

# Inspection report for Wool and Bovington Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Dorset County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	383740
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 December 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joan Lindsay

<b>Centre leader</b>	Ruth Forbes
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Not applicable

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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings or telephone discussions with the centre manager and staff, representatives from the local authority and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, such as the health services, parents and other users of the centre.

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

## Information about the centre

The centre was designated in 2005 as a phase one centre, having opened originally in 2002 as part of the Sure Start programme. It provides the full core offer of a children's centre and is managed directly by the local authority. Restructuring of children's centres across Dorset took place in 2011 and this centre is now part of the Purbeck cluster. The centre leader is the children's centre cluster manager who has responsibility for nought to eight-year-olds in the Purbeck area and is part of the locality team. The centre is operationally managed by the previous manager who opened the centre in 2002. The centre is open 50 weeks of the year on weekdays and occasional Saturdays. It serves a rural area extending over the areas of Bere Regis, Lytchett Matravers, West Purbeck and Winfrith, with approximately 621 children under five in the reach area. Most families come from a White British background. While there are no high levels of deprivation, there are small pockets. There is a considerable transient population made up of army personnel and a small Gypsy and Traveller community. In 2008, the latest figures available, there were 72 children aged nought to four living in workless households, of which 17% were eligible for child tax credit. Children's levels on entry to early years education across the four reach area schools are variable, but largely in line with that expected for their age. However, communication, language and literacy skills and personal social and emotional development are relatively poor.

## 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

Wool and Bovington Children's Centre is providing a satisfactory service. Families who use the centre have high levels of trust in staff and feel safe there. One parent voiced the views of many by stating, 'You can talk to them about any problems to do with the children or personal or emotional problems.' Staff have a keen awareness of safeguarding procedures and work well with some partner agencies to provide well-tailored, good levels of care, guidance and support. The centre has been particularly successful in developing parenting skills and confidence, and addressing the specific needs of teenage and young parents and the transient population of army families. However, although the centre does have contact with some families from all target groups, the spread of that contact is uneven at present. The lack of some data from the local authority is hampering the centre's knowledge of the proportion of each target group in the reach area and the centre's ability to measure its impact more effectively.

Those who use the centre feel fully involved in it and are certain their views are listened to. 'They are so accommodating' was a common view. However, there is no formal method to ensure these views are put before the advisory board and parents are under represented on that body. This is partly due to recent major changes in the way centres are governed as there is now one advisory board covering the three Purbeck children's centres. Consequently, although carrying out its duties satisfactorily, this board is not yet fully involved in the centre's self-evaluation and not all partners, such as Jobcentre Plus, are playing an active role. Furthermore, a lack of data means that the centre's action plan does not have sharp enough, measurable targets.

Staff, many of whom are long serving and very knowledgeable about the families they serve, are committed to improving outcomes for those in the reach area. A lack of data has hampered how they measure their impact in some aspects, but where this can be measured and where there is anecdotal evidence, such as in improving the lives of those who use the centre, there has been a positive impact. There is a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development based on

sound self-evaluation, and a concerted drive to adapt to the new cluster model and to increase the numbers of those who use and benefit from the centre. Consequently, there is a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should provide or facilitate up-to-date reach area data to enable the centre to measure its impact on a more regular basis, especially in relation to Key Performance Indicators.
- Strengthen the involvement of the advisory board so that it is more involved in the centre's self-evaluation and improve the centre's action plan so that targets are measurable, specific and challenging by:
  - gathering and using data to measure the centre's impact in more aspects
  - increasing the strategic role of some partners such as Jobcentre Plus.
- Involve families in the strategic management and governance of the centre so that their views are fully taken into account by:
  - formalising the way parents' views are recorded, acted upon and fed on to the advisory board
  - ensuring there is more representation from target groups on the advisory board.
- Increase the percentage of those who access the centre by using data to focus services at some target and hard to reach groups particularly those in workless households and the Traveller community.

