeeding rates remain high. The centre is aware that the levels of child obesity and the proportion of accidents requiring hospital visits in the Odd Down area are not as low as they might be.

The safety of children and their families is at the heart of the centre's work. The impact of the use of the Common Assessment Framework and the multi-agency cooperation through the Team Around the Child is outstanding. The centre's social worker has been central to developing processes that smooth transitions between services and align parenting programmes in the area and outreach work to best support those most at risk of being unsafe. A big move forward has been having more partners working within the local children's centres rather than in isolated buildings. This is because it allows families to feel more comfortable at the centres, getting to know and trust staff, and then taking greater advantage of the services and support they need.

Transition from the centre's nursery into school is supported effectively. Data from the attached primary school show that children who attended the centre performed better than their peers at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre's teacher and the area's special educational needs coordinator have worked hard over the last year to use data to prioritise support and early interventions in order to reduce achievement gaps. They are rightly focused on being able to demonstrate greater improvement throughout the reach area as well as in the centre's nursery across all areas of children's learning and development.

Excellent role modelling by staff and their warm and enthusiastic welcome for all make the centre a place that parents and carers want to attend. The excellent relationships between adults and the good range of courses on offer at the centre

help a large majority of the parents and carers in the target groups to support their children, acquire new skills, developing their confidence and self-esteem, increasing family stability and independence. Several choose to undertake volunteering, as one Stay and Play volunteer said, 'I felt I got so much out of that I wanted to give something back.' The centre is aware that the levels of literacy and numeracy in some households hinder their future life chances and work has already been planned to improve these outcomes.

Users are very well supported to express their views about how the centre is managed and where improvements could be made. Parents and carers have full involvement through representatives on the governing boards. The infant's voice in assessments has been a recent focus through joint training with professional partners so that even the youngest views are taken into account.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for families*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target 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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

**How good is the provision?**

**2**

Greater sharing of information between health services and the centre, although relatively new, has begun to increase the amount of provision to target interventions as early as possible. For example, the targeted use of the Flying Start programme with families of young children has the capacity to reduce the intensification of need later on by providing lifelong learning skills.

All staff are dedicated and skilled at forming effective relationships with families in difficult situations and in times of crisis. Outreach workers are particularly flexible problem solvers. They are consistently and persistently spotting where other services should be involved and providing support for families most in need. To help aid understanding, augmented communication systems are implemented using signs and symbols, for example in Rhyme Time. Therapy provision through music, along with speech and language development, at the centre is a notable strength.

All group and individual work has specific objectives that are agreed with the family. An excellent example in the nursery is the use of learning diaries and at home the observation records used for children by the parents and carers to help them identify and celebrate their children's achievements. However, some of the partner provision is not so obviously linked into the centre.

There is a good range and variety of services, activities and projects on offer in the locality. There is a regular holiday provision for targeted families and a crèche is available for parents and carers who need to attend sessions or meetings. There is also a good range of advice, guidance and support provided on parenting skills, smoking cessation, drug and alcohol misuse, sexual health, finance, volunteering and how to get into paid work. The Family Information Service and the Citizen's Advice Bureau visit the centre and work with families most effectively to resolve issues around family debt and housing. Because the centre continuously adapts its provision to meet changes in family needs, other activities have only recently started, such as the Dads Club in Bath East, but in all cases the community is consulted to ensure that groups and activities are provided at convenient times.

Consultation with families indicated that they needed more facilities for under fives in the Foxhill area. The centre has arranged for the use of the Foxhill Community Centre for a good variety of services to meet these needs, such as Stay and Play and the Community Café. The development of activities to support adults into work, education and training at Foxhill has been slower to start, but is progressing steadily with the full involvement and shaping of the services with an increasing number of parents and carers.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

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

**2**

Good partnership working, professional supervision and day-to-day management mean that the centre operates smoothly and effectively. Leadership, management and governance are good overall rather than outstanding. This is because although the centre's self-evaluation is accurate and the goals it sets are challenging, with a clear focus on the target groups, the achievement gaps have not narrowed fast enough across all areas of children's learning.



A strength of the leaders and managers at all levels is the involvement of parents and carers, along with the membership of professional partners on the governing and advisory boards. Although the views of users and partners are generally acted upon, the centre leaders and governance rightly focus on its core purpose. For example, the centre rightly decided not to develop another universal Stay and Play session, in spite of requests from parents and carers. It has also grouped with other children's centres to ensure that universal Stay and Play is only available on one day so that families in cars do not move from centre to centre. This is just one of many examples of how the centre uses its resources wisely. It provides good value for money by targeting those known to be most in need, whilst maintaining some services for all so that parents and carers can easily self-refer to other services if they need to.

The centre and its staff promote equality and diversity very effectively. They are responsive to all special, disability and cultural needs. Behaviour is monitored very well to help children and families celebrate differences in increasingly meaningful ways. The centre is well aware and has plans to provide more training so that everyone providing services for the centre is comfortable in using current language around sexuality and race.

Safeguarding and safety arrangements are exemplary. Local authority procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed closely. The centre works in partnership highly effectively with a wide range of agencies to protect children and adults who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. Strong partnership working through outreach workers, along with the provision of cost-free safety devices, such as plug socket covers, has given families practical help to make their homes safer. All staff have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check, have very good levels of awareness through regular training and follow appropriate child protection procedures.

*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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</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>1</b>

<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>1</b>

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

None.

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 St Martin's Garden Centre on 26 and 27 October 2011. We judged the centre as good.

Thank you for helping us to find out about your centre. We enjoyed talking to those of you we were able to meet. The parents and carers that talked with us said your centre was an extremely safe and friendly place. We also found that it has excellent methods to make sure that staff and helpers are suitable, have good training and skills to work with your family.

The way staff work in partnership with other professionals, like the health visitors, social services and the speech and language team is successful. You explained to us how much you trust the staff working at the centre and that everybody 'goes the extra mile' to help you, particularly in times of crisis. You and your children are guided, cared for and supported well.

Your children make good progress in their learning and behave well at the centre. The activities at the centre help to prepare your children successfully for the next stage of their education. They also help you develop a range of skills that are beneficial to your families' futures.

The centre welcomes people from all backgrounds and treats everyone equally fairly. You all have a say in how activities should be organised and have representatives on the boards that make decisions about the centre.

You, along with the leaders and managers, have good ideas about ways to improve the centre. We agree that the most important things are:

- to make sure that all partners that work through the centre can prove how well they help your children and help you access the children's centre services if you need them
- to help families who struggle with their reading, writing and understanding of number.

It was a real pleasure to meet you and your children. We hope that you continue to enjoy and benefit from your time at St Martin's Garden Children's Centre.

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