

Inspection report for Moors Edge Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon
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Date of previous inspection	No previous inspection
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Linked school if applicable	none
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	none

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.

An inspection of the co-located 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the manager of the centre, the strategic manager and group manager for Action for Children, a representative of the local authority, the chair of the Core Offer Monitoring Group (advisory board) centre staff and parents. Telephone conversations were held with the local midwives team leader and the Devon Family Learning area coordinator.

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

Information about the centre

Moors Edge Children's Centre is a phase 2 centre that opened in 2007. It moved to its new site on the St Catherine School campus and was designated in 2009. It provides the full core offer of children's and families' services. The responsible provider for the centre changed from Barnardos to Action for Children in April this year. At the same time the reach area changed and no longer includes Chudleigh. This resulted in a much decreased budget and lower levels of staffing. Some families who live near Chudleigh that were registered with Moors Edge Children's Centre still use their services. There have been several managers over the last year. The current Centre Lead took up post this September and also manages the ABC Children's Centre.

Families in the reach are predominantly White British and 97% have English as their first language. There are 9.8% of children living in workless households and 15% of families are in receipt of working families tax credits. There are eight low super

output areas within the children's centre's reach area. Half of the families live within or around the 'rural fringe' estate of Heathfield. The rest live in more rural and isolated areas across the moors to Moretonhampstead. Isolation is a significant factor for some families, especially if they have low incomes. There is a below average proportion of lone parents and of teenage parents in the reach area. The percentage of obese and overweight children in the Reception classes of local schools was 26% in 2008-2009. The proportion of obese children, although similar to that found across Devon and nationally, rose sharply in 2008-09 to 12%. Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with a range of skills and knowledge that is often below that expected for their age. However, the Foundation Stage Profile shows the gap in attainment between the lowest 20% and the rest was 33% in 2010 and in line with Devon and national averages. Foundation Stage Profile scores in 2010 were 60% for children who achieve a total of at least 78 points, with at least 6 points scored in each of the personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy scales.

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

Moors Edge Children's Centre provides a satisfactory range of services and support for families in its reach area. Currently, 57% of families with children under five years of age benefit from the activities and support provided. For these families, care, support and guidance are good and parents and carers regularly comment on how the centre staff have been a tremendous support to them in times of difficulty or just great at giving non-judgemental advice when it is needed most. Parents at the twins and triplets group commented about how important it was to meet other mums in the same circumstances. They are able to share experiences and discuss their children's development with staff who discuss information about, for example, the weaning process. The centre is effective in supporting new mothers in breastfeeding. With the support of staff and trained voluntary 'buddies', an above-average number of mums feel confident to breastfeed their baby. As one mum commented, 'I found the group really useful, it got me out of the house and helped me grow in confidence with my baby.' This good support enables young babies to

enjoy a healthy start to life, along with a good number of activities that help families to develop healthy lifestyles.

The centre plays an important part in supporting children's early learning and development, which is helping to close the gap in children's attainment in the Reception classes. Parents also make good progress in developing their parenting skills. The centre provides a variety of opportunities for parents and carers to understand how their child learns and how to manage their behaviour positively, but there are very few opportunities for adults to extend their own academic learning or to acquire new skills that will help them back into employment.

Parents welcome the safe and friendly environment the centre provides. Staff involve parents in evaluating the work of the centre in a variety of ways, for example through questionnaires and in giving feedback on the activities. The staff respond well to their suggestions and, wherever possible, making changes to meet their needs. Activities are now provided at a pre-school group in Moretonhampstead, for example to meet the needs of the families in the area who find it difficult to travel to the centre. A parent group was established when the centre was first designated, but this is no longer functioning. Parents are not part of the Core Offer Monitoring Group and are not involved in the decision-making process that will help the centre improve.

