

Inspection report for Totnes and District Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon County Council
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Centre leader	Deborah Oakey
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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 the governing body, the core offer monitoring group, the centre manager, members of staff, parents and carers, representatives from Action for Children, local authority officers and partner professionals from other agencies. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Totnes and District Children's Centre is located in Totnes having developed from a Mini Sure Start project. It was designated in July 2007 as a phase two children's centre to provide the full core offer. Until recently, the centre was managed by an independent local charity alongside a pre-school based in the same building and a nursery located in the town centre. A commissioning agreement was set up in April 2011 between the local authority and Action for Children for the delivery of the children's centre services. The centre operates as part of a cluster of four children's centres in the South Hams. It offers a range of services including health services, family play sessions and parenting programmes. The centre still maintains strong links with the pre-school and nursery and is a key member of the local learning community which includes all pre-school and primary schools in the reach area.

The number of children aged five years old or younger living in the centre's reach area is 781. The centre serves an area which is not identified as deprived overall, but includes some pockets of deprivation with a minority of families either dependent on workless benefits or low incomes. The population is mostly of White British heritage, with a very small percentage of families from other ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and knowledge that are at the expected levels.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. The centre is clearly at the heart of the community and is located in one of the two main areas of deprivation. It is accessed by families from the reach area and beyond. Until recently, it provided some services in outlying villages. The centre has clear plans to reintroduce some outreach provision for families with young children in two of the villages. Families from across the area who attend the centre appreciate the support of staff and the warm and welcoming environment.

Healthy outcomes for the majority of the families are satisfactory overall, and good in many respects. For example, breastfeeding rates are high. However, immunisation rates are low. The centre has recognised this and is working with health professionals to improve immunisation rates in an area with a strong cultural resistance to immunisation. Key health services are provided at the clinic by health professionals. The centre's staff provide additional activities, for example, healthy eating sessions and breastfeeding support to supplement key services provided by health professionals. Mothers particularly value the support provided to breastfeed their children.

The centre provides a good range of activities to stimulate and develop children's knowledge and skills and to prepare them effectively for transition to formal schooling. These activities are well planned and ensure that children consistently make good progress in developing their skills and in gaining confidence and independence. The proportion of children in the local area reaching 78 points or above across the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with national averages. However, services for adults are less well developed. The centre provides few services for adults although it recently introduced advice and guidance sessions for families dependent upon benefits on how to maximise their income.

The centre has a strong focus on the safety of children overall, and complies with safeguarding legislation. The centre is taking appropriate measures to promote the safety of children in the new conservatory area of the building while awaiting the installation of further security measures. Staff promote a caring ethos. They work

well with professionals from key agencies, for example, health and social care, to improve outcomes for children, particularly those from target groups.

New management arrangements as a result of the commissioning agreement with Action for Children have generally been handled well. The centre manager and staff have ensured that families have not generally experienced any deterioration of services during the transition period. However, staff do not yet have access to suitable information technology resources to comply fully with the processes and procedures required by Action for Children. The centre does not produce sufficient suitable data for the analysis of trends in the take-up of services or of how individual families, particularly those from target groups, access services. The centre has focused on improving areas of weakness despite the pressures of considerable organisational change. The progress made in implementing appropriate initiatives confirms that the centre has a satisfactory capacity to sustain improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend services to increase opportunities for adults to improve their economic and social well-being.
- Provide appropriate resources for staff to use information technology effectively in their work.
- Collect and analyse data to monitor trends in take-up and progression of different groups in the community, particularly families from targeted groups, and amend the services available in the light of this information so that outcomes can be improved.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre engages in a number of initiatives to support breastfeeding. The rates of breastfeeding across the reach area are above national averages and improving further. Mothers appreciate the support they receive: 'I would have stopped breastfeeding without the support; it is nice to know there are people to talk to.' Although immunisation rates are lower than the national rates and are the lowest in the county, the centre has recognised this and, in conjunction with health professionals, is taking concerted action to improve immunisation rates. It is too early to identify the impact of these actions.

