

# Inspection report for Westham Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	383849
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–29 June 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alex Baxter

<b>Cluster Centre leader</b>	Elizabeth Rowe
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Conifers Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Little Firs Day Nursery

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:** July 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.

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's governing body, the local authority and the senior management and leadership teams. Employees of partnership agencies linking with, and visiting, the centre were consulted. Inspectors also spoke with centre staff and families using the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre.

## Information about the centre

Westham Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. It was designated as a local authority-run Sure Start children's centre and began offering the full core purpose in 2008. The site was developed in 2009 along with the adjacent Conifers Primary School and the on-site Little Firs independent childcare provision. Westham Children's Centre is one of a cluster of four centres serving the borough of Weymouth and Portland, now managed by Action for Children. Governance arrangements also include a Cluster Advisory Board and a Parents' Forum, which regularly undertakes feedback for the centre services, including those across the cluster. The newly appointed Children's Centre Cluster Manager (January 2012) oversees the strategic leadership and development of the services, and supports the Centre Lead, who manages the centre day-to-day.

The centre serves the immediate area of Westham, Chickerell and Wyke Regis, which reflects a mixed community that overall has a broadly average level of social and

economic disadvantage. It is made up predominantly of families of White British heritage. There are 829 children aged birth to four years in the reach area.

About a quarter of the communities in the centre’s reach area, including the areas close to the centre, have high levels of deprivation and are amongst the most deprived 20% across the country, with an above average number of families with low incomes and requiring benefits. Overall, approximately 18% of the children under five are members of families who depend on workless benefits. Currently, about 75% of the children served by the centre are identified as more vulnerable or experiencing difficulties in their lives. Children’s levels on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are below those expected for their age. Given the close proximity of and close links with other children’s centres in the cluster, it is common for families to access services from more than one centre.

Provision at the linked, privately run Little Firs Day Nursery and the Conifers Primary School are subject to separate inspections. The reports can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## 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

Westham is a satisfactory and improving children’s centre. Relatively new management arrangements stemming from the local authority’s commissioning agreement with Action for Children are developing well and have sustained sound provision during a difficult period of change. Continuing strengths in the involvement of parents in the day-to-day work of the centre, for example as volunteers, and in its strategic development on the Advisory Board and Parents’ Forum have also ensured that services are adapted well to the needs of families.

The new cluster manager appointed in January 2012 has accelerated the momentum of improvement by nurturing practitioners to work more as a team in meeting the needs of families, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Successful implementation of initiatives such as additional outreach support, successful engagement with fathers and gaining parents’ confidence at new birth

registration through 'Tell Us Once' information sharing confirms that the centre has a satisfactory capacity to sustain improvements.

Improving collaboration between agencies is increasing the range of data collected about the take-up of services. Senior managers are now using this data to assess the various families accessing its services. As a consequence, managers noted a gap in provision for parents and children with disabilities and special educational needs, and have introduced 'Time for Talk' and 'Making Sense' groups. However, some of the data collected is too new to enable a full analysis of trends of families' engagement in services, particularly those from target groups. This is an area for development alongside the need for agencies to more readily share information; for example, recent feedback from partners suggests that more families with children under five are now being supported than the data of 45% reach indicates. Even so, through improving partnerships, for example with midwives and pre-school settings, the centre can identify that 75% of the children that it supports include those considered most vulnerable.

Inspection shows that the centre implements good safeguarding practices. Staff also provide good quality support and guidance, which enables the parents and children who participate to make good gains in their health, safety and well-being. For example, parents attending 'Play and Learn' and 'Baby Club' improve their parenting skills well, children advance their social and communication skills enjoyably and everyone makes new friends. Similarly, outreach support through home visiting is provided with empathy and skill, and is successful in lifting self-confidence and promoting safe practice in the home.

However, while outcomes for the majority of the families across the area served by the centre are mostly satisfactory, and good in some respects, several challenges remain. For example, although breastfeeding is now being encouraged well through trained breastfeeding peer support parents, the number of new parents choosing to breastfeed remains below average. Similarly, although engagement with other groups, such as young and teenage mothers, is improving, lines of communication with parents and partner agencies are not fully developed.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Strengthen partnership working, by improving communication and the sharing of information, so that the centre engages with, and meets the needs of, all of its most vulnerable families in its community.
- In conjunction with local authority, Action for Children and other partners, develop the use of data to evaluate the impact of its services on different groups, for example families with children who have additional needs.

- Improve communication with families so that parents are fully aware of what the centre has to offer and can easily access the support for themselves, should they need and/or wish to do so.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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Observations of the centre's activities show that parents and children who participate enjoy learning and achieve well. Parents attending PEEP, Baby Club and Play and Learn sessions develop friendships and self-confidence, and extend their parenting skills. Children demonstrate good progress by behaving well and expressing views about their favourite learning activities, which are acted upon by staff. These qualities enable parents, alongside skilled staff, to advance the children's health, communication and emotional skills. As one parent said, typically reflecting the views of others, 'I specifically choose to come here because I like the friendly atmosphere and the very supportive relationships.' Parents learn how to keep their children and themselves healthy when attending the on-site health, antenatal and baby clinics, and at the same time, feel welcomed and encouraged to attend other groups.

