

Inspection report for Crockerne Children's Centre

Local authority	North Somerset
Inspection number	383910
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Crockerne Church of England Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Crockerne Church of England Primary School Nursery

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 early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, representatives from the local authority, health professionals, partners who offer services and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Crockerne Children's Centre shares the same site as Crockerne Primary School. The centre opened in 2006 as a phase one centre. The centre is governed by a partnership board on behalf of the local authority. The centre provides part-time and full-time nursery funded daycare provision in the adjoining Crockerne Primary School Nursery. The nursery is open from 8.45am to 3.30pm in school term time. The centre provides the full core offer of children's and families' services. Services delivered directly by the centre at the main centre site include health drop-in sessions. During the school holidays, the centre provides Stay and Play sessions and a childminders' network group. Services provided through partnership arrangements include health and social care services. The centre provides employment advice through Jobcentre Plus. The centre is led by a part-time centre manager. Staff include a part-time family support worker and part-time administrator. The centre coordinator manages Portishead Children's Centre, where families also access services such as breastfeeding support at the 'Café Mamma' and the 'Lads, Lasses and Dads (Llads) Group'.

There are currently 646 families with children under five years of age within the centre's reach area. The centre serves a location where a number of families come from more affluent areas. There are pockets of deprivation and high need locally, but none are in the lowest percentages of the most deprived areas of the country. The levels of skills shown by children on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are

those expected for their age. There has been a recent increase in the number of families in the centre’s reach area due to the expansion of housing on the outskirts of Portishead. The centre’s reach area is spread out. A motorway runs through the middle of the reach area, making travelling to Crockerne Children’s Centre difficult for some families. Families living nearer to the Portishead Children’s Centre are able to access the services this centre offers. There are low proportions of lone parents, teenage mothers and families out of work. Less than one fifth of families are dependent on workless benefits or receive the childcare element of working tax credit. The majority of families are of White British heritage, with a small minority of Asian, Black Caribbean, Black African and White Eastern European.

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

Satisfactory provision is made for the young children and families who use the centre. Approximately one third of families in the reach area use the centre. This leads to satisfactory outcomes overall. Within the centre’s work, there are some key strengths. The centre’s work in care, guidance and support for the most vulnerable group of users is good. Timely and appropriate support is provided to help adults to develop their emotional health and well-being. These sessions are well received by parents. Health outcomes for the majority of families using the centre are good. The centre provides healthy eating learning opportunities for families, for example through the well-attended Stay and Play sessions. Families report that they are continuing activities with their children at home, such as those related to healthy eating. The significant increase in the proportion of mothers within the centre’s reach area breastfeeding their child at six to eight weeks is a key strength of the centre’s work. There has been a steep rise from 37% in 2010 to 58% in 2011. The centre shares an effective working relationship with health and other professionals, leading a well coordinated approach to supporting families who use the services.

Senior leaders have a variety of professional backgrounds, some of which include educational backgrounds. They understand the centre’s strengths and weaknesses and have produced action plans for improvement. However, while some aspects of the centre’s work are good, targets set for overall improvement are currently in the

early stages. This is because of changes in data and information systems. There has been less work relating to the detailed analysis of families' needs in the reach area in order to improve services. Consequently, in developing provision in key areas the centre's leaders and managers are demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to improve.

The centre is beginning to use data and information to plan services but not enough time has elapsed to analyse the impact the services have on improving the outcomes for families in the reach area. While centre staff receive some feedback from parents on the services the centre provides, leaders are also aware that they need to extend the opportunities for the involvement of more parents in evaluating and developing the centre services.

Crockerne Children's Centre supports children with additional needs and vulnerable children well. Working in partnership with the Springboard charity, specialist professional agencies and Crockerne Nursery, there is strong support for children to develop their social and emotional skills. Consequently, these children make at least satisfactory progress from their starting points and some children make good progress in their learning and development. Nursery staff develop individual play and educational plans, matched to children's needs. Where children transfer from the nursery to Crockerne Primary School Reception class, school leaders report they settle quickly in the familiar surroundings.

