

Inspection report for Ile Valley Children's Centre

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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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, representatives from the local authority, health professionals, partners who offer services and parents. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Ile Valley Children's Centre opened in 2007 as a phase two centre and provides the full core offer of children's and families' services. The centre is run by the charity Action for Children on behalf of the local authority and is situated on the Greenfylde First School site in a separate building. There is a signing-in reception and information area, and an area for buggies. The centre has a small fenced outside area for play and access to fresh air. Opening times are from 8.30am to 5.30pm, Monday to Thursday and 8.30 am to 2.30pm on Fridays for 48 weeks of the year. The centre is closed on bank holidays. Sessions are run for families between Christmas and New Year. Services delivered directly by the centre at the main centre site include family learning, music and movement, young parents' group, monthly dads' group, breastfeeding group and peer support, baby massage, well baby clinic, antenatal and post-natal support, a childminder support group, and one-to-one support for parents. The school site is used when family events are provided in the school holidays. Services are delivered by the centre at other locations. Family play and learning sessions take place at Broadway Village Hall and South Petherton Methodist Church Rooms. The centre signposts parents to partner services for advice and training, such as Somerset Skills and learning who support in training for returning to work and volunteer opportunities.

The centre is one of five centres managed by Action for Children. The cluster of centres is led by a manager and each centre has a centre lead who is responsible to the cluster manager. Ile Valley Children's Centre has two part-time centre workers and a business support officer. Each centre in the cluster has a separate advisory

board. Ile Valley Children's Centre Advisory Board is chaired by a parent and there are representatives from partner services, such as health, social care and education as well as representatives from the local community and parents.

There are currently 781 families with children under five years of age within the centre's reach area. The centre serves the small market town of Ilminster and surrounding rural areas. There are no wards within the centre's reach area that are within the 30% most deprived areas of the country. However, there are pockets of high need and in the rural areas, facilities for families, for example transport, are limited. The levels of skills shown by children on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage provision are those expected for their age.

The majority of families are of White British origin. The total number of families from ethnic minority groups or whose first language is not English is lower than figures for Somerset. There are small numbers of lone parents and few teenage pregnancies. Families out of work and those dependent on workless benefits or receiving the childcare element of working tax credit amount to less than one sixth of all families in the reach area. This figure is below figures for the local authority.

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

Family learning is at the heart of this good centre's work. The provision for babies, young children and families who use the centre is good. Over half the families in the reach area use the centre and, as a result of the centre's effective working, data show that this figure continues to rise. Within the centre's work there are key strengths. The engagement of the most vulnerable families with the centre's services is well above the target set by the local authority. Centre staff are highly committed to creating trusting relationships between adults. As a result the centre's care, guidance and support provided to help adults with parenting skills, emotional and physical health and well-being are good. Group and individual sessions are well planned and delivered using the staff's good understanding of child development and the needs of their families. The Ile Valley Children's Centre supports families well. There are strong partnerships with other agencies and a coordinated approach to

matching the support to the needs of families, for example, the two-year-old funding for nursery places. There are good systems in place for assessing starting points of vulnerable families and their children, tracking their progress and giving support. Consequently, families and children make good progress. Data show year on improvement in narrowing the gap in children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially in communication, language and literacy.

The centre has built up good working relationships with health and other professionals leading to an effective coordinated approach in supporting families who use the services. The range of health outcomes for families is good. A particular favourite with parents is the opportunity to learn about healthy eating through cooking sessions. The proportion of mothers within the reach area breastfeeding their child at six to eight weeks is in line with the target set by the local authority.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Parents and visiting professionals comment on the warm and friendly welcome they receive from staff. Consequently, families feel safe, and babies, children and adults all get along well. Key partners, such as those from education, comment that it is the positive relationships that make a discernible difference to the well-being of all centre users, including the most vulnerable families. Centre staff respond quickly to concerns raised by parents by putting appropriate support in place and continually following up with families to evaluate the impact of their work. The open and trusting relationships between staff and parents mean that, where necessary, staff challenge families in the interests of family and child well-being, for example, in their outreach work, on issues relating to safety in the home such as catches on doors and the storage of cleaning materials. During centre sessions children and babies play happily and behave well. Parents report that by coming to the centre they have made friendships which benefit themselves and their children.

Staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity and inclusion is central to the services provided. The centre knows its community well. Through working with individual families and signposting them to opportunities that are available, the centre is successful in removing barriers to further learning and training, for example, supporting mothers to become breastfeeding mentors. Consequently, there is a sustained improvement in the engagement of families, particularly those in need of support. This is because parents feel that centre managers and staff value them as individuals and listen well to their views. Comments show that parents feel confident to make suggestions about activities provided. The centre's approach of 'you said and we did' is particularly appreciated because families know they are making a positive contribution to the centre's work. The parents' forum meets regularly and is an effective way in which the centre captures the views of parents, as well as the representation of users on the advisory board.

The cluster manager and the centre lead share information with the advisory board. The advisory board is fully involved in setting targets for improvement and creating the centre's development plan. These targets are linked to the local authority priorities, such as reducing child obesity in five year olds. Through effective planning

of activities, for example those relating to healthy eating, the centre links the focus of its work well with local authority areas for improvement. The centre's self-evaluation is detailed, based on evidence, and accurate. This has led to the continual rise in user engagement in most of the areas within the centre's reach. There are clear systems for users, staff and professionals to discuss findings from assessment data in evaluating the centre's work on all families. However, while working partnerships with other professionals and services are strong, current limitations on the data received from some are preventing leaders and managers from establishing an even sharper analysis of the needs of families within parts of the whole reach area. This means that across the different wards in the reach area the engagement of some users is variable.

Senior leaders understand the centre's strengths and areas for further improvement, for example using a wider range of information to be able to increase the user engagement in all parts of the reach area. The processes for self-evaluation are well embedded into the centre's work, for example there are clear systems for finding out the views of users. Actions taken so far to carefully evaluate the effectiveness of the centre's work, particularly with the most vulnerable families, are good. This, together with the drive and ambition of senior leaders and staff, the way in which families are cared for and feel safe, the opportunities for parents and children to learn together and how well children are prepared for the transition to education, continue to make a discernible difference to the lives of families and demonstrate a good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Build on the current effective partnership working to include more sharing of data and key information which will support the centre further in reaching more families and being able to continue to rigorously assess the quality of its work.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families enjoy their parenting experiences and the opportunities to learn alongside their children. Consequently, children's behaviour is good and parents and children are keen to try out new activities, for example making hand prints from plaster of Paris. Babies show curiosity in the stimulating and colourful resources offered in the centre, for example investigating shiny silver paper and interest in first baby books. At the end of the fun play sessions, children and parents make decisions about what they have enjoyed the most by placing a picture of themselves on the planning board, or in the case of children, a smiley face. In this way, children are being encouraged to make decisions about their learning. This contributes to their good preparation for transition to pre-school education and on into school. Local schools report how well children and their families are prepared for school, as a result of how effectively the children's centre supports their needs early on, including helping

vulnerable families overcome difficulties. Families and childminders taking part in the family event days report how much they enjoy the different activities on offer. Parents feedback to the centre show how successful these events are and that they 'would like more'.

The centre is quick to respond to current issues facing families. For example, feedback from families shows that they appreciate sessions on managing money issues and ideas for saving energy. The centre is also quick to respond to individual families in times of crisis. Other professionals comment on the good lines of communication between the centre and themselves. As a result, families are better equipped to deal with and work through unexpected events such as unemployment, accidents and bereavements. In this way the centre is effectively helping families to improve their economic stability and independence.

Parents regularly share their views and opinions with the centre through parent questionnaires, parent forum and evaluating sessions, or by talking to individual members of staff. These show that parents have a good level of satisfaction with services provided, including opportunities to feed into and influence decision making and centre planning.

The centre has effective assessment systems in place to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and adults and those families subject to Common Assessment Framework processes. Child Protection Plans are monitored closely. Parents report feeling safe and able to talk about their worries or concerns with others. Parents act on advice they are given and through engagement in practical activities. For example, road safety and fire safety activities ensure that parents understand how to keep themselves and their children safe on the roads and in the home.

