

Inspection report for St Piers Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	384111
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	St Piers Special School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the service manager for the locality, the local authority development manager county, representatives of the advisory board, the deputy headteacher of St Piers Education College the adjoining special school, health professionals, partner agencies, parent and carer groups and members of the local community.

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

Information about the centre

St Piers Sure Start Children's Centre is located on the Young Epilepsy campus. The centre serves a large rural geographical area, with significant rural population, living in village, hamlet and isolated housing. The majority of families in the reach area are of White British heritage. The main ethnic minority group is Travelling families. The mix of economic groups ranges from 94% to 43% on the scale of national disadvantage. There are specific pockets of deprivation in an otherwise fairly affluent area. Against national criteria, there is moderate child poverty with an increasing number of families in receipt of unemployment benefits and children from workless households. Within the reach area there are 672 targeted children under five years of age. An average proportion of children from the reach area enter early years education with skills, knowledge and abilities in line with those expected for their age.

The centre provides education and play programmes for children, courses for parents and carers, home visiting, and a range of on-site and outreach support and health services.

The centre is managed by the governing body and senior managers of St Piers School as part of the national charity Young Epilepsy, on behalf of Surrey County Council, Early Years and Childcare services. The centre was designated a phase two centre in April 2007.

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

St Piers Sure Start Children's Centre is a good setting. It provides good quality provision and support to meet the needs of the large majority of families, including those in target groups. Leaders and managers at all levels, including the advisory board and governors, have clear objectives and good self-evaluation procedures to further improve services. This ensures that outcomes for the majority are good and reflect a good capacity to improve further.

The centre leader is self-evaluative and makes constant use of any available information, whether acquired through local knowledge, outreach visits and or from other partners and services. This information is used well to drive target setting and to assess the centre's contribution to local and national priorities. Leaders use evaluations from families effectively to inform future planning and to adapt and change services. However, the centre has less reliable and/or relevant data from the local authority about all targeted groups in its area. This makes it difficult for the centre to measure quantifiably the impact of its actions and strategies in the reach area.

The centre has established strong relationships with many local bodies and partners. These are generally used well to ensure that the needs of the local community are supported and met within the centre or through outreach activities. It successfully promotes equality and respect for diversity by removing barriers to learning. As a result, registrations are rising among families, vulnerable groups, Travellers and isolated rural families. Activities are flexible and tailored to meet families' needs. For example, crèche facilities, evening and Saturday classes and a mobile bus are used

to enable greater access and the centre is now seen as the hub of the community.

The centre draws well on its links with local schools, portage and specialist services to ensure parents and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities can access integrated services. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive, one comment, typical of many, was, 'It is a lifesaver, a valuable resource with super staff.'

Children and adults are safe at the centre because safeguarding is given a high priority. The centre offers a wide range of good-quality services, from basic parenting to work-related skills through its strong partnerships with the Tandridge health team and Jobcentre Plus. As one parent said, 'It is such a friendly welcoming place it makes a big difference to us.'

The centre provides a good range of opportunities for babies and young children to promote their learning and development, especially in 'Stay and Play' sessions. The centre is narrowing the achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest, but it is seeking even more ways to strengthen its partnerships so that it can improve children's personal, social and communication skills which locally are weaker than other areas of children's development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should draw up relevant and reliable data that accurately identify targeted groups so that the children's centre can focus its services and support even more accurately.
- Strengthen the role of partnerships to support children's early personal and social development and their communication skills.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for users are good. Feedback from parents is overwhelmingly positive and shows that families do value and benefit from all the centre offers and in its outreach facilities. Children and vulnerable adults are safeguarded at the centre. The centre also uses visual signage to help those with low literacy levels. Those experiencing change, challenge or difficulties show improvement in their confidence and parenting skills. A large majority are engaged in 'Stay and Play' sessions run by local nursery staff. Children enjoy playing with good-quality toys and equipment while parents have the chance to share any problems, get advice, information, support and make friends. At the same time parents are helped to understand the aims and purposes for children's play. Parents said, 'We feel safe, have made friends and no longer feel alone.' Attendance at the paediatric first-aid course is particularly good. A large majority of families access good-quality information and support about play and developmental milestones, immunisation, and dental health. All show an increase in the safety and well-being of their children.

