

Inspection report for Southgate Children and Family Centre

Local authority	West Sussex
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the relief manager, centre coordinator and centre staff. Discussions were also held with representatives of the local authority, a variety of centre partners, including various health professionals, the speech and language therapist for the centre and a representative of Home-Start. Meetings were also held with representatives of other agencies such as the Targeted Intervention and Integrated Working group. Observations were made of the activities taking place at the centre during the inspection and discussions were held with a number of parents.

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

Information about the centre

Southgate Children and Family Centre is a phase two centre which was recognised as meeting its core purpose in December 2009. The centre's reach area is made up of predominantly White British families, but with some 15% of families from minority ethnic groups. The main groups are Asian or British Asian, Black or Black British and Chinese. The reach area is within the 70% deprivation ranking nationally but there are several Super Output Areas where the levels of multiple deprivation are higher (30 to 50%). Data about the reach area in terms of worklessness and benefits are unclear, but approximately 22% of families who are registered at the centre are in receipt of workless benefits and 15.7% receive tax credits.

The centre is open four days a week for direct delivery of services throughout the year, and is closed one day a week for delivery of targeted services such as Family Learning. The Centre is only closed on bank holidays. It is managed by West Sussex local authority through an advisory board known locally as the Centre Partnership Board.

Children start in early years provision with a range of skills and knowledge that is often below that expected for their age, particularly in language skills.

The centre manager was on annual leave at the time of the inspection and so a manager of a local children’s centre acted as relief manager in her absence. Together, the two managers lead five children’s centres that make up a resource pool for the provision of services to families within Crawley as a whole.

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

Southgate Children and Family Centre provides a satisfactory service for the families living within its reach area. The quality of the care, support and guidance provided for families who participate in the services is good, but at present not enough of the families whose circumstances make them most vulnerable access services and the numbers of some target groups’ participation remain too low. The quality of the one-to-one support for those vulnerable families who do access the centre is thorough and leads to improved outcomes for the families. These parents’ comments were typical shared with the inspectors, ‘It’s the first place I come to get support and advice.’ ‘It’s such a caring place,’ and, ‘I have seen such a difference in my children and family since coming to the centre.’

Children show good levels of engagement and enjoyment in the play and learn sessions. The activities are effective in developing a range of appropriate skills but they are not sufficiently individualised to ensure good progress in learning and development of all children. The centre has no way of showing how it is contributing to the children’s learning as identified at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage

as it does not track the on-going progress of any of the children who attend regularly. Additionally, there is insufficient follow up of the impact of centre services when children move on to early years education.

The centre is a safe and welcoming environment. The frontline staff who work directly with the families know them well and are effective in recognising their individual needs. At 53%, the majority of families in the most deprived areas are engaged in the centre's activities but there is an absence of data on those not accessing services and why this is the case. Outcomes for families who attend the different activities have not been recorded in the past and this reduces the centre's ability to identify what it needs to do next to further meet their needs. Similarly, until recently no records had been kept of how many of families from the different target groups are attending the various activities which reduce the centre's ability to analyse how effective it is in engaging with lone parents, teenage parents and fathers, for example.

The leadership has a good awareness of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and increasingly uses the growing amount of data to identify and respond to the needs of families in the reach area. The number of families registered with the centre is building steadily. The centre service plan has a good focus on improvement, with ambitious targets set, but there has not been sufficient time for them to have a demonstrable impact on the centre's effectiveness. The re-instated partnership board is very new and has not yet developed its role in supporting and challenging the work of the centre. As such, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the outcomes for families by:
 - making better use of data about families in the reach area so that effective strategies are developed to engage with them more successfully
 - reducing any barriers to families accessing the centre's services and increasing participation rates of target groups, especially teenage parents and fathers
 - monitoring the impact of the centre's services on families and their children's lives so that next steps in their support can be identified.
- Develop the provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - monitoring the interests and progress of those who attend the play and learn sessions regularly so that activities are more effectively planned to meet individual children's needs
 - building links with the local early years settings and primary school to track the progress of children who attended the centre so the staff recognise the impact of their work and have a good understanding of how it can be improved.
- Develop the role of the Centre Partnership Board quickly to include parents so it

