

Inspection report for Seaforth Children's Centre

Local authority	Sefton
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Sand Dunes Nursery School URN104846
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sand Dunes Nursery Childcare Service EY400808
	Seaforth Children's Centre Creche EY393717

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners; health, education and children's social care professionals.

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

Information about the centre

Seaforth Children's Centre is a Phase One, purpose-built centre on a large housing estate in the Sefton area of Liverpool which was designated in February 2006. It provides the full core offer and the range of services include health services, social care, family play sessions, parenting programmes, outreach services and adult education. Services are provided at the children's centre as well from the All Saints Children Centre, May Logan Healthy Living Centre and other outreach venues. The two children centre managers coordinate services across the reach area to avoid duplication, meet the core purpose of children's centres and to maintain effective partnership with other services. The centre is situated in an area identified as having the highest levels of deprivation and the centre reach area is within the top 7% of deprived communities nationally. Within the reach of the centre there are significant issues surrounding unemployment, youth crime and substance misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy. The population is mostly White British with smaller, but growing, percentages of other ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. Levels of unemployment are high and many of the existing jobs are low paid.

Housing is mostly social or private rental. Most children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are significantly below expectations for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy development. There are links to the seven local primary schools.

The children's centre is managed by the governing body of Sand Dunes Nursery School on behalf of the local authority. The centre operates in a three-centre cluster with All Saints Children's Centre and May Logan Healthy Living Centre which share an advisory board Cambridge Children's Centre that includes providers, delivery partners, voluntary sector organisations, local councillors and members of the local community and users that attend the three children centres.

The centres early years and childcare provision is delivered by Sand Dunes Childcare Service, which is situated next door to the centre. The centre also offers crèche facilities from its onsite childcare provision, Seaforth Children Centre Crèche. Both settings were visited as part of this inspection. The Ofsted report for Sand Dunes Childcare Service from April 2010 judged the childcare provision as outstanding overall and was taken into account for this inspection. This report can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

A key strength of Seaforth Children's Centre is the highly effective staff team who are led and managed very well by an enthusiastic and passionate manager. This enthusiasm and the outstanding commitment to deliver services in partnership has been a significant factor in this centre establishing itself at the heart of the community. The centre has gained the trust of the community and families who use it and who benefit from a range of good quality services. Analysis of the needs of those who use the centre and need crisis support is very thorough. This ensures that services are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs. As a result, outcomes are good overall and outstanding in relation to safety.

Further strengths of the centre's provision and leadership and management include highly effective partnership working; excellent care, guidance and support and robust

implementation of safety and safeguarding procedures. The high priority given to improving parenting skills, particularly of those most in need of support, is having an outstanding impact on the safety of children. One parent commented that her knowledge of safety had improved so much that she was 'creating a safety information board in the reception area which will include the number of alcohol units it is safe to consume up to Christmas'. Services are delivered in an inclusive environment where inequalities are swiftly and effectively removed. Most parents and carers are taking an active interest in their children's learning; women are becoming less isolated and male carers are making informed choices in respect of the services in which they wish to be involved, particularly popular is the 'Dad, lads and lasses group'. There is a sense of enjoyment in all the centre's activities. Adult learners, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances, are making progressing in developing their literacy and numeracy skills. The centre supports parents and carers well in improving their budgeting skills. However, take-up of all adult learning programmes and progression into further educational and employment is less well established than other aspects of economic well-being.

All of the families, including those most vulnerable as a result of their circumstances, are unequivocal in their praise for the centre. 'The centre has changed my life and my children's.' 'It's a wonderful place, staff are brilliant and caring.' 'I've made so many friends and I know I can talk to the staff and share any problems.' 'I enjoy coming and miss it when I do not attend.' These comments are typical of the views expressed by parents and carers and reflect the excellent standard of care, guidance and support that is given. The views of parents and carers are routinely gathered through evaluations and the Parents' Forum. These views are used very effectively to develop provision. However, there are no parents and carers involved in key decision making and support and challenge at a strategic level as there are no parents and carers on the advisory board.

The centre manager has developed a highly motivated and skilled team that has earned the respect of users and partners. They work relentlessly and are securing improving outcomes for families. The centre's own evaluation is relatively accurate and takes full account of feedback from families and the wide range of information provided by the local authority. However, systems for the regular and rigorous analysis of information and data to improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation, and its impact on outcomes for users, are not fully embedded. Nevertheless, there is a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and where further improvement is still required. As a result, the centre's overall effectiveness and capacity to improve are good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase participation rates on adult learning programmes and progression into further education and employment and further develop procedures to track and measure the centre's effectiveness in this area.

