

# Inspection report for ABC Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Devon
<b>Inspection number</b>	367731
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 November 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mark Lindfield HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Mandy Bowden
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the governing body the core offer monitoring group, manager of the centre, members of staff, parents and carers, local authority officers and partner professionals from other agencies. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The ABC Children's Centre has a main site in St Luke's Church in Buckfastleigh and provides services and activities in Ashburton and neighbouring villages in South Devon. The centre has developed from a mini Sure Start programme and was designated as a Phase 2 children's centre in 2006. A commissioning agreement was set up between the local authority and Action for Children in April 2011 for the delivery of children's centre services. The centre serves an area in the top 50% of areas nationally in regard to levels of deprivation.

The number of children in November 2011 living in the centre's reach area aged five years old or younger is 469. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge that is broadly in line with national averages. The large majority of families are of White British heritage, with a small but increasing proportion of other minority-ethnic heritages over the last three years. Unemployment within the centre's reach area is higher than across the rest of the Teignbridge area with 13% of families with children under five years old dependant on workless benefits. Local indicators show a higher than average number of incidents of domestic violence.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

Overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory with some aspects that are good. The centre is an integral part of the local community and provides a range of services in neighbouring towns and villages. These ensure that the centre attracts the majority of families with children under five years old in the local area to participate in activities and sessions. Users of the centre at the main site and at other venues recognise the support that staff provide in creating warm and friendly environments.

Healthy outcomes for the majority of users of the centre are good. Moving baby clinics from local surgeries to the centre’s sites has enabled staff to meet and get to know a high proportion of families in the area. Staff offer additional services for families as they attend which helps to provide an early response to maintain the health of young children. In particular, health workers and the centre’s Family Health Worker provide good support to mothers to breastfeed their children. Parents and carers spoke of the impact of the timely and speedy response of professionals making follow-up home visits as a vital element in helping them to sustain breastfeeding.

Good-quality planning for sessions with children derives from the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and covers a range of activities to stimulate and develop children’s knowledge and skills. Children’s early language skills are developed through regular, lively and enjoyable singing sessions. Weekly planning for children with Down’s Syndrome provides them with learning activities and sensory experiences closely matched to their individual needs so that they make good progress in their physical and emotional development. Young babies are provided with safe and comfortable areas to play together and explore. ‘Treasure Basket’ sessions help parents to learn about using safe and readily available playing resources and equipment and improve parental understanding of safe and appropriate play resources. Overall, the centre’s sessions ensure children consistently make good progress in developing their social skills and in gaining confidence and independence. The proportion of children in the local area who reach 78 points

across the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with national averages.

The core offer management group and key staff have a sound and accurate grasp of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. They regularly monitor the progress the centre makes to address its key priorities. The centre manager and key staff have maintained a clear focus on providing services for families in the local area despite variations in staffing levels. Within a small staff team, reductions in administrative support, additional responsibilities for the centre's manager and the imminent departure of an outreach worker have made the task of maintaining levels of provision a noteworthy achievement. As a consequence, the centre's capacity to secure further improvements is satisfactory.

The centre gathers feedback from users and the community on an informal basis. Parents and carers are consulted informally about the range of services and activities but their views are not consistently gathered and used effectively to shape and adapt services. Too few families are systematically and routinely engaged in the governance of the centre.

Regular representation at core group meetings by health partners has helped to develop closer links and has improved healthy outcomes for users. For example, partners have worked together to organise a pilot project to address lower rates of immunisation in the local area. Representation at core group management meetings by agencies providing careers and employment advice is underdeveloped. In addition, the governance of the centre does not make full use of available information and data to monitor the impact of the centre's support for the most vulnerable families and those in most need. For example, there is a higher than average incidence of domestic violence locally. While the centre has sensitively displayed information and has helped some families to reduce the risk of occurrence, it has no clearly defined strategy to work with other partners to support and address this issue and identify those in need of support.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Ensure leaders and managers more closely monitor the impact of services on improving outcomes for all vulnerable groups.
- Increase opportunities for parents and carers to contribute their views and opinions, shape services and activities, and influence the strategic direction of the centre.
- Ensure all partners contribute fully to the core offer monitoring group and more actively participate in strategic planning to develop careers advice, develop routes into employment and address rates of domestic violence.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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'Treasure Baskets' and 'Stay and Play', as well as 'Cradle Days' sessions run in conjunction with the local church, are well organised and well received by parents and carers. They are conducted in a welcoming atmosphere so that children attending behave well and respond confidently to staff. The stimulating resources and activities on offer encourage children to play together cooperatively, to share and take turns. As a result, children develop positive relationships and show good overall personal development during activities. Adults describe the centre reducing their sense of isolation by helping them to develop friendships with other families that they maintain over time. Overall, the centre encourages families to play and learn alongside their children and helps to develop adults' social networks and children's social skills well.