plays a full role in monitoring and evaluating the centre's work, in challenging leaders and shaping services that better meet the needs of the most vulnerable families in the reach area.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for families who attend the centre are often very positive especially for those who are supported individually by the frontline staff. Childhood obesity rates within the locality are similar to the national picture. The regular health checks carried out by health partners, as well as the information provided by the centre staff, have clear impact on parents' understanding of how to keep healthy. Staff promote the importance of exercise through sports days in school holidays and an activity day as part of National Active Week. The provision of toothbrushes and toothpaste at cost price is much appreciated by parents. Staff are trained in providing advice and support for mothers experiencing antenatal depression and work successfully to help them overcome anxieties. Recent data show that the proportion of mothers who sustain breastfeeding is below the national average despite support and information about breastfeeding being readily available together with advice on weaning strategies. Immunisation rates are above average.

The centre is a warm and welcoming environment where families and children feel safe. Awareness of safety issues is promoted through a good number of regular inputs by the Accident Prevention Trust. The recent Emergency Life Support and Infants First Aid Course was well attended by parents from the Bumps and Babies group. Parents commented on how much they had gained from the sessions and one parent explained how invaluable it was because her husband, who attended the course, used what he had learnt to save their daughter's life when she stopped breathing. All staff are trained in using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and work effectively with other agencies in the CAF forums, Team Around the Child panels and child protection multi-agency meetings. The number of child protection plans is reducing through the use of CAF Plus strategies. Support for families on a one-to-one basis is effective in helping them to address safety issues in the home. Currently there are no data about accidents and hospitalisation for the reach area to help the centre judge its impact on keeping children safe.

Children enjoy the play and learn sessions held each week. Data from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile show that the proportion of children reaching 78+ points across the early years curriculum with more than six points in communication and language skills and their personal, social and emotional development is increasing. However, the gap between the lowest 20% of children and the rest is growing. As a result, the centre is aware of the need to strengthen links with early years settings, so that there is a consistent approach to analysing the reasons for the increase and how best to tackle it. A good range of information is provided for adult courses in which some parents participate, but the data on attendance are not yet being analysed. Some families, for example, engage in adult learning that will support their

future employment skills, such as learning to speak English. Good levels of information and support from staff on accessing information about benefits, training and employment are available. The Citizens Advice Bureau also works with the centre to provide a good source of information to families.

Children behave well and are developing positive relationships with those around them. Families of different ethnic groups mix amicably, showing respect and consideration for one another. The centre is encouraging parents to become volunteers. There are three currently; one acts as a breastfeeding buddy and two others support the toy library each week. Parents willingly complete questionnaires about the services and a good number participates in the new parents' forum sharing ideas for the future. But, as yet, parents are not contributing fully to the decision-making process and there are no parents on the partnership board.

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	3
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

There is a satisfactory range of universal services and activities provided to support families in the area. A key strength of the centre is the support provided for families in their homes. The family outreach worker with the most appropriate expertise is selected to support a family to ensure the best outcome. For example, one of the family outreach workers at Southgate is currently supporting a family from another centre because she has knowledge of their home language. Parents from Southgate commented that they feel so much more confident talking to a member of staff who understands their culture and backgrounds.

The play and learn sessions are well attended. Fortnightly visits by the speech and language therapist are well attended by families with children who show possible speech problems. They ensure early identification of any disability and/or special need which is then effectively supported. The centre provides a satisfactory range of

courses and training for parents. A good focus has been placed on supporting families with English as an additional language and a course has just started with eight participants. There are, however, very few targeted activities, although some identified families are encouraged to attend Bumps and Babes and the Baby Massage group. Families say they enjoy and benefit from these courses and activities, but the staff do not have a clear enough view of how to be more effective in engaging with their target groups, such as lone or teenage parents.

Staff are sensitive to family circumstances and backgrounds especially those of different minority ethnic groups and cultures. All staff are quick to listen, and provide support and guidance to all families who use the centre. They actively signpost families to services provided outside of the centre and provide encouragement so they feel confident to attend. Good inter-agency working with the health professionals and staff from Home-Start also ensure good levels of support. Similarly, the Citizens Advice Bureau is used effectively to provide advice on a range of issues to those seeking benefits. Computers in the centre are accessed appropriately for job-seeking advice. Staff encourage parents to use the 'warm phone' to get immediate advice on a range of issues including where to find information on childcare for parents wanting to return to work. A good range of information and satisfactory advice for parents wanting to quit smoking are available, but there is no specific advice available on alcohol or drug misuse or sexual health. Many dads attend the play and learn sessions but there are no specific activities for fathers at the centre. They are however given information about a local voluntary group, Dads United.