- Improve the contribution of parents and carers to the governance of the children's centre by ensuring representation on the advisory board.
- Improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation through the regular and rigorous analysis of information and data.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

An impressive feature of this centre's work is the attention it pays to the emotional health and well-being of families. It is improved by the centre's ongoing support, timely referrals, partnerships with counselling services and effective signposting. These ensure that families receive prompt, high quality, appropriate interventions. 'I was in a bad place and I'm not sure what I would have done without the centre.' 'I want to be a better parent and I now enjoy going out with my child as his behavior has improved.' 'Coming here was one of the best decisions for me and my kids.' These comments evidence how vital the centre has been to them. Families receive good quality health information. Families' attendance at health services, at the centre or through outreach has risen from 573 in 2009/10 to 652 in 2010/11. Breastfeeding rates at initiation has risen from 38% in 2008/9 to 42% in 2010/11. This is due to the excellent links with health professionals, inter-agency working and carefully targeted individual support. Although a range of activities are in place to reduce the numbers of children at risk of obesity in the Reception class such as, family cookery courses, weight management, healthy lunch box sessions and Snackrite events evidence shows only a slight improvement in this area. The centre manger and staff are aware of this and are continually looking at ways to improve outcomes in this area. For example, initiatives such as weaning groups and children-and-parent sessions such as 'Fun Time', 'Baby Massage' and 'Playtime' promote healthy lifestyles among almost all groups of users.

Robust procedures ensure that families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are kept extremely safe. Ongoing and weekly safeguarding discussions ensure that any causes for concern or progress are noted and appropriate action is taken. The whole staff team demonstrates an excellent understanding of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes. Parents of children who are subject to this assessment, looked-after children or a child protection plan are seen as a fundamental to the improvement in outcomes. There is a strong belief in parents and carers as partners. Most parents and carers demonstrate an outstanding understanding of their responsibility to keep their children safe and appreciate that the centre will ensure that they are doing so. Family outreach workers visit all homes in the reach area and help families to understand the benefit of installing small and large safety equipment. Other initiatives include, a 'Stay safe' course, baby health club and attendance at stranger danger, fire safety and fire alarm testing services. In addition, the centre also runs a Webster Stratton programme and Triple P parenting programme in partnership with family support workers. Community police officers deliver sessions on 'Safety awareness in the community' and attend the regular pram walks. The centre is a very happy place to be. Children play well together and adults are respectful and polite to each other.

The centre's work is contributing well to the improvement in learning outcomes, particularly in communication, language and literacy and personal and social emotional development. Effective relationships between the seven local schools and the children's centre ensure that appropriate and targeted interventions are made prior to children entering the school's Early Years Foundation Stage unit. This ensures that children who have attended the centre's targeted pre-school group (PALS) and 'You make a difference' groups are in a better position to learn than those who have not had involvement with the centre. Data collated by the local schools show that the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers is closing steadily. There are good quality programmes to encourage parents and carers to progress into volunteering at the centre and beyond. However, despite some success in parents and carers participating in literacy and numeracy training at Levels 1 and 2, teaching assistants qualifications and soft skills activities, such as cake decorating, jewellery making and nail art, adult learning is a less well-established aspect in the promotion of the users' future economic well-being. The centre is exploring further ways to increase take up of the adult learning opportunities and further develop assessment procedures to measure their success. The regular links and good relationship with 'Sefton at Work' and Jobcentre Plus also contribute to helping adults back into employment and to reducing dependency on benefits.

Strong commitments are made to seeking the views of users and to the evaluation of all activities. Parents and carers state that their contributions are valued and they feel that their opinions really count. They discuss changes that have been made as a result of their comments made to the advisory board via the Parents' Forum. However, due to the lack of parent and carer representation on the advisory board the contribution of parents and carers to the governance of the children centre is limited.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and 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 knows most families in its reach area very well and has excelled in identifying those whose circumstances make them most potentially vulnerable. As a consequence, they are often involved in a significant amount of very intensive family support work. It is as a result of the staff's creativity and outstanding partnership working that despite the intensive work they continue to deliver both a targeted and universal range of services. Outreach work plus effective one-to-one support are making a positive contribution to breaking down barriers, particularly for families from hard-to-engage groups. The positive impact of the outreach service is clearly demonstrated through case studies of their interventions with families most in need of support. The centre has engaged and is delivering coordinated services to its teen parents, such as through its P.I.P.S group. It helps them develop good parenting skills, secure housing, access benefits and financial advice and guidance and make significant progress in their personal and social skills. The sensitive and highly individualised care, guidance and support provided to families are outstanding. Vulnerable families are exceptionally well supported in times of crisis with skilled and committed staff successfully empowering and enabling parents and carers to make significant improvements to their lives.

The children's centre works closely with the co-located school's Early Years Foundation Stage leaders to ensure that play and learning opportunities are of a good quality. The 'Ahead of the Game' group supports parents, carers and children and enables a seamless transition from the centre's activities into nursery. The centre is also used by the local childminding network on a weekly basis. Data held by the schools show that the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers is closing steadily. The headteacher of Sand Dunes Nursery and of Linaker Primary School is confident that the work of the centre is having a positive impact on this outcome.