## How good are outcomes for families?

3
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Childhood obesity data are only available for all of Purbeck, and whilst this shows a significant decline to 6.2% in 2011, it is difficult to measure the specific impact of the centre. This is also the case for breastfeeding rates where the locality data show a figure being sustained at around national averages. However, these aspects have been a strong focus for the centre and most parents feel that they have a good understanding of how to keep their children healthy. Effective work with various partners has led to 'Bosom Buddies' support for breastfeeding, 'Early Days Cafe' and 'Let's Cook' activities encouraging mothers to breastfeed for longer and to cook healthy meals for their families. The centre also addresses the rural isolation and local scarcity and high cost of healthy food by running a popular weekly mini-bus service to a supermarket. A high awareness and support for the prevalence of perinatal mental health issues, especially amongst young mothers and forces' families, have had a positive impact on their emotional health.

Children behave well and safely in the centre. Parents are particularly well supported in helping to manage their children's behaviour. This is done through structured programmes such as 'Incredible Years', described as 'an inspiration' and 'an amazing tool to help me' by participants, and through consistently good role modelling by staff at activity sessions. Parents are advised effectively about home safety and

children's safety in the home is further supported through the equipment given out in the 'welcome pack' and the 'Safe at Home Project'. The secure systems to access the centre's various sites; and very high levels of trust in staff, mean that all families spoken to during the inspection feel safe in the centre. Staff are quick to respond to any concerns, including the relatively high prevalence of domestic violence. They are well trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and child protection plans. Consequently, the outcomes for these children are generally good and numbers on such plans are relatively low.

The centre is beginning to track the progress of children who have accessed the services when they move on to school, and this shows that there is a positive impact especially in children's personal and social development. Overall, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data for the schools in the reach area show that approximately 65% of children reach the expected levels. However, although the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest is still better at 26% in 2011 than the national average of 31.4%, the figure widened considerably from 2010. With this in mind, the centre's sessions have a strong focus on developing early learning skills and the work of the children's centre teacher has supported this with activities planned around the areas of learning. There are some notable individual successes in parents developing skills and confidence, especially amongst the young mothers. Several have been supported to return to studying and the 'Young Rascals' group is now run by the participants themselves. However, the centre is aware that more could be done to encourage increased involvement in adult learning and training.

Children develop positive relationships with adults and each other and grow in confidence through attending sessions such as 'Make and Play' and 'Little Rascals'. Families have regular opportunities to express their views and they do feel listened to, such as when they requested an overnight camping trip. However, there is a recognition that there needs to be a more formal method of involving families from more target groups in the decision-making process.

Children make good progress in developing their skills for the future because of the quality of the activities and the focus on early years development. However, the impact of the centre on developing economic stability is difficult to measure without relevant data. In addition, the transient nature of the army population has an impact on any measure. Nevertheless, some families using the centre are improving their lifestyles by being enabled and supported to return to studying, voluntary work or employment.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for families:*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

**3**

Centre staff are knowledgeable about those who use the services and tailor activities and support well to meet the needs of the rising numbers registered. Consequently, outcomes for those families are at least satisfactory. However, the local authority has been unable to provide specific data to enable the centre to identify what proportion of some target groups, such as those in workless households and lone parents, is being reached. Evidence that is available shows that staff are particularly effective in sustaining the involvement of teenage and young mothers and in supporting army families, seen as specific vulnerable groups in the area. However, contact with the Traveller community has been more sporadic and is recognised as an area of development, as is the need to re-establish the dads' group across the cluster.

The centre makes good provision for children's early development through enjoyable activities, and courses for parents that revolve around children's early learning and parenting skills. The use of other locations around the widespread reach area, such as in Wool and in Lytchett Matravers, and the provision of transport for families all help the most vulnerable to access services and improve their outcomes. However, whilst many target groups are engaging with the centre, a minority is not doing so in sufficient numbers to enable the learning and development overall to be judged as good.

Families are very appreciative of the high levels of care, guidance and support offered to them by well-trained, caring staff. In many cases the support given has had a profound impact on families' lives, such as when there have been cases of perinatal mental health or domestic violence. Families especially appreciate the ongoing care they receive through home visits and phone calls and the centre has been effective in supplementing this outreach work through working in partnership with other agencies. This is especially so in relation to the information that is shared with the health agencies and the army welfare officer. This is having a beneficial impact for those families who use the centre.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision:*

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, but the management structure and governance have undergone recent changes that are still embedding. Consequently, although governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood, there has not been time for the new advisory board to be effective in the strategic planning and self-evaluation of the centre. Most key partners are involved in supporting the centre, but the impact of their involvement is not being formally measured by the centre or all of the partners. In addition, although there is a strong motivation to improve, and a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development, the centre's action plan is too unwieldy in format and content to focus on specific targets.

