

Inspection report for Southernway Children's Centre

Local authority	Plymouth City Council
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Centre leader	Alison Roberts
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Beechwood Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Catkins Childcare

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 the centre's management team, representatives from the management committee, the local authority, partnership agencies, members of staff and families using the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre and the wider community.

Information about the centre

Southernway Children's Centre is a phase 2 children's centre located within Beechwood Primary School designated in June 2009. It is sited on a multi-agency campus which includes the children's centre, a primary school, 'I CAN' speech and language services, a nursery and a doctor's surgery. The centre is managed by the management committee of Wood View Learning Community federated governing body on behalf of the local authority. It operates in a cluster model with Witleigh Children's Centre and staff work across both centres. The centre offers a range of services which include health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. Services are provided at the children's centre main building as well as in venues in the community.

The centre is located in a densely-populated, urban locality with a high proportion of social housing. It is in an area which is not identified as deprived overall, although there are some pockets of deprivation where a high proportion of families are either dependant on workless benefits or low incomes. The population is mostly White British. Children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are typically low, particularly in their communication, language and literacy development and their personal, social and emotional development.

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

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of Southernway Children's Centre is inadequate because systems do not sufficiently safeguard children and their families. Most staff are suitably trained in child protection. They know how to recognise signs which may indicate that a child is at risk of abuse; are clear about reporting procedures; and know who to go to if they have concerns. Leaders have recently reorganised systems for maintaining records regarding children who are subject to a child protection plan. However, such records are not sufficiently detailed or updated to maintain a comprehensive picture of engagement with families. Relevant information is not passed consistently to the appropriate authority. Recruitment procedures are not rigorous enough to ensure all gaps in an applicant's employment history are explored prior to appointment. While the centre has obtained written confirmation of criminal records bureau disclosures from most partner agencies, it has failed to ensure that such assurances are in place for all agencies prior to having unsupervised contact with families. Monitoring by leaders and managers has not been rigorous enough to promptly identify and address these areas.

Leaders and staff work well together to provide services which meet most outcomes for children. They show a strong commitment to developing targeted services to those who are most in need. A clear caring ethos is evident throughout the centre and parents express how welcome staff make them feel. Staff provide families with good levels of information, advice and guidance. They are effective at empowering parents, and many report increased levels of confidence due to their contact with the centre. Leaders and staff have a satisfactory understanding of the needs of the local community through their own local knowledge and from information provided by a range of partners, such as health, the police and local schools. They have access to some data to support their understanding. However, much of the data provided by the local authority are poor. This means that staff do not have an accurate, up-to-date profile of their reach area to assist them in the strategic planning of services or in their measurement of success. The local authority is working with a range of partners to improve the quality and the range of data provided.

The numbers of families accessing services is satisfactory. Centre staff have had success in engaging with some families who are hard to reach. The Malazi Worker has had particular success in engaging with very young mothers in the reach area, offering them good levels of support during their pregnancy and in the first few months of motherhood. The centre has also had success in engaging fathers in the life of the centre. They regularly attend groups designed specifically for them such as parenting classes and universal provision.

Centre leaders demonstrate a clear vision for the centre. Self-evaluation accurately identifies the strengths of the centre and the majority of areas which require further improvement. Steps to improve provision have already been taken. Staff have received training to improve the quality of the assessments they undertake with families, and leaders have conducted a detailed review of the services offered to families. They have used this information to plan improved provision. Priorities identified in the centre's development plan are aimed at the better targeting of services to meet the needs of more vulnerable groups of the community. Plans are in place to bring about further improvement, although they are not sufficiently honed to ensure developments are brought about in a timely manner. Overall, the centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the implementation of safeguarding procedures to ensure all children and their families are suitably protected.
- Improve monitoring so that all weaknesses are identified quickly and addressed swiftly.
- Sharpen action planning in order that planned improvements are undertaken in a timely fashion.
- Together with the local authority and partners, improve the quality and analysis of data to support the planning of services and the monitoring of impact on outcomes for families.

How good are outcomes for families?