The centre has gone through a period of significant change. Several changes in leadership, cuts in the budget and the number of staff considerably reduced resulted in some services having to be removed. The staff have worked with parents and partners to establish a new service plan with additional activities due to start shortly. Parents understand the difficulties but are upset that some of the activities they loved have disappeared for the time being. The centre's self-evaluation is fairly accurate and the areas for improvement are appropriately identified. The need to increase the number of families who engage with the centre is a priority and plans are being made to reach out more successfully, but this is in the early stages of development. Clear targets have been set by the local authority for the centre's improvement. All staff are dedicated in meeting the needs of their families and are well motivated to develop the centre's services. The capacity for improvement is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Meet the targets set by the local authority to increase the proportion of parents who participate in the centre's services to 62% of the reach by April 2012.
- Provide courses that support adults' learning in their basic skills of English and mathematics and the knowledge and skills that will support their families' better economic well-being.
- Engage parents and carers in the decision-making process so they support the centre's improvement.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre provides a satisfactory range of activities that promote parents' appreciation of the importance of healthy lifestyles and supports them in developing the skills and enjoyment of cooking healthy meals that their children enjoy. Courses such as Cook 4 Life and the Henry courses focus strongly on these aspects. One parent talked with real enthusiasm of the fun she has now with her children, shopping for the fruit and vegetables they will cook at home together. Cooking is also a regular part of the play and stay sessions and the importance of exercise is explored and enjoyed as part of the Food Fun and Fitness sessions. Helping families to cook healthily on a limited budget is also welcomed by parents and carers and they gain confidence in producing simple meals and snacks. These, and other, activities have successfully helped to reduce the numbers of children starting school either overweight or obese from 11.7 % in 2008-09 to 8.13% in 2010-11.

Midwives are crucial in the identification of families where there is the possibility of mental ill health and/or postnatal depression and the centre staff are quick to offer support. They encourage mums to join in the baby groups, to meet other new mums and to share in the support these friendships bring, as well as the advice of well-trained staff. Running the Early Days group alongside the antenatal clinic is proving very successful in giving this support and reassurance.

There is a good focus on keeping children safe at the centre and in providing information and resources for parents that help them feel more confident in keeping their children safe at home. The centre staff are successful in helping parents recognise potentially dangerous situations and know how to avoid them. Safety equipment, such as safety gates, are freely available. Frontline staff are all trained in child protection and in implementing the Common Assessment Framework, so ensuring that procedures are in place to keep children and families safe. The number of hospital admissions in the area caused by accidents or unexplained circumstances is below average.

Although the centre does not directly run any pre-school groups, all the work with young children is based on the Early Years Foundation Stage developmental stages. Its work with young children contributes well to their learning and development and their readiness for learning. The Foundation Stage Profile scores have shown a steady increase trend over the last four years, increasing from 42.2% in 2008 to 60% in 2010, and the gap between the lowest 20% of children and the rest is closing to broadly average. Children and adults very much enjoy the activities run by the centre. Parents' comments show clearly how their parenting skills have developed. 'My child now speaks to me instead of shouting,' said one, and another commented, 'Now I can see the need to praise.' Parents gain a number of new skills, particularly those linked to parenting. The paediatric first-aid course, for example, was well attended. There are no courses currently however to support parents' and

carers' improvement in English or mathematics or to support adults back into work.

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	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	4
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

Centre staff work closely with midwives and health visitors to identify the need of families within the reach area, particularly those of the most vulnerable. Good inter-agency working to support families who are involved in the Common Assessment Framework process or who have a child protection plan has been further developed. The centre is better informed and involved in the team around the child meetings and child protection conferences. Good signposting by these health professionals is helping young families to access the centre's services. The centre uses parental evaluations and suggestions about what they would enjoy and find useful to develop services that better meet their needs. The difficulties of those who live in isolated areas of the reach area are well understood and the centre makes every effort to help them to access the services, either paying for taxis or providing transport when a real need is identified.

The proportion of teenage parents is fairly small in the reach area but the 'Parents with Prospects' group was one of the centre's most successful courses in supporting young parents in broadening their horizons and included both mums and a dad. Good links with other partners such as the Citizens Advice Bureau is supporting those families with financial difficulties. Advice on how to cope with debt and to access benefits is helping families to be more financially independent. For example, the Citizens Advice Bureau's 'Ten Top Tips' for managing the financial demands of Christmas is planned for the end of November. Links with Jobcentre Plus are positive, if rather limited, and information about job vacancies is distributed at all the regular activities.

Relationships between the centre staff and its families are positive and trusting.