The centre pays good attention to supporting families to feel safe both on the premises and in their daily lives. However, the centre has yet to implement a permanent solution to ensure the safety of children in the new part of the building. Effective partnerships with the Family Intervention Service and social care provide support for the very few families where there are child protection concerns. The use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is now well established, and demonstrates good outcomes for many of the families that have been referred. Staff collaborate with key partner agencies to provide good support through home visits to

vulnerable families referred for one-to-one support. These visits extend across the reach area, and meet the needs of the most vulnerable families in the area.

The emotional well-being of parents and children underpins much of the provision based at the centre. For example, 'Mellow Parenting' and 'Incredible Years' programmes are valued by parents. Parents particularly appreciate the 'Step by Step' programme for families with children who are disabled and have special educational needs: 'Each child and parent are made to feel special.' Activities such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Hullabaloo' music sessions are well planned and successfully engage parents and children. They are much enjoyed and appreciated by those who participate. Overall, staff plan and resource stimulating activities which encourage children to play and learn alongside other children. The centre has effectively improved children's skills in phonics, their social and emotional well-being and their fine motor skills which impact on writing ability. The provision at the centre also helps to develop adults' social networks. Parents say 'The centre is somewhere to go; it stops the isolation.'

The recent development of 'Parents and Children Together' (PACT) engages a small but increasing number of parents in providing support and encouragement to families new to the provision. This support is much valued: 'I remember that the first time I came I did not know what to do.' Few parents are directly involved in formal decision-making processes. The centre elicits parents' views through an 'Air and Share' process halfway through every term. It makes it clear to parents what action has been taken in response to the outcomes of this process. Parents appreciate the centre's 'children's clothes and toys' fund raising initiative: 'The children's clothes and toys table is quick and easy; better than going to a charity shop.'

Although the centre has well-established links with relevant agencies it has not yet developed sufficient support for families to make great improvements to their economic and social well-being. Some activities, for example 'Maximise your Income' one-to-one sessions with advisors, have recently been introduced. The centre also plans to introduce workshops to improve self-confidence and basic information technology skills in the near future. A programme to improve access to vocational training and employability skills as well as more general adult education provision is planned for the next academic year.

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	3

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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The overall quality of care for children and families is satisfactory. Staff use assessment in a satisfactory way to ensure that services meet families' needs. The range of services based at the centre meets the needs of most families. However, no outreach provision is currently provided for families in villages within the reach area. Parents in one village are maintaining playgroup activities, having been given a firm foundation of support from the centre's staff in the past. Plans for outreach provision in the future are limited to weekly services in two villages.

Staff and representatives of key agencies work together well to provide good integrated services for families referred for individual support. Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by staff. Good links with portage workers provide early intervention and ensure smooth transition into mainstream settings. 'Step by Step' sessions offer a warm and secure environment for parents and their children, and are much valued by the families.

Some provision for other target groups is well established, for example, 'Dangerous Dads' activities are organised monthly by a father who has volunteered to offer this provision. However, it is not clear how many 'dads' engage in this provision or whether it meets the needs of fathers of vulnerable groups. Services for other targeted groups, such as young parents and lone parents, are also provided, although these are less well developed.

The centre is an active partner in the local learning community; it has strong links with all pre-schools and primary schools within the reach area. The progress of children who attend the centre is monitored by staff who plan and resource future sessions to suit the development of individual children. Evidence from the head of a local primary school indicates that 'the good working relationship with the centre supports smoother transition into school'.

The centre has recently introduced one-to-one 'Maximise your Income' sessions offered by Homestart representatives. It is too early to identify the impact of these sessions on improving the social and economic well-being of the few families that have attended. The centre does not yet provide sufficient advice, guidance and support for parents who would benefit from further education and training opportunities to improve their employability. The centre has recently worked in collaboration with partner agencies to develop a suite of education and training opportunities for adults to improve their confidence, qualifications and employability. However, these have yet to be implemented.