4

Families are engaging in physical activity through the opportunities offered by the children's centre. Specific sessions, such as 'Baby Fizzical' and 'Fizzical Fun', provide parents with ideas for promoting physical activity both indoors and outdoors. Children and their families have fun while they explore the outdoor environment through access to 'Forest School' activities, walks in the forest and walks in the park. Parents learn how to engage their children in learning about the outdoor environment as they are introduced to interesting activities, such as going on 'treasure hunts', looking for 'fairy houses' and cooking on a outdoor camp fire. Parents learn about healthy eating through the healthy snacks provided by the centre. In addition, information regarding weaning and healthy diets is provided at baby groups and through colourful displays around the centre. Despite these efforts,

levels of childhood obesity in the reach area remain high.

Mothers who choose to breastfeed receive suitable support through attendance at the 'Latch-on' group and by a breastfeeding peer supporter. The centre recognises that more needs to be done to improve breastfeeding rates and has identified that delayed support is a barrier to sustaining breastfeeding. Leaders are working closely with other children's centres, both in the locality and across the city, in order to increase the amount of peer supporters available to mothers. Suitable attention is given to supporting the emotional well-being of parents and their children. Staff are trained to instruct parents in baby massage and deliver these skills on a group or one-to-one basis to support attachment.

Parents learn about how to keep their children safe in the home. For example, they learn about measures to reduce the risk of accidents such as the use of smoke alarms and socket covers. The implementation of a home safety scheme has also helped parents to keep their children safe; outreach workers conduct home safety assessments and the centre provides relevant safety equipment. Outside agencies, such as the fire department, visit groups to share relevant information with families. A focus on specific topics, such as road safety, has improved children's understanding of how to keep safe. For example, one parent advised how her child continues to refer to the information provided about road safety; she regularly reminds her mother about how to keep safe and of the need to wear high-visibility arm bands when out walking. While staff work well with most families subject to a child protection plan to improve outcomes, systems in place do not sufficiently safeguard children and their families as gaps in procedures leave them vulnerable to risk.

Children and their parents have fun learning together. Parents are guided in supporting their child's learning and development by staff role modelling in groups as well as attendance on parenting programmes. As confidence in their own skills and abilities develops, some parents are inspired to access further development opportunities such as literacy and numeracy classes as well as undertake accredited qualifications.

Children who attend the co-located nursery provision make good progress in their development. Staff know the children well and plan appropriately to meet their individual needs. Children are supported in their transition into both nursery and school provision. Centre staff work closely with nursery and school staff to ensure children settle easily and confidently. Appropriate attention is given to promoting children's language and communication skills. Staff work well with the co-located 'I CAN' team to provide targeted support for children with communication difficulties. Support given to both the co-located nursery and to early years providers in the reach area has been successful in improving outcomes for young children.

Parents have some opportunities to influence the direction of services as staff canvass their views on the quality of services received. The centre has recently introduced a consultation programme which was particularly successful in engaging

some parents in reviewing the quality of services overall and in identifying ways to improve further. Some parents are engaged in the governance of the centre and they are represented on the advisory board. Parents and members of the community are supported to give something back to their community by the centre's volunteer programme.

Good attention is given by staff to supporting parents' confidence and self-esteem as a first step to returning to work and education. Some parents have been successful in gaining recognised qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications through provision offered by the centre and this has resulted in some parents gaining paid employment.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	4
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

Leaders and staff use their knowledge of the needs of the community to provide a suitable range of services. They take services out into the community and have been particularly successful in engaging families who are at risk of isolation. Overall, the assessment of the needs of individual families is satisfactory and enables staff to provide services which are relevant. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in order to undertake comprehensive assessments for some families. Assessments for other families however, lack detail. Leaders are aware of this omission and have already begun the implementation of a much more comprehensive assessment model in partnership with social care.

Together with the local learning and skills provider, the centre offers parents opportunities to access training such as literacy and numeracy and accredited qualifications in childcare. Opportunities to engage in family learning are also provided and parents are beginning to implement this learning in the home environment. They explain how they are now able to manage their children's

behaviour better and how they implement creative activities at home. Staff recognise when parents have achieved; an annual celebration event is organised where both parents and staff's achievements are acknowledged. Those who have been successful in gaining qualifications receive a personal 'well done' letter from the centre manager.