Centre resources are managed well and they are of a high quality on all the sites visited during the inspection. Families make particularly good use of the centre's mini-bus that enables them to visit local attractions and shopping facilities. Staff are experienced and the Family Support Workers are having a positive impact on the numbers who use the centre. However, there is an awareness that there are some groups who are still under represented and consequently the centre gives satisfactory value for money.

The centre promotes equality and diversity appropriately. The centre's sites are fully accessible to those with disabilities and the centre meets its statutory duties in this regard. Resources and staff expertise mean that children with disabilities are fully included. The centre is welcoming to all and a high level of respect is shown by those who use it, reinforced by the Well-being Group Agreement, a set of expectations drawn up by families themselves to ensure mutual respect. The centre has been particularly effective in breaking down barriers between army families and civilians. The centre can point to successes in narrowing the achievement gap for some families but it is aware that, with more pertinent data, it would be able to target and include even more groups in the community.

Safeguarding procedures are good, meet all statutory requirements and permeate the centre's work. Appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out thoroughly and the relevant assurances given by partner agencies. All the staff are well trained in child protection matters as well as paediatric first aid and in Common Assessment Framework matters, making them confident in instigating and



participating in these and child protection meetings. An awareness of perceived high levels of domestic violence in the area means that staff are quick to spot and act on any concerns and to utilise the support of other agencies. Families are also trusting of the centre staff's ability to help and so will bring any concerns about others that they may have.

Overall, relationships with key partners are clear and understood and there are some effective ones in place, most notably with the health services, the Family Information Service, the garrison welfare officer and the Women's Institute who run the 'Let's Cook' courses. These are having a discernible impact on outcomes. However, other partnerships, such as with Jobcentre Plus and the Traveller Support Service, are not so well established.

Families spoken to during the inspection were unanimous in their praise and satisfaction with the centre. Similarly, the results of termly evaluations are positive and used effectively to plan future activities and classes. However, there has not been an annual survey undertaken this year by the local authority as a result of the restructuring. In addition, although some of those who use the centre are active volunteers, the formal involvement of families in relation to governance and influencing the strategic direction of the centre is limited.

*These are the grades for leadership and management:*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

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

None.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Wool and Bovington Children's Centre on 7 and 8 December 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During our visit, we looked at your centre's plans for improvement and numerous other documents. We spoke to a range of partner agencies working with the centre as well as staff, members of the advisory board and representatives from the local authority. We also visited several centre activities taking place during the inspection such as 'Make and Play' sessions and 'Little Rascals', and spoke to a substantial number of families using the centre.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. It was very helpful to have your input. Those of you we spoke to were very positive about what the centre does for you and especially in the way your children have learned and developed and how you have grown in confidence in how to help them. Common views held were, 'I don't get as stressed, I feel a lot calmer when dealing with my child's behaviour,' and, 'I was made to feel so welcome and left feeling more confident having been reassured I was doing well.' In addition, you feel the staff are very helpful, caring and committed to supporting you and your family and this is something the inspection evidence confirms. The centre safeguards those who use it well, often working effectively in partnership with other agencies to provide support specific to your needs. The centre knows that it now needs to increase the numbers of those who use it, especially from certain groups in the area. To do this we have asked the local authority to provide the information needed for the centre to see where the gaps are in the groups who are using the centre. With this information, we have asked the advisory board to set more ambitious targets to improve outcomes for more of you and your children. In addition, although families' views are sought and acted upon, such as when there were suggestions for an overnight camp, the way this is done is not formal enough and not all groups are equally represented on the advisory board. There is also scope for some partners such as Jobcentre Plus and the Traveller Support Service to play a greater role on the advisory board.

The centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and all the staff are committed to continue to improve the numbers who use the services and to improve outcomes for those in the area. They are aware of the centre's strengths and areas for development and are having a positive impact in the way families are cared for and safeguarded and in how children are developing early skills and you are developing your confidence in parenting. As a result, the centre is satisfactorily placed to continue to improve.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).