Relationships are positive. Parents experiencing problems report that 'nothing is ever too much trouble'. Parenting sessions delivered as part of the cluster or in partnership with parent and family support advisers give parents opportunities to train as volunteers to work in children's settings, and some go on to take further qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Through the centre's work in building parents' confidence some parents become breastfeeding peer mentors and their support is highly valued by the centre and new mothers alike.

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	2

positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	
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

Through belonging to a cluster of children's centres, Ile Valley Children's Centre is able to provide a wide range of staff expertise. The centre regularly shares resources across the cluster, for example staff from other centres delivering training and parenting classes. This means that sessions can be run by members of staff from other centres so creating a variety of learning opportunities for all groups of parents and children. Experienced members of staff know individual families well and have a good understanding of the needs of families in the local area. The centre provides good services and activities that effectively engage users, for example peer support for breastfeeding mothers and baby drop-in clinics run by health visitors. The centre provides a comprehensive range of information which is readily available for parents. This includes information for adults seeking employment and regular updates on job vacancies in the area. Some adults are currently taking up opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills by working towards accredited qualifications. The centre views the personal development of individuals as a priority and parents, for example those who have become volunteers or those taking qualifications, report how their confidence has developed.

Parents praise the dedication of staff and appreciate the welcoming approach. One member of staff summed up the approach of the staff by saying, 'We are always here for the families.' Participation rates exceed the local authority target and continue to improve. However, despite advertising services locally the cluster manager and centre lead are aware that some families living in rural locations do not currently use the centre's facilities. In some areas transport links are limited and parents report finding the cost of travelling to the centre high. Group activities provided in the outreach areas are generally well attended and the centre is continually striving to attract more families.

The delivery of services is well targeted to support individual vulnerable families because of good assessment of the needs of these families. The outreach work by the centre workers is effective, for example, providing ideas for outdoor activities such as a nature walk and following this through with ideas to do in the home. Case studies provide evidence about the positive difference centre services make to the outcomes of those most in need and who are experiencing problems. Schools receiving families report that the centre makes a 'discernible difference' to these particular families. The trusting relationships which develop are used as a building block by families to have confidence in accessing additional services and working with other professionals for support. The quality and range of services are integrated well to meet the personal, social, health and safety needs of local families.

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 clear direction and leadership from senior leaders, including those from the charity Action for Children, underpin the centre's effective work. The good governance and accountability arrangements mean that leaders have an accurate understanding of the links between self-evaluation, strategic planning and the provision of services. The advisory board provides good support and challenge and uses the data available well to set targets for continued improvement. Equality and inclusion run through the centre's work. Feedback from users shows confidence in how the centre treats adults and children as individuals. The good partnership with other professionals ensures services are coordinated and integrated because communication is effective. Protocols for the sharing of information between services are generally established. However, while the working partnership with other professionals and agencies is strong and benefits families well, in a few cases the protocols for increased sharing of data and information are sometimes less clear.

A particularly strong partnership is that which exists between the centre and the neighbouring school on site. As a result, families and their children make a smooth transition to school and achieve well. The centre continues to develop a variety of partnership activities, which include statutory, private, voluntary and independent providers.

Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and ensure that all who use the centre are well protected. The systems for staff vetting and recruitment fully meet requirements. New parents are routinely made aware of the procedures for child protection. These are followed relentlessly by staff where there are concerns related to children's safety and protection. Policies relating to safeguarding are available to parents. Displays and notices relating to services, family information and policies are available to parents, such as the complaints policy. Health and safety matters, including child protection, are closely supervised and supported by robust risk assessments.

The use of assessment data and evaluation systems by leaders and managers to improve services further is good and has had a positive impact on the continued improvements in user engagement. The successes of groups and activities are well evaluated by the centre leader and actions are put in place to address any issues raised. In this way the centre staff keep a constant eye on how to improve services

offered.

The use of resources is enhanced as a result of belonging to a cluster of centres. This includes the deployment of staff, volunteers and session workers, and the good outcomes for families demonstrate that the centre is providing good value for money. Performance management arrangements for staff are in place. These arrangements are overseen by the cluster manager. As a result, the training needs of staff are up to date and well met, for example in first aid and child protection.