The vast majority of pregnant women in the local area attend health clinics, antenatal sessions and go on to attend post-natal sessions run from the centre's sites. Courses such as 'Busy Babies' held at the same time as baby health clinics allow health professionals and centre staff to provide advice, guidance and support. Parents and carers reported how valuable these sessions were in helping them to raise their health concerns and have responses immediately. Referrals from health visitors have helped to support families to reduce their social isolation and improve their emotional health. Parents and carers who have attended 'Breaking Free' sessions report that these have been effective in improving their emotional well-being. Timely guidance from the centre's health and family support worker has been valued by many families and is evident in the steadily increasing proportion of mothers breastfeeding at birth and the above average rates of mothers continuing to breastfeed their children 6 to 12 months after birth.

The centre has been successful in targeting and supporting fathers and male carers. A dads' group runs fortnightly on Saturday mornings and is attended regularly by a number of families. Adults report that the sessions are enjoyable and help to extend their ideas of suitable play activities. These sessions help to provide fathers and male carers with the confidence to attend other sessions as evidenced by the presence of fathers at a range of other activities.

The centre takes care to gather informal feedback from parents and carers to ensure that they are made to feel welcome and included. Parents and carers are expected to regularly provide their evaluations of activities and sessions and these are taken into account in the planning of future sessions. However, parents' and carers' opinions are not routinely sought to shape and develop services at a strategic level.

Parents and carers make satisfactory progress in their education and personal development. There is evidence which shows that some families are improving their levels of confidence to live economically independent lives. The centre has provided 'Care to Learn' support to enable some families to return to college. Staff have completed benefits training and provide advice and support on a one-to-one basis.

Some families have been supported to obtain funding for safety equipment and household items. Parents and carers are provided with good support to help promote the positive behaviour of their children, and regular 'Incredible Years' parenting courses help to develop effective parenting skills.

The centre provides specific events to help families with basic budgeting, understanding credit and avoiding door-step money lenders. Opportunities to help parents and carers into learning and training are more limited. Recent English and information technology courses were accessed by adults from across the local area of all ages and were not sufficiently targeted at those families most in need. The centre can point to advertised adult education programmes aimed specifically at families claiming benefits and living in workless households booked to be held in the next few weeks.

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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>3</b>
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The overall quality of care for children and families is satisfactory. Parents and carers describe the trust and confidence they feel towards the staff and report that they 'don't know what they would have done without the centre'. Several of the activities provided by the centre and partnership agencies are well attended and accessed by a wide range of users from the local area. There is evidence that the centre's support makes a discernible difference for some families, including lone-parent families, families with disabled children and for children with disabled parents. Joint working between outreach workers, health visitors, midwives and a family health worker has resulted in the majority of families, including those from priority groups improving their healthy lifestyles and well-being. However, services are less clearly focused and coordinated around support for local families of young parents and for those with children in workless households.

There is evidence that partnerships with the Family Intervention Team and social care provide support for families where there are child-protection concerns. The centre has developed staff's understanding of the benefits of use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and can provide evidence of an increased initiation of CAFs by centre workers. Staff are regularly invited to attend child-protection meetings and this has been extended to invitations to attend planning meetings with the Family Intervention Team. Home visits are shared between staff at the centre to ensure that families are provided with regular support.

Parents and carers of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by staff in sessions which provide a secure and welcoming environment. Staff work closely with a speech and language therapist and with portage workers to provide early intervention and an organised response for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Local schools report that this coordinated approach helps children to arrive with well-tailored support before they transfer into mainstream settings helping to ensure smooth transition.

A number of teenage parents access a range of services at the various sites. Young parents describe being helped to apply for accommodation and some have been supported to return to college courses. However, the numbers accessing targeted-support sessions specifically for young parents under the age of 22 has declined over the last year.

