

# Inspection report for Friars Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Southend-On-Sea
<b>Inspection number</b>	383801
<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–2 May 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Katherine Beck

<b>Centre leader</b>	Andrea Woods
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Friars Primary and Nursery School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	None

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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**Report published:** May 2012

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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.

Inspectors held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, the acting headteacher, and a member of the school's senior leadership team with responsibility for liaison between the school and centre, representatives of the health services, community services, the East Shoebury locality manager and parents using the services. They also met with representatives of Jobcentre, the local college, the local authority, and the advisory board.

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

### Information about the centre

Friars Children's Centre is a phase two centre located on the same site as Friars Primary and Nursery School. Currently, governance is the responsibility of the school's governing body. While the substantive headteacher is on extended leave, the centre is led temporarily by the acting headteacher and a member of the school's senior leadership team. The advisory board includes representatives from services and the school's governing body.

The local authority is carrying out a consultation to re-organise its children's centres. It is proposed that in September 2012, the centre is aligned with the nearby Shoebury Children's Centre, managed by the Pre-School Learning Alliance. Staff turnover is high. Staff who left recently are not being replaced until arrangements following the consultation period are finalised. At present, no staff are directly employed by the centre and services are commissioned or delivered by employees at the school. The centre serves the West and East Shoebury wards. Deprivation levels vary from the highest 11% to 30% in the country.

The centre was designated in 2007 and received full core offer status in 2009. It provides childcare during activities, family support, and child and family health, as

well as job and benefits advice. The area served by the centre includes private developments, but mostly consists of housing association homes and flats. The number of lone parents and workless families on benefits is above the national average. The majority of families are from White British backgrounds. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they first start in Early Years Foundation Stage provision are below those expected for their age.

## 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**

<b>4</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>4</b>
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## Main findings

Friars Children's Centre is inadequate. It has been unable to maximise its effectiveness within the community because of high staff turnover and interruptions to its leadership and management. The arrangements for governance and accountability lack clarity. Data is not used to set ambitious targets; to inform the centre's development plan; or identify the range of activities and services needed to meet community needs. Self-evaluation is weak because it fails to provide a clear picture of the centre's strengths and weaknesses to inform and contribute to further improvement. Key targets set over a year ago, to use data to check the effectiveness of its provision, and to implement outreach services, have not been met. The centre's capacity to improve is inadequate.

Few families contribute their views about provision and to decision-making in the centre. The centre is unaware of how effectively it is making a difference to the lives of families in the area and is not engaging sufficiently with those who are most in need. The management of resources is having insufficient impact on improving outcomes for families. Outcomes, particularly those for being healthy, achieving and enjoyment, economic and social well-being, are inadequate.

Currently, the centre is without a manager. Staff who oversee the management of the centre in the interim have full-time responsibilities within the school. They do not have sufficient time or expertise in this work to drive the centre's development. However, they ensure that the centre continues to provide health services, a popular dads' club, sessions to promote healthy living and opportunities for families to have fun and play together. Community events in the holidays are supported well and promote the centre within the locality.

Following a recent audit, new arrangements to enable families to be safe in the centre and in the home have been implemented. Staff training for child protection has been updated and a new policy forbidding the use of mobile telephones in the centre has been introduced. Courses in safety in the home have been presented and parents are referred to a nearby centre for training in first aid. The lack of outreach services means the level of involvement of lone families, those from workless households and those whose situations make them hard to engage is limited. While the centre knows where they live, it has not been sufficiently active in involving them. As a result, the centre is not promoting equal opportunities.

The centre provides a limited range of universal services on a day-to-day basis. These are not always well attended. It works successfully with a small number of targeted families on specific needs relating to social, emotional and behavioural issues. Often, parents are signposted to other centres to access services, to the college for training or to other health services. The centre does not follow up the families it helps in this way. It does not collect the data from other services sufficiently to know the impact of their work on the families in the reach area.

Families have regular access to Jobcentre services at the centre. Benefits services are provided elsewhere. The centre has data to show the percentage of children aged from birth to four living in households dependent on workless benefits or eligible for working tax credit in its reach. It does not know how many of these families it enables to improve their economic stability by reducing their reliance on benefits or by returning to work.