The promotion of emotional well-being is an important aspect of the centre's work and children make good progress and learn to cooperate and behave well. They are motivated and inquisitive whether in the 'play sessions' or using the toys from the toy library. Central to improving the health and well-being of parents and families, including those most vulnerable, is the centre's close partnerships with midwives, health visitors, and other health professionals. The large majority of families using the centre develop their skills, including parenting skills, well. Parent evaluations show how much they enjoy sessions from baby massage, ante-natal classes, the local baby café breastfeeding support, safe weaning, and new parents groups. These services are reaching most families including those targeted. The centre promotes healthy lifestyles well through posters, information, toy foods and physical activities. With no outside play area regularly available, summer outdoor events are especially popular. Visits rise from 150 monthly to 150 weekly with Zoo Lab, outdoor, creative and musical play and a day trip to the seaside being well attended.

Good assessment systems ensure the safety of vulnerable children and adults and those families subject to Common Assessment Framework processes. Child protection plans are monitored carefully. Most families are confident to express their views and participate in decision making, leading to good improvement in their personal development. Case studies show families having gained skills at the centre have become active members in the local community.

Skills for the future are developed through 'Parenting Puzzle', a course helping parents to understand the emotional needs of their children, which improves their experience of family life. While the family learning project helps targeted families, including Travellers, to improve their literacy, technology and budgeting skills. Parents can access support and advice about housing, and workless benefits. Over a third of families using the centre have engaged in training, adult learning or relevant activities, helping them to gain greater independence.

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	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's good provision ensures that 60% of known birth to fours within the reach area are registered. While local authority data provide some insight on the socio-economic status of the reach area, they do not always provide accurate and/or reliable data for all vulnerable groups. This makes it more difficult for the centre to measure its own performance within the reach area. The centre does however use its local knowledge and other sources of information to assess how well it is meeting the needs users to good effect. Staff and partners successfully share information and use activities such as home visits and off-site activities to carefully assess users' needs and this has helped to extend provision.

Good partnerships with adult learning providers through 'next steps' and 'HELP' advisers, make it easier for the centre to tailor support for parents seeking training or employment. To aid earlier intervention, the leader has, with the support of midwives, modified the forms they use to include information about the centre. As a result, all new parents are referred to the centre as a matter of course. Childminders gain professional development through accredited first-aid training.

The centre is very alert to the needs of those most vulnerable and makes considerable efforts to include them. Outreach workers work in close partnership with the Traveller outreach service and the mobile bus is used to deliver training for new parent groups on Traveller sites. This has proved a great success with Traveller families now requesting other services such as help with technology and financial budgeting. Teenage parents are supported well through baby clinics. The centre provides a National Childbirth Trust (NCT) breastfeeding counsellor at each 'Kickers and Crawlers Club' focused on improving the percentage of mums who breastfeed at six to eight weeks from birth. The centre's own data collection and anecdotal evidence show more are seeking to breastfeed than may have done so before. Parents whose children have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported through advice, access to services such as 'Homestart', portage and signposting to professional services and specialist education.

As a result of suggestions received, the centre has introduced more sessions at different times improving engagement with dads and parents or carers who work, to access courses. Families are encouraged to share their views through surveys, observation, comments books, informal chats and contact by email or telephone. Parent engagement on the advisory board is soon to be strengthened with more parent representatives to help shape its work. Children's views are recorded by parents about the toys they borrow from the toy library, where suitability of toys are linked to stages of learning. One parent said, 'My husband enjoys choosing the toys as much as my child loves playing with them.'

The centre seeks ways of supporting children's personal and social development and their communication skills. The centre manager, who is a trained early years

specialist, uses her skills effectively to support the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and has good links with local nurseries and primary schools. Information is shared about children's needs, but it has proved more difficult to engage speech and language therapists in the centre due to demand on resources elsewhere.