Parents are very appreciative of the centre's work and a recent questionnaire shows 98% of families who responded were satisfied overall with the services provided. The centre gives clear advice about the dangers of smoking and signposts adults to local doctors' surgeries if they want to quit. Staff are trained in providing support for those who are affected by domestic violence and give support and advice if required.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The staff team at Moors Edge is still very new and procedures for supervision meetings are only just beginning to be implemented. The staff are, however, highly committed to the successful support of all their families and children. Regular professional training is enabling the staff to meet the needs of the families and the use of trained volunteers is extending the support that can be provided. Good working arrangements with the centre's partners enable the centre staff to review their work and to seek ways to further develop their services. The centre works with the Moretonhampstead pre-school group and good links with two of the local primary schools are enabling the centre to use other venues, when required, for their community days for example.

The Core Offer Monitoring Group is well informed about the centre's provision and uses a variety of effective systems to monitor its work and support staff in its development. The Core Offer Monitoring Group monitors finances effectively, scrutinising activities to ensure they provide value for money. But, as currently the centre is only engaging with just over half of the families in the reach area and outcomes for these families are satisfactory overall, value for money is only satisfactory at present. Good links with other centres in the locality are enabling staff expertise to be shared. This is fairly new but developing well and so is the opportunity for staff to meet regularly and share ideas and procedures. The activities for dads, for example, are soon to be shared with the ABC Children's Centre so more frequent events can be held.

Safeguarding is good. There is strong focus on keeping children safe and in promoting the emotional well-being of parents and carers and thus the well-being of the children. Policies are clear, staff are appropriately trained and procedures for safeguarding children and supporting vulnerable families are well understood. Staff recruitment is carried out appropriately and good focus is given to ensuring all adults

who work with the children are suitable and appropriately qualified. The centre site is very secure and its premises and resources checked regularly. There are good partnerships with the various agencies and outreach workers who work together with the centre staff to share information about the families and children so that they are well supported.

Families of all backgrounds are made to feel welcome in the centre. The small proportion of families with children or adults who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are successfully supported. There is a small, but increasing, proportion of families who speak English as an additional language in the reach area. Those who use the services are confident of a warm welcome and support.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	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	3
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	3

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Moors Edge Children's Centre on 16 and 17 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to chat to us and tell us about the activities you enjoy at the centre. We can see that you are very pleased with the support and advice the staff give you and that you really love the opportunity to meet other parents. You also told us how worthwhile it has been for your children to meet other children so they can learn to play happily.

We can see from your many comments after the activities that you are very pleased with what the centre has to offer especially the 'Treasure Basket' activities and baby massage groups. The courses that have helped you learn about cooking healthy meals on a budget have also been very successful. We could see that a good number of you found the first-aid elements of many of the activities and the first-aid course very helpful in understanding how to keep your family safe. Several of you that we spoke to talked about how great the staff are in giving advice and that you felt really confident now in being mums. The sessions on understanding how your child is learning and how to manage their behaviour has played an important part in making family life much happier.

We have seen that the care, support and guidance the centre staff provide are good. Several parents told us how important it has been for them to be given the opportunity to get to the activities with the support of the voluntary driver because they had no means of getting there themselves. Relationships between the staff and you and your families are very good and we saw the warm welcome that all visitors to the centre receive. The centre is a safe place for you and your children and staff are good at helping parents understand how to keep their family safe as well. Many positive services are provided by the centre, but at present only just over half of families with young children in the area are able to take part in the activities. We have asked the centre to reach out to more families so they too can enjoy the good activities provided.

We have seen photos of proud parents receiving their certificates at the end of courses on 'Cook 4 Life' for example, but there are very few opportunities for you adults to improve your language or mathematical skills or to develop new skills that could help you into employment. We have asked that the centre work with outside providers to run these sorts of courses.

Many of you help the staff to make the activities even better by completing questionnaires and giving suggestions about the aspects that can be improved. The centre often adapts what they do in the light of your suggestions, such as running the Food Fun and Fitness activities in Moretonhampstead. It needs a few of you to be even more active in helping the centre to evaluate its work and we have asked the centre to find ways of engaging you in these kinds of activities. If you feel you can give a little time to help in this important work then please let the staff know.

Thank you again for helping us with the inspection. It was good to meet you all and we wish you all the very best for the future.

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