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

Greenfylde First School was inspected as part of the primary school Section 5 inspection in 2009. The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings and judgements at the time.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ile Valley Children's Centre on 25–26 April 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Ile Valley Children's Centre works effectively with you to ensure that you and your children enjoy learning, have fun and develop well together. As a result, outcomes for users are good. The groups run by the children's centre encourage you and your children to have healthy lives. You told us you particularly enjoy the cooking activities and as a result your children enjoy trying new food. The centre provides you with a range of information on healthy living, including recipe booklets and information on sleep, weaning and potty training. You also told us how much you appreciate the sessions on money and saving energy because this is helping you with ideas for your family budgeting.

Those of you we spoke to told us that you enjoy the parenting classes on offer and that the Dads' Club on a Saturday morning is popular. You also gave us positive feedback on the family events, some of which happen in the school holidays and take account of older children as well. You thought these were very successful and offered a range of exciting activities for every family. From our observations, case studies and discussions, we were able to see that the centre provides well for you and has a positive impact on your lives. The parenting classes give you ideas about supporting your child's learning at home. The sessions also help you to know about your child's ongoing development and how to provide the activities which will stimulate your baby or child's learning further. Parents report that information such as the booklet on Positive Parenting is very helpful. Consequently, your child is well prepared for the transition to pre-school education and on into school. Those of you in receipt of the two-year-old funding value the support given to you and your child in accessing pre-school or nursery education.

The centre provides well for you and plans the use of space and resources effectively, including the small outside area. Equipment is bright, colourful and stimulating for your children. You told us that resources are regularly changed and well matched to the needs of your children. As part of the cluster and through the effective partnerships with a range of pre-schools the centre shares resources well to provide a continuous range of new and engaging toys and resources for learning.

We were impressed by the way some of you have become volunteers, through encouragement from the centre, and are going on to take literacy and numeracy qualifications. You told us that you are, quite rightly, proud of your achievements and these have been possible because of the work of the children's centre. New mothers told us how much they appreciate the support from other mothers who have become breastfeeding mentors. Childminders told us that the centre supports their work with children well and they appreciate the drop-in sessions.

The centre's strong partnership with Greenfylde First School means that many of you are familiar with school staff before your child starts school and benefit from holiday activities offered on the school site. We found that centre staff are enthusiastic and

work well with partners, for example health professionals, to successfully help you to make positive changes to your lives. We know that leaders and managers and staff listen to your views about the services provided for you. You told us that you appreciate the responses you get from staff following the feedback you give on activities.

The good safeguarding arrangements help you to feel safe and free from risks. For example, leaders follow robust practices to ensure all adults working in the centre are suitable and well qualified to do so. The centre benefits from being one of a cluster of five centres run by the charity Action for Children. Across the cluster policies and procedures for safeguarding are consistent. We can see that children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Babies are keen to investigate toys and respond well to you and to other adults. The centre puts being safe at the heart of everything it does. Consequently, relationships are good and you report that staff are approachable, friendly and 'always have time to listen'. There is good support offered to those of you whose circumstances may make you and your children vulnerable. Staff and partners assess families' individual needs well in order to ensure you receive timely and appropriate support. Health, social care and a range of other professionals work well with the centre because communication is good. Consequently, this coordinated approach around families helps you and your children thrive.

Your children's centre is well led by senior managers and staff with ambition and drive to continually improve the services offered to you. The centre lead and her team, overseen by the cluster manager, use a range of information when planning activities. They listen well to your views and respond by amending activities. In planning services, centre leaders carefully analyse the data presented by the local authority to consider the effectiveness of their work. This is well supported by the advisory board, which is fully involved in reviewing and evaluating the centre's performance against key targets. However, there are a few inconsistencies in the way data and information are shared between services. This means that, while partnership working is strong, the children's centre is not always able to build on how it rigorously evaluates the impact of its work on the community it serves and to engage with the families in the reach area who are not currently using the centre's services.

It was a pleasure to talk to you and see how you and your babies and children enjoyed spending their time in the Ile Valley Children's Centre in the activity and drop-in sessions provided. Your children settle well and those of you using the services on offer are well supported.

Thank you for your contribution to the inspection.

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