The centre can show that the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and others of this age is reducing. That said, it does not track the progress of children attending the centre to show the centre's impact on their development.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Together with the local authority, put in place an effective management structure that ensures:
  - staff leading the centre have the appropriate expertise and time to maximise its effectiveness within the community
  - all involved in governance, accountability and day-to-day management are clear about their roles and responsibilities
  - self-evaluation is rigorous, based on secure evidence, and identifies the centre's strengths and targets for improvement
  - the collection of data from a range of services is used effectively to set ambitious targets, to measure the impact of the centre's provision on outcomes for families and offer a wider range of services matched to

need.

- Provide effective outreach services to increase the take-up of services and improve the lives of lone and workless families, and those that are hardest to reach.
- Make better provision for families across the target groups to improve their economic well-being.
- Take action to involve parents more effectively in making decisions about the centre.

### How good are outcomes for families?

<b>4</b>
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Children behave well in the centre as there are fun things to do. Risk assessments for daily activities and external visits appropriately promote safety. Parents said that they feel confident and safe while in the centre. Recent first aid and safety at home courses have helped to minimise injuries to children. However, the centre is unable to demonstrate its impact on reducing the number of visits families make to the accident and emergency department. Anecdotal evidence indicates that activities in the centre reduce parents' sense of isolation and post-natal depression. Partnerships with a range of professionals enable a cohesive approach to children subject to Common Assessment Framework processes; no children are currently subject to a child protection plan.

The 'Healthy Exercise, Nutrition for the Really Young' course promotes healthy lifestyles, but there is little to show the changes families make to their lifestyles in the longer term. Health visitors promote breast feeding, but there is no data to show how successful they are at enabling mothers to sustain it. Obesity in five-year-olds is low in the area, but it is high for older children. That said, the lack of outreach means too few hard to reach families engage with services to help improve their health outcomes. The centre lacks provision for families who need support for smoking cessation, drugs and alcohol abuse. It does not know who these families are.

Children enjoy their learning alongside their parents, although activities are not planned sufficiently to offer greater challenge over time. Children's communication skills have been identified as an area of weakness. Speech therapy is not readily available. 'Let's Talk with Under Fives' is helping parents and children to communicate more effectively. However, the lack of evaluation and recording of children's achievements makes it hard to track children's level of development. The effectiveness of the centre's provision on improving outcomes for children at the age of five is not monitored rigorously enough. That said, the school can demonstrate that the gap between the lowest achieving children and others in the Early Years Foundation Stage is narrowing.

A very small number of parents who attend the centre regularly become volunteers. Their contribution is monitored carefully so that they remain good role models.

Parents and staff treat one another with respect and consideration. The centre has found it difficult to involve parents across the target groups in decision-making and governance. Consequently, parents are unable to influence the centre's provision and offer ideas to enhance its effectiveness. The centre is not aware of the number of parents who improve their skills and personal development through accredited and non-accredited courses. A representative from Jobcentre contacts those who are in receipt of benefits to keep them up-to-date about matters affecting them and the availability of jobs. There is little to show how families enhance their financial independence and there is no information about how many parents are helped back into work.

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>4</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>3</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>4</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>4</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>4</b>

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

**4**

The range of services currently provided is limited. Except with regard to safety, there is little evidence of the centre's effectiveness, although it meets appropriately the needs of fathers and those with very young children. The centre also lacks the detailed information it requires to meet fully the needs of workless and lone families and those who are harder to reach. Most sessions are universal and parents are asked for a small contribution to the costs. Targeted services are linked mostly to families where there are social, behavioural or emotional needs and are organised at a time when the whole family can attend.

'Toddler Time', 'Baby Weigh', and 'Baby Crew' are popular, although attendance is sporadic. They provide appropriate opportunities for parents to enjoy playing with their children especially painting and 'messy' activities not always provided at home. However, activities undertaken in these sessions and in the crèche lack careful planning to enhance children's learning. Visits to places of interest and local events widen the social experiences of families. 'Let's Talk with Under Fives' is designed to help parents assist in their child's language development. 'Baby Massage' and first

aid courses have been arranged in the centre or in another venue close by as a result of parental requests. Few activities enable families across the community to learn about better ways to budget and improve their economic well-being. Those wishing to enhance their skills in literacy and numeracy or acquire new skills to gain entry to work are signposted to the local colleges. The centre is unaware of how many parents have been successful in their studies. This is because their achievements are not recorded or celebrated.