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?

3

Centre leaders and staff are evaluative of the centre's work and have a realistic view of its strengths and areas for improvement. The manager has focused appropriately on the need to refine the evaluative processes so that the impact of the centre's work can be assessed accurately. Information from parental surveys and questionnaires has been collated but has not yet been analysed and this hinders the development of an effective strategy for engaging more effectively with a wider range of families from target groups. An increasing range of data is now available and being used sensibly to identify needs more effectively. Data on attendance are not yet sufficiently robust for the centre to know how well it is engaging with all

target groups especially those out of work or in receipt of benefits.

The centre's services are gaining momentum following the local reorganisation and the appointment of the new manager. There are well-structured protocols and management systems which support the smooth day-to-day running of the centre. Staff work well together and have clear roles and responsibilities. The recently restructured Centre Partnership Board has only met a few times so its role in monitoring and challenging the work of the centre is not yet fully under way. The centre service plan has a strong focus on improvement and ambitious targets have been set. Supervision arrangements are well understood and staff say they find the process supportive. Training is made available to support staff expertise and to broaden the range of services available.

Strong integrated working with centre partners is clearly evident. Sustainability is high on the agenda and this is promoted through the effective use of staff expertise across the five local centres, the sharing of staff and resources. Outcomes are satisfactory and user engagement is increasing. As such the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Equalities are well promoted and staff are diligent in ensuring there is no discrimination and the centre is accessible to all. Good support is in place for those with disabilities or special educational needs. Sensory toys are available from the toy library, with others that are suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities. There is positive support for families from minority ethnic groups, a good proportion of whom attend the centre's activities.

Safeguarding meets requirements and procedures are well understood by staff. Staff are suitably trained in safe recruitment and child protection procedures. Systems for monitoring and reporting concerns are efficient. Policies and practice are effective in ensuring children and their families are safe, including those experiencing domestic violence.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

adults	
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Southgate Children and Family Centre on 24 and 25 April 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to chat to us and tell us about the activities you enjoy at the centre. We can see that you are very pleased with the support and advice the staff give you and that you really love the opportunity to meet other parents. You also told us how worthwhile it has been for your children to meet other children so they can learn to play happily. Their independence and social awareness are developed effectively. One mum commented, 'My child has learnt to share and take turns at the centre.' The children really enjoy the different activities. We have asked the staff to monitor how well your children are progressing, especially those who attend regularly, and to start identifying their next steps so their learning moves forward even more quickly. The staff do have the information where your children go for the next stages in their learning so we have asked the centre to work more closely with the local pre-schools and primary schools so that together they have a clear view of children's development and how it can be improved further.

We can see from your many comments about activities that you are very pleased with what the centre has to offer especially those that help you understand your child's needs and emotions. Many of you that we spoke to talked about how great the staff are at giving advice and that you feel really confident now in being a parent. You are also very helpful to each other, sharing experiences and support. One grandmother was quick to suggest ideas in helping improve a child's sleep patterns because she had experienced similar problems in the past.

We have seen that the care, support and guidance the centre staff provide are good, particularly for those who have challenges at home. Several parents told us how important it has been for them to be able to talk to someone in their home language and how important it has been to know the staff understand and respect their culture. Relationships between the staff and you and your families are very good and we saw the warm welcome that all visitors to the centre receive. The centre is a safe place for you and your children and staff are good at helping parents understand how to keep their family safe as well. We saw how positively the centre works with other partners, such as the health visitors and the local pre-schools, to support your child's development. Many positive services are provided by the centre. But, at present, only just over half of the families with young children in the area are able to take part in the activities. We have asked the centre to use the information it has about local families and their attendance at the centre's activities so that the staff can be even more effective in meeting your needs.

The new manager and the staff have an accurate view of how the centre can improve. A good focus has been placed on developing strategies for its development but there has not been sufficient time for them to have an impact. The re-instated partnership board is still very new and has not yet developed its role in supporting and challenging the work of the centre.

Thank you again for the time you gave in talking to us. We wish you all the very best for the future.

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