Positive relationships make a tangible difference to the well-being of the most vulnerable groups of centre users. Staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity and inclusion is central to the services provided. Safeguarding arrangements are secure and thorough, as are the arrangements for keeping children and families safe. The use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) helps to prioritise services for vulnerable families. Families appreciate the warm and caring atmosphere, friendly staff and the outreach support. Partners, such as childminders, report that staff at the centre are 'always calm and nothing is too much trouble'.

The centre signposts families to independent providers, who run sessions locally. These are well supported by parents. The Parent and Toddler Group run by the Salvation Army makes a satisfactory contribution to young children's personal and social development and their early communication and language skills. Nursery staff visit children in these settings to get to know the families and this supports children who transfer to the nursery. A small number of adults participate in community education courses. Families at the centre are improving their economic stability and independence and report that they enjoy the centre activities.

A few families are beginning to contribute to strategic decision-making through membership of the partnership board. Parents feel that individual staff members listen to their views about individual sessions. However, the involvement of a wider number of parents, as yet, is in the early stages. The newly established local network group, which includes independent providers, is beginning to share professional expertise relating to providing activities for families.

The centre leader shares information with the partnership board. Several members of the board have roles in the local community and so know the needs of families in the area. Currently the involvement of the partnership board, including representatives from parents, in inputting into the centre's self-evaluation document is limited. Recent changes in the local authority's data and recording system means that opportunities to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the centre's work have been limited. Following staff training, there are now plans in place to involve a wider audience in coming to a view of the centre's strengths and areas for future development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop opportunities for the wider involvement of parents in evaluating and developing the services provided by the centre.
- Ensure partnership board arrangements provide appropriate level of challenge and support by making more effective use of available data and information to manage and evaluate the performance of the centre, and to participate more directly in self-evaluation and strategic planning.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

By attending sessions such as 'Café Mamma', mothers have gained confidence in breastfeeding their children. The good take-up rate for breastfeeding in the reach area is as a result of a local authority initiative, together with the way in which the centre supports and encourages new mothers.

Children are consistently encouraged to eat healthy snacks at the Parent and Toddler Group and Stay and Play sessions. Advice is given to parents at the centre's Health Drop-in sessions, covering all aspects, including sleep and diet. Young mothers and lone parents show a good understanding of providing healthy meals for their babies and children. Grandparents and childminders who attend toddler sessions say the children enjoy eating the healthy snacks. The centre organises a forest visit with other children centres and in this way families understand the importance of fresh air and exercise.

Keeping families safe lies at the heart of the centre's work. Parents keep themselves and their families safe, because they act on the advice they are given by staff who model and advise on best practice. The centre has effective assessment systems in place to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and adults and those families subject to Common Assessment Framework processes. Child Protection Plans are monitored closely. The centre supports some families well in returning to work, through funded places in the nursery. Children in the nursery consistently behave well in ways that are safe for themselves and others. For example, at fruit and snack time, children sit in small groups and chat happily to one another and their key worker. In this way, they are also developing their social skills and communication skills.

Relationships are positive and trusting. Consequently, parenting programmes such as PEEP sessions (Peers Early Education Partnership) help families develop satisfactory parenting skills. These sessions provide information and guidance to help parents reflect on learning opportunities in everyday life by talking, playing, singing and sharing books. Parents also develop their personal skills by acting as volunteers in some sessions.

Links with Jobcentre Plus are available so that families can access employment and careers guidance. Parents can access this advice from the resource centre run by the local council. As a result of support from the centre, a small proportion of parents have accessed adult education and qualifications at local colleges, such as hairdressing and childminding accreditation. Of the childminders registered, over half hold further qualifications. The centre uses this information, along with health professionals, when advising parents in choosing a childminder. Health and social care professionals report that this is particularly effective in supporting the needs of vulnerable children and families.