Families in crisis feel confident to turn to the centre for support. Staff obtain food for families experiencing financial difficulties through a local charity. They work closely with the local housing association to identify families experiencing housing difficulties and support them to be able to remain within their homes or move to improved accommodation. One parent expressed that the guidance and information received from staff at the centre had been instrumental in her being able to turn her life around and in her being able to protect her children, stating, 'I couldn't have done this without the children's centre.'

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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

The management committee and advisory board know the local community and understand what the centre does well and where improvements are needed. The newly-established senior leadership team is clear on the need to move from a universal to a more targeted approach to service delivery. The team has made inroads on this journey and is clear about what it needs to do to develop this further. Leaders are motivated to seek further improvements; plans are being implemented which are appropriately aimed at improving provision and outcomes. However, at present the plans are insufficiently detailed to speedily drive improvement. While staff are provided with regular professional supervision, leaders have not always been effective in monitoring the implementation of procedures such as those relating to safeguarding. Staff work well with most families who are subject to a child protection plan and have had success in supporting families to improve outcomes and ultimately remain together. However, procedures are neither robust nor consistently implemented to ensure that all families are sufficiently protected and, as a result, leadership and management including governance and accountability arrangements are inadequate overall.

The centre offers satisfactory value for money. Good use is made of staff across the two centres in the cluster to secure and maintain appropriate levels of service for the

reach area as families can access services at both centres. Centre staff have been successful in registering the majority of children in their reach area including some families from target groups such as young parents and fathers. The main children's centre premises are of very good quality, they are bright and welcoming to parents. Staff make suitable use of community venues in order to take services out to where they are most needed. The centre promotes inclusion of children and their families. Centre staff offer children with disabilities and their families good support through the provision of the specialist Step-by-Step group run in conjunction with the Portage service. They are increasingly successful in engaging with groups who are hard to reach. Together with the school, they are building relationships with a small Polish community who live in the vicinity.

Centre staff have developed a range of partnerships with key agencies. Most partners are clear about the priorities for the area and, as a result, they work well with the centre in developing services to meet local need. Relationships are particularly well developed with those partners who are co-located with the centre such as the school, the designated nursery provider, and the 'I CAN' team. Centre leaders recognise that pressures on some partners mean that they are unable to be as engaged as fully as they might like and are working towards improving this aspect of their work. Families are invited to evaluate the quality of the services they use. More recently the centre has undertaken a full evaluation of provision and fully included parents in a consultation event which successfully engaged attendees in developing services further.

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	4
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	4
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

The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings of the inspection of Catkins Childcare in January 2011. This inspection found that children in the nursery's Early Years Foundation Stage made good progress in all areas and that the nursery provided good support and education for children.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Southernway Children's Centre on 15 and 16 November 2011. We judged the centre as inadequate overall. This is because systems to safeguard you and your children are not sufficient to make sure you are all fully protected. However, leaders and managers know what to do to improve and have already begun to implement plans to strengthen the implementation of procedures.

The staff team shows a very strong commitment to improving the lives of all of you and the staff work well together. We agree with you that staff at the centre are very caring and make you feel very welcome when you visit groups at the centre and in venues in the community. Staff understand how they can help to make a difference to the lives of many of you and your children and they work alongside a range of other professionals to do so. Many of you told us that the support you have received from staff at the centre has resulted in you developing your confidence. Some of you have successfully completed qualifications and moved on to gaining paid employment. Staff are particularly successful in the support they give to young parents and fathers.

Leaders and managers of the centre understand what steps they need take to improve their services even further and they are determined to make your lives as best they can. However, the information given to them by the local authority does not yet provide enough information about the local area to enable staff and management to understand how to meet fully the needs of your community. They already have many plans in place to improve services and we have asked leaders to make sure they develop their planning to ensure they make these changes as quickly as possible. We have also asked the centre to improve the way in which it monitors the work of the centre so that the staff are able to identify more quickly and address important weaknesses.

We noticed that you make a contribution to the setting. You regularly provide staff with your view on the quality of the groups and activities in which you take part.

More recently, several of you have been involved in a consultation event which gave you a good opportunity to tell staff your views and what services you would like them to provide. We hope that you will be provided with similar opportunities in the future.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts about the centre. We are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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