Staff are knowledgeable and sensitive and know the needs of families using the centre. One parent summed up, 'The centre is fantastic but it's the people that make it. Consistent good care, guidance and support underpin the centre's work. Excellent communication between centre staff, partners and users and good-quality provision ensure that outcomes for the majority are good.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre manager is keen to develop new initiatives, and has succeeded in raising the profile of the children's centre in the community. Given the limitations of the centre's physical size, its geographical rural area and transport difficulties, outreach has a greater take up amongst the most vulnerable families, as opposed to centre services. The centre has service level agreements with Huggets Day Nursery and finances nursery staff to run 'Surestarters Stay and Play' sessions. The centre also finances NCT breastfeeding counselling. Good deployment of staff and services, high-quality resources and the self-financing toy library ensure good value for money.

The engagement of families, partners and the advisory board means most work together effectively to ensure that the centre provides and meets the needs of the local and wider communities well. Senior leaders are reflective and ensure that improvement planning is sharply focused on promoting a good range of services. They use a data package to evaluate impact through analysis of attendances by super output areas, ethnicity and hard to reach groups. The outcomes for the majority of families, including those vulnerable, are good because the centre provides good-quality sustainable activities, advice and support. Leaders and managers at all levels have high expectations use ambitious targets and robust self-evaluation procedures. These all strengthen the good capacity to further improve provision.

Clear policies promote diversity and tackle any discrimination. Examples of their success are seen in the engagement with Traveller families. Members of the advisory

board and the centre are now poised to engage with Eastern European minority families in the area. The centre has some success in getting more dads to attend and the provision of bacon rolls at some events seems to have enticed them. Family feedback is continually sought and is responded to. Activity on the centre's website is high where contacts, information and links to health-related sites are accessible.

The advisory board is an experienced body and provides effective oversight. The chair of the advisory board is keen to ensure that the centre retains its high profile with recent structural changes in the management and governance of the campus. The local authority keeps in close contact with staff and the advisory board, is supportive and engages in formal monitoring and reporting requirements. Safeguarding is given a high priority. All staff have completed safeguarding training and the procedures for vetting of staff and all child protection and policies are secure. All activities are risk assessed, for example handling small reptiles when Zoo Lab visited! The centre is proactive and staff work closely with health and social teams so that they may support families with children on Common Assessment Framework or child protection plans. Staff have secured the trust of parents and have developed strong partnerships with health, employment, social care, education agencies and professionals. It values these and the volunteers that support it in the delivery of good-quality integrated and sustainable provision.

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	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	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made

during this inspection

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the St Piers Sure Start Children's Centre on 17 and 18 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you we met for helping us with the inspection. Your views were very helpful to us. You told us how much you value the way the centre helps you and how welcome you feel and that staff know you as individuals.

You told us about the range of activities and courses that you can join in and how you feel you have benefited as a result. We know that the centre constantly seeks your views so that it better meets your needs. The centre provides a wide range of good quality integrated services from baby signing, 'Parenting Puzzle', 'Kickers and Crawlers Club' to breastfeeding support, child health clinics and dads and kids activities.

You get good guidance as you need on a whole range of things from healthcare, safety, purposeful play and parenting. Many of you are given advice and are supported in training, employment skills or other relevant learning activities. You told us how valuable and enjoyable the 'Stay and Play' and new parenting courses were, not only because of the advice and support you get but also because you make new friends and feel less isolated. Several of you told us that the centre was a 'lifeline'.

The centre is small, welcoming, safe, stimulating and well resourced and you told us that was what you liked about it, but especially the staff who some of you said 'were brill'. You also told us how much you enjoyed using the toy library. The centre has good outreach facilities too, including in the local community and the use of the mobile bus. The summer events look particularly exciting and you told us about the fun you had. We know the centre staff work hard to meet your needs and especially for those families that are hard to reach and or are vulnerable. Although the centre has some useful data to help it to locate and reach all families, we have asked the local authority to help by providing more reliable and accurate data so that the centre can be sure it is having a measurable impact and that it is not missing any vulnerable groups.

Although the centre provides purposeful learning activities which help to develop young children's social, personal development and communication skills, we have asked it to strengthen its partnerships with specialists and providers in this particular area to help further improve children's skills in these areas.

We hope that you will continue to enjoy using and supporting the centre. We also hope that those of you who said you would be interested in joining the advisory board will be able to do so.

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