Parents share their views and opinions with the centre. The centre has responded to the views of parents by changing the times of some sessions. However, the centre is aware there is less opportunity for parents to influence decision making and centre planning.

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	3
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

The centre provides suitable services and activities that satisfactorily engage the majority of the priority vulnerable groups of users in the community. Experienced members of staff know individual families well and have a secure understanding of the needs of the majority of families in the local area. The centre provides satisfactory support for adults seeking employment and financial advice. As a result,

an average proportion of families are helped to maintain their economic stability or take up an employment or career pathway. The quality and range of services are integrated to meet the personal, social, health and safety needs of local families. The children's centre works closely with health, social care, speech and language professionals to assess and support the needs of families. Outreach work for one-to-one support in the home is good. The family support worker helps families through times of crisis. This enables the effective delivery of services to target groups. Case studies provide evidence about the positive difference centre services make to the outcomes of those in need and who are experiencing problems. Drop-in sessions at the centre with health professionals respond to individual parents' concerns well and signpost to other professionals for additional support. The trusting relationships which develop are used as a stepping stone by the families to access additional services which are available to them elsewhere.

Participation rates are satisfactory. The take-up of courses is variable. For example, the take-up of the centre's Stay and Play for Babies has been low. However, the take-up rates for independently run activities, signposted by the centre, such as the Rhyme and Sign and the Parent and Toddler Group, is high. There are very low numbers of teenage pregnancies. The centre has successfully engaged with all of these young mothers. Despite advertising the centre's services locally, the centre manager is fully aware that some hard-to-reach families within the community do not use the centre's facilities as frequently as others. A number of families in the reach area are situated nearer to a neighbouring children's centre. These families choose to engage with the services on offer because of ease of travelling.

Parents praise the dedication of the staff at the centre and appreciate the 'open door' approach. One parent summed up the views of many by saying that if the services were not provided, 'it would be a loss to the community'.

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 satisfactory governance and accountability arrangements mean that leaders have an adequate understanding of the links between self-evaluation and strategic planning and the provision of services. Partnerships with other services are strong and key partners established, ensuring services are integrated. The centre plays an active role in developing a variety of partnership activities which include statutory, private, voluntary and independent providers. A particularly strong partnership with

independent providers is the partnership with the well-established local parent and toddler and parent and baby groups, as well as local childminders. In this way, the centre is making a discernible difference to families, particularly those who are vulnerable, who use the centre services. The partnership advisory board provides an adequate level of support and is in the early stages of developing its ability to challenge the centre leaders on actions taken to improve performance.

Performance management arrangements for staff are in place. The centre manager supervises staff and ensures that their training needs are up-to-date, such as training on using the local authority's new data system. Health visitors and speech therapists use the centre to work with children and their parents. This use of effective partnership benefits the families, particularly those who are vulnerable. Some parents report they would like more Stay and Play sessions, as these are currently limited to the school holidays. The use of resources, including the deployment of the small number of staff, volunteers, and the satisfactory outcomes for families, demonstrate that the centre is providing satisfactory value for money.

Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and ensure that all who use the centre are well protected. New parents are routinely made aware of the procedures for child protection. Policies relating to safeguarding are available to parents. The entrance area to the children's' centre displays notices relating to services, family information and policies available, such as the complaints policy. Health and safety matters are closely supervised and supported by robust risk assessments. Awareness about child protection matters is closely monitored and supported by effective risk assessments. All staff are up to date with training requirements, including paediatric first aid. The systems for staff vetting and recruitment fully meet requirements.

Equality and inclusion run through the centre's work. The integration of multi-agency services supports opportunities for children and their families. The centre's approach makes a contribution to community cohesion. For example, the centre takes part in local events with local groups, such as the 'Pill Fayre' and the annual Village Green Event. These are enjoyed by children and their families.