Case studies indicate that those whose circumstances make them vulnerable and who come to the centre, receive suitable advice and are directed to the services that can assist them to best effect. They demonstrate improvements in family relationships and children’s safety. Support for some fathers has resulted in improved contact with their children when they are no longer living at home. However, the lack of outreach services means that the care, guidance and support provided is not sufficiently focused on families in other target groups.

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>4</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>4</b>

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

**4**

Weaknesses in management over time have restricted the centre’s development. Regular reports to the governing body, advisory board and local authority present an unduly positive picture of the centre’s provision. They lack data and clear explanations of its strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, those responsible do not have sufficient information to ask challenging questions to hold the centre fully to account, to monitor its effectiveness and check that public funds are spent wisely. Targets for leaders to use data to check the impact of the centre’s services were not checked. Data and advice provided by the local authority have not been followed up. The lack of urgency in setting up outreach services limits opportunities for hard to reach groups to improve their circumstances. Self-evaluation procedures do not include adequate consultation with partner services and parents, analysis of data or rigorous monitoring. Objectives and targets set out in the centre’s development plan lack ambition and are not monitored for their effective implementation. In addition, these targets are not shared with other service providers or families. Monitoring of provision, including that provided by commissioned services lacks rigour.

Arrangements to safeguard families in the centre are satisfactory. No-one is permitted to work in the centre until they have undergone successful Criminal Records Bureau checks. Recent child protection training reminded staff about



symptoms of abuse and neglect. It provided designated child protection officers with up-to-date procedures to follow should abuse be suspected. Staff work together with the central team that deals with referrals under the Common Assessment Framework to protect vulnerable children. Support for those experiencing domestic abuse satisfactorily promotes the safety of individuals within their own locality.

Efforts to involve fathers in their children's lives have been successful. In contrast, the centre has failed to engage with families across the community. Systems to identify the needs of specific groups and monitor the impact of provision are not used well enough to show if the achievement gap for adults is being narrowed. Partnerships with health, Jobcentre and the local colleges do not include sufficient exchanges of data to demonstrate the impact of these services. Provision for those who are disabled or with children under five with disabilities or special educational needs is limited.

The centre offers its basic services for 50 weeks a year. During school holidays and after school, it provides a wide range of clubs to benefit the community and families with children with special educational needs. The accommodation is purpose built, with good quality resources. Other resources, including staffing are not deployed well enough to ensure families gain maximum benefit from the centre. Consequently, value for money is inadequate.

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>4</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>4</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>4</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>4</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>3</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>4</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>4</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 Friars Children's Centre on 1–2 May 2012. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Thank you to those of you who met with us and for your contribution to the inspection. You mentioned you like coming to the centre to play and relax with your children. You appreciate the opportunities for them to paint and take part in 'messy play' and do things that they may not be able to do at home. The centre provides you with many fun activities to enjoy with your family as a whole in the school holidays.

As you know, there have been many changes of staff at the centre in recent years. Currently, there is no manager, or anyone working in the community to seek your views and assist you. The acting headteacher of the school and a member of the school's senior leadership team are making sure that you can still attend the activities you enjoy the most, especially the dads' club. They are ensuring that you have access to a crèche when you attend sessions for adults, family support, child and family health, job and benefits advice. They also help you to keep your children safe when you are at home, out on trips or in the centre. However, they have full-time responsibilities in the school and do not have the time or specific expertise to help the centre meet your specific needs.

With all the changes of staff, the centre has been unable to support many of you in improving your lives. This is because it does not know enough about what the community needs and how well it is helping you through the activities it is providing. Those of you who attend regularly know that you will receive help and advice about family matters. However, the centre is not taking the action it should to encourage those of you who may need advice about your children, benefits, jobs, or how to gain qualifications.

You may know that the governing body and acting headteacher of the school have the main responsibility for ensuring that the centre meets your needs. We have asked that, with all the changes, everyone is clearer about their roles and responsibilities to meet your needs. In doing so, they must provide a wider range of activities that meet your needs. They must check that the services being offered really help you to make important decisions and improve your financial situation.

To bring about the necessary improvements, we have asked the local authority to ensure that staff leading the centre have appropriate expertise and time to help as many of you as possible. Evaluations of the centre's provision must include your views and be based on secure evidence that shows its strengths and identifies areas for improvement. Your involvement in the decisions made to improve the centre must be increased. We have also asked the centre and the local authority to provide outreach services and collect and use accurate numerical information about local needs. This is to help set ambitious targets to assist more people in improving their lives, too.

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