Children attending activities including crèche sessions are regularly assessed for their progress and interests in the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning. These are carefully recorded in individual folders and accompanied with photographs of significant moments in children's development. As a result, staff are aware of what children need to be provided with from session to session and are able to track their progress and share with families to celebrate children's progress.

The centre provides specific events to help families with basic budgeting, understanding credit and avoiding door-step money lenders. Changes in the levels of external funding have seen reductions in adult-learning opportunities. Recent provision of English and information technology sessions enabled community members of all ages to improve their educational achievement. However, activities are not sufficiently engaging target groups to fully develop their learning and qualifications and progress to further employment, education and training. A number of adults reported that they had not received or been aware of the availability of adult education training courses.



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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

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

<b>3</b>
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There are clear governance arrangements in place. Procedures to evaluate the work of the centre are in place and provide a sound understanding of the centre's relative strengths and weaknesses. The core offer monitoring group is provided with regular assessments on the progress the centre makes against targets agreed with the local authority. These have led to improvements to key areas, most noticeably an increase in the centre's use of the Common Assessment Framework. However, the current plan misses opportunities to identify specific targets to meet the needs of the more deprived areas within the local communities. Senior leaders can provide evidence that they have provided support that has led to improvements for some families facing challenging circumstances.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Recruitment checks are thorough and ensure staff's suitability to work with children and vulnerable adults. The centre displays safeguarding statements at the main site and at other venues so that families are aware of the centre's procedures. Safeguarding training is regularly updated for all staff and is part of the induction process so that all members of the team understand their responsibilities. Staff complete records of their support for families. They have developed their understanding of the Common Assessment Framework and work with social care and the Family Intervention Team to support families where there are child-protection concerns. The recent transition to Action for Children has led to changes in the systems for recording and collating paper records which have not been fully embedded.

The centre has developed services to ensure that it promotes the inclusion of children and families. The centre's easily accessible website has the facility for a reader to translate any page into one of 44 different languages. The high participation rate by families within the local area represents a wide range of users, including lone parents, fathers and children of disabled parents. Staff get to identify the needs of many of these users through the well-organised sessions and their friendly approach. Senior leaders monitor the proportions of different groups of users that attend and report these to the management group.

Provision of targeted support reaches a high number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and regular attendance of a greater number of fathers and male carers than at the majority of other children’s centres in the local authority. The centre’s Early Years professional has ensured that children attending activities make good progress in their social development, physical skills and early speaking and listening skills. This helps to ensure that the gap in achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage between the lowest 20% of children and the rest is in line with the national and local authority averages. As a result, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The centre’s provision of adult training and qualifications has been intermittent. The centre works actively with other local centres and adult education providers to develop suitable training opportunities aimed specifically at families in workless households to develop their employability skills.

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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</b>

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

There were no other inspections of services and Early Years Foundation Stage provision that directly informed these inspection judgements.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the ABC Children's Centre on 9 and 10 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. We enjoyed talking to you during activities and meeting groups of you during some of the sessions. You were clear on your views about the centre and they were very helpful to us. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution to the inspection.

We are pleased to find that the centre provides strong support for families to improve their healthy lifestyles. Staff work hard to meet all of you as you attend services at the centre and at other sites around the area. They work well with health visitors, midwives, portage workers, speech and language therapists to support you and your children. We noted how much you appreciate the help, support and advice of many of the staff at the centre.

It was noticeable how much your children enjoyed spending time at the centre and how much they made friends and played with other children. The sessions that your children attend are well organised and planned carefully to help them develop their social skills and their independence. Many of you said how you and your children had gained in confidence and had had made friends. You also told us how many of you had learnt parenting skills which you were now putting into practice.

Many of you are asked to provide your views on post-its and to give your opinions about individual sessions. We have asked the centre to make sure that more of you are encouraged to give your views at a higher level to improve the work of the centre. We would like to see more of you participating at core offer group monitoring meetings.

We noticed how well health professionals and centre staff work together to improve the lives of many families. We have asked the centre to work more closely with other agencies to reduce the numbers of incidents of domestic violence and to improve the advice and guidance for families to help support them to develop their suitability for employment. We recognise the centre's actions to provide suitable adult education and training courses but these are not widely publicised and, as a result, take-up rates are not as high as they could be.

Mark Lindfield  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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