The monitoring and evaluation systems, including input from the partnership board, to improve services further are in early stages of development. Progress in this area has been slow because of changes in the local authority data and information systems. The success of groups, courses and activities is evaluated mainly by the centre leader through discussions with staff and some feedback from parents. The centre knows that it needs to develop a more formalised approach to gaining a wider range of user views to feed into action plans and future decision making.

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	3

which secure improvement in outcomes	
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	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

The Crockerne Children's Centre registered early years provision was previously inspected in October 2006. The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings and judgements at the time.

The nursery class at Crockerne Church of England Primary School was inspected as part of the primary school Section 5 inspection in April 2011. The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings and judgements at the time.

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Summary for centre users

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

Your children's centre has some key strengths. It provides you with a safe and inclusive environment where you and your children feel safe, valued and respected. In the local area, the proportion of mothers who are breastfeeding babies two months after birth has risen steeply. The Café Mamma sessions set up for you at the nearby Portishead Children's Centre have been effective in giving you advice and support to breastfeed your baby. Staff at Crockerne Children's Centre encourage your children to try new healthy snacks and to eat healthily. Your children enjoyed having a go at cutting up fruit and vegetables during the Stay and Play sessions. You

continue encouraging your children to eat healthy foods at home by preparing nourishing soups and stews.

Those of you we spoke to told us that you enjoy the activities on offer. The centre signposts you to other sessions provided locally, such as Rhyme and Sign and Salvation Army Parent and Toddler Group. You and your children enjoy these activities and they are well attended. From our observations, discussions and case studies, we were able to see that the centre has an impact on your lives. The PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) sessions give you ideas about supporting your child's learning at home, such as sharing books. You told us how you and your children are benefitting from the advice given to you through the Health Drop-in sessions. The nursery's good provision supports those of you in receipt of the nursery funding, and your child's smooth transition to school.

We found that staff are enthusiastic and work well with partners such as health visitors, speech therapist and midwives to successfully help you to make positive changes to your lives. The centre has a strong partnership with other local groups such as childminders. Outcomes for users are satisfactory overall. We know that staff listen to your views about the services offered to you. However, we have asked them to develop a system which reflects your views of the success of session and provides an indication of the impact the services are having on your lives.

We can see that children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Toddlers are keen to investigate toys and respond well to you and other adults. Although some of you volunteer at the centre, the centre is aware that there are fewer opportunities for you to access academic courses that lead to qualifications. The centre sign posts you to Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice and Credit Union at the local Resource Centre, where advice on housing, employment and financial matters is available.

Partnerships with key agencies are strong. This enables good support and guidance to be offered to those of you using the centre's services. Staff and partners are effective in assessing the individual needs of families in order to ensure you receive the correct support. The family support worker helps families who are facing challenges circumstances. The way health and social care professionals work together is effective in ensuring you and your child thrive. You value the advice you receive about childminding in the area. As a result, you are supported in choosing a childminder to look after your child when you return to work.

When you visit the centre, you are well looked after and always offered refreshment by friendly staff. The good safeguarding arrangements help you to feel safe and free from risks. For example, leaders follow rigorous and robust practices to ensure all adults working in the centre are suitable to do so. Staff are well trained in how to safeguard children and they make you aware of policies and procedures relating to child protection.

The centre adequately plans the use of space and resources and provides satisfactory value for money. The centre manager and her small team use a range of information when planning activities. They listen to your views, but these are not yet analysed in depth to plan or review activities provided for you. Recent changes in the way data and information are presented to the centre by the local authority mean that the analysis of the effectiveness of the range services provided for you is at an early stage. The partnership advisory board of the children's centre supports the centre's work. As yet, members of the board are not yet fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the centre's performance in depth and contributing more directly to self-evaluation processes.

It was good to see how you and your babies and children enjoyed spending your time in the centre and in the activity sessions provided locally. The children settle well and families using the services on offer are well supported.

Thank you for your contribution to the inspection at Crockerne Children's Centre.

Yours sincerely

Jane Neech
Her Majesty's Inspector

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