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

The centre is run by a manager who is motivated to seek further improvement and effectively focuses staff on continuing to improve services. The manager and staff have a clear vision for the centre and work hard to meet the community's needs. The day-to-day management of the centre is good. The centre manager has a good working relationship with the manager from Action for Children with responsibility for this cluster of children's centres. However, although the centre's staff feel extremely well supported by the centre manager, they say they feel that they are 'forgotten' by senior managers. They have insufficient access to appropriate computer resources to implement the policies and procedures required by Action for Children.

The centre does not sufficiently gather information about take-up and progression rates of target groups in order to systematically plan further improvements in services. Although it holds 'Air and Share' weeks three times a year to gain feedback from parents and carers who access the services, the centre does not systematically contact non-users of the services to identify whether it should improve the range of provision to meet their needs.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory overall. Staff recruitment checks are thorough and ensure staff's suitability to work with children and vulnerable adults. All staff have received appropriate safeguarding training. They contribute to the CAF process effectively and work effectively with social care services, in particular the Family Intervention team, to support families where concerns about their well-being have been identified.

The centre has developed services to promote the inclusion of all children and families. The centre's website has the facility to translate the content into a number of languages. The response to families who have been referred for individual support is good, and home visits ensure that the needs of these families are met appropriately with good support from partner agencies as appropriate. The high participation rate by families within the local area represents a wide range of users. Staff are friendly and helpful and respond well to the needs of many families, including those with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at the centre, through well-organised sessions.

Partnerships with other agencies are good. The centre has established good links

with relevant agencies which have proved beneficial to families in the area. Regular breakfast meetings held at the centre support the further development of effective links with partners. Key agencies are well represented on the core offer monitoring group; these meetings provide useful feedback to the centre as well as agency updates regarding the services they provide to families in the area. Currently, parental involvement in formal decision-making processes is limited; only two parents are members of the core offer monitoring group. However, the centre has well-established mechanisms to gain parental views and has supported the development of the PACT group to involve parents further in the development of services. The centre's provision of adult training and qualifications is limited. The centre has recognised this and is working with relevant partners to provide a programme of workshops and courses to increase the self-confidence and employability skills of adults.

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 adults	3
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	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 Totnes and District Children's Centre on 16 and 17 May 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. We enjoyed talking to you. You were very clear in your views about the centre and its staff. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution to the inspection.

We found that you are generally provided with a satisfactory level of services; many are good, but there are gaps in the provision of services that would be helpful to you. For example, while some services, for example breastfeeding, are good, services relating to immunisation are not as effective. The centre provides well for families in need of specific support through home visits and strong links with specialist staff from other organisations. However, the centre has been unable to maintain services in your local communities, although the services based at the centre are generally good. The centre recognises that at the moment it does not offer as many opportunities as it could to enable you to gain in confidence, achieve qualifications and increase your chances of employment. However, it is working on improving these opportunities in the near future.

We found that you and your children enjoyed and benefited from the activities available at the centre. Many of you said that you and your children have gained in confidence and made new friends.

We like the idea of the PACT group providing support to families who attend the centre, and would like more of you to join in this activity. At the moment, the core offer monitoring group, which influences decisions about the services available to you, has two parents among its members. We would like to see more of you joining the group and helping to make sure that the centre meets your needs.

The centre manager and staff have a good understanding of how to improve services for you. They are working closely with partner organisations to provide better opportunities for you to gain in confidence and achieve qualifications. At the moment the staff do not have enough computer facilities to make sure that they can complete their paperwork quickly so that they have more time to plan and improve the services on offer to you. We recommend that this is resolved in the near future, so that staff can concentrate on improving your experience of the centre and supporting your children's development more effectively.

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