The majority of adults, including those from target groups and the potentially most vulnerable, are helped to access training and employment information and personal development courses, which is increasing their self-esteem and confidence and securing emotional stability. However, there is limited evidence of increased participation rates on adult learning programmes and progression into further education and employment and procedures to track and measure the centre's effectiveness in this area are still developing.

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.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are consistently good at all levels and outstanding in some aspects. Governance and accountability arrangements are very effective and are clearly understood by staff, users of the centre and partner agencies. Staff are provided with high quality supervision and have access to a wide range of training and development opportunities. Strong leadership and an absolute shared vision generate an enthusiasm within the team, advisory board members and with the centre's partners. As a result, they all view even the most difficult task as a challenge and not a problem. Their good mix of skills, qualifications and knowledge ensures the provision of a holistic service to centre users. Individual strengths are recognised and used to develop services further. This commitment leads to high quality, integrated provision.

There is an excellent range of partner agencies represented on the advisory board such as, providers, delivery partners, an extensive range of voluntary sector organisations, local councillors and members of the local community. As a result, the centre's identified priorities link effectively to those of the wider area, although there are currently no parent representatives. Overall, the local authority and the governing body set and monitor ambitious and challenging targets. However, the centre cannot yet demonstrate that systems for the regular and rigorous analysis of information and data to improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation, and its impact on outcomes for users, are fully embedded.

Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support. Staff are well deployed and utilised ensuring good value for money, the centre manager and senior leadership team remain highly aware of the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the centre.

Inclusion and the accessibility of services provided by the centre are given a high priority. Good support is provided for those families who speak English as an additional language. For example, the centre timetable of activities is translated to specific languages and a translator service is used effectively which leads to improved communication and greater involvement. The centre provides a very effective level of service for the families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities that are known to them.

An excellent commitment to partnership working is the key to this centre's success. They recognise the opportunities and strengths of a wide range of agencies to whom they signpost very effectively. The centre and their partners, particularly those involved in the extended services and early intervention share a common purpose in their pursuit to deliver an outstanding holistic service to the whole family. Representatives from all partner agencies that inspectors met with were unanimous in their praise. They could clearly evidence through case studies the impact the centre was having on improving the lives of families.

The arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding. All legislative requirements are met or exceeded. Staff are very well trained and have access to high levels of support and training. The highly effective implementation of policies and procedures ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults. The excellent multi-agency working is promoting the swift exchange of information for the potentially most vulnerable children, including those with Common Assessment Frameworks and Child Protection Plans. The recording of this information is extremely robust. Detailed risk assessment procedures are conducted for all activities in the centre and at outreach venues. The procedure for home visits and lone working is an example of excellent practice. The administrator at the centre is extremely vigilant and monitors visitors to the centre in addition to monitoring staff when they are lone working in the community. Observations of family support worker contact with families in the centre and on home visits show the openness and transparency which the centre adopts in its work with all families.

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, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	1
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

The most recent inspection report of Sand Dunes Nursery School was considered during the inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Seaforth Children's Centre on 10 - 11 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall with some aspects that are outstanding.

We really enjoyed talking to you in meetings and during the activities we were able to observe. We read so many of your comments following your involvement with the centre. You expressed your views clearly and they were very helpful to us. You told us that the centre staff go out of their way to listen and to act upon your views. We have asked the centre to develop this area of their work further and to ensure that some of you are involved in the governance and decision making of the centre by ensuring a parent representative is on the advisory board. You told us that as a result of coming to the centre you have been given the confidence to go on and make new friends. For some of you these friendships are so supportive that you are not so dependent on the centre. However, you also told us that you still like coming to this friendly, bright and welcoming centre where staff are extremely caring, helpful and friendly. Inspectors agree that this is an accurate picture of the staff team and the environment.

We were very impressed with the outstanding care, guidance and support you receive, particularly during periods in your lives when you are most vulnerable. Led by a very knowledgeable and committed manager, staff at the centre demonstrate an excellent understanding of safety and safeguarding. They work incredibly hard with an exceptionally wide range of partners, such as the health service, social care, community action groups, counselling services and local schools to name but a few. They provide a 'team around the child' approach, which supports the improvements you are trying to make to your lives. We know from the information supplied by the centre that for a very large majority, the safety of your children at home and in the community is outstanding. Evidence shows that there have been significant improvements in your confidence and parenting skills. Your centre provides good support for children to make sure they get a good start in life. Several of you have enjoyed attending courses in English, cake decorating, Indian head massage and computers. However, we found there was still scope for more adults to be involved in the training courses the centre and its partners offer.

The centre also works hard to reach out to families from a wide range of backgrounds to make sure they are included in the services and activities. Assessment of need for those of you involved in the centre is exceptional and is undertaken very sensitively. The senior management team collect lots of information from you, the local authority and its partners and use this information to make the centre as good as it can be. We have, however, asked them to use this information more effectively so that they can more accurately show how the centre is making a difference to you and your families.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us and who allowed us to visit you in your homes. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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