Although data of families' achievements show some improvement, outcomes are generally satisfactory. The challenge now is to lift achievements of those families currently not accessing the centre's support. For example, data of smoking at birth and childhood obesity compares well with the national average, with the latter reflecting the positive impact over time of activities such as the 'Incredible Edible' programme. On the other hand, dental health and the take-up of breastfeeding, despite being targeted by 'Breastfriends', remain below average. Similarly, although the achievement gap at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage between the lowest 20% of children and others compares well with the national figure and is narrowing in some schools, it shows little improvement overall across the centre's area. The centre's teachers are now tackling this issue more effectively through partnerships with pre-schools and nursery providers to increase support for families with disabled children and those with special educational needs, through groups such as 'Making Sense' and 'Time for Talk'.

Although adult outcomes are satisfactory overall, they are improving. For example, engagement with young and teenage parents, through 'Parents with Prospects', is enabling an increased number to access further education and progress toward employment. More families from target groups, especially fathers, now enjoy their contact with the centre and attend activities regularly. An increasing number of parents are volunteering; currently, nine parents are assisting in breastfeeding activities and other parents contribute well to the governance of the centre.

Families attending centre activities and those at outreach locations develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe, and learn from capable staff how to assess risks effectively. Families visited at home by health and outreach workers also learn how to deal with emergencies and to sustain safety in the home. Strengthening links with health and social teams and other practitioners

ensure effective implementation of Common Assessment Framework procedures. As a result, an increasing number of children subject to child protection plans are making steady progress. New activities such as 'the Freedom Programme' implemented across the cluster of centres are beginning to help families experiencing domestic violence.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>3</b>

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

<b>3</b>
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The range of services and activities provided by the centre and its outreach services meet the needs of parents and their children satisfactorily. Following year-on-year improvement from 28% in 2009, about 45% of children under five now attend the centre's activities. Seventy-five per cent of these are from vulnerable groups, whose families receive specific funding and also access support from other centres in the cluster.

Activities such as 'PEEP' and 'Baby Club' develop good social links and promote the learning and well-being of families. Children have ample opportunities to enjoy learning through purposeful play activities, indoors and outdoors. They take great pleasure in planting flowers, 'spray painting' and 'writing' recipes for making pasta during 'Play and Learn' sessions. The broad range of activities located at other venues, including 'Breastfriends' at Chickerell Hall and 'Forest School', 'Incredible Years' and 'Young Parents' at other centres in the cluster, also promote enjoyment, parenting skills and children's personal development.

Parents and children attending activities at the centre, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, are welcomed into a safe, well-equipped learning environment. However, while crèche support is provided, the lack of longer-term childcare provision at the centre means that families access childcare at the adjacent private nursery or at other centres in the cluster. As a result, a significant number of families from within the area served by this centre continue to attend

other centres, making it difficult to measure the impact of this centre's provision.

Improving partnership working, especially since the new cluster manager's appointment, has strengthened the centre's assessment of parents' and children's progress. The close involvement of parents at every level in evaluating the impact of the centre's services also ensures that activities are matched well to their needs. Newly introduced support for young parents, parents of children with additional needs, families experiencing domestic violence and the involvement of more fathers in centre activities are all having a good impact. Additional signposting and referrals from health teams, and evaluations completed by staff and parents, all show the difference that this improved provision is now having on the lives of families with greatest needs.

Closer links with health and outreach teams are also building on the good care, guidance and support provided by the centre. However, positive initiatives such as 'Tell Us Once' to encourage parents to share information, regular meetings with paediatricians and other developments introduced by the cluster manager are new and have not yet had a full impact to raise parents' and children's achievements.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

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

<b>3</b>
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This year's annual conversation between leaders and managers has set the challenging target of engaging with 60% of families. This has further raised aspirations and quickened the pace of improvement. Additionally, under the determined lead of the new cluster manager, multi-agency partners are now working increasingly effectively with each other. Together, they are focusing services more specifically on vulnerable families and promote mostly satisfactory outcomes and value for money. For example, the newly introduced 'Making Sense' group, which includes parents of disabled children and those with special educational needs, and the children's close to average attainments at the end of their Early Years Foundation Stage education reflect the sound promotion of equality of opportunity.

Child protection and safeguarding procedures are good and risk assessments and vetting of staff are thorough. All of this, together with an increasing number of referrals and improvements in working with partners, demonstrates the centre's secure capacity to improve.



Parents are well represented in the governance of the centre. Their contributions are used well by senior staff, not only to shape services, but also to develop parents as volunteers, such as breastfeeding peer support workers. Some have also been trained as evaluators on a planned stakeholders' group. Development planning is based on evaluations made by staff and parents, which reflects a high level of satisfaction. However, self-evaluation is satisfactory rather than good because data are not fully used to measure the impact of services over time, although feedback from families and partners is used well

Steps are being taken to improve the way the centre keeps families informed; currently, though, the newly installed electronic information board at the centre has yet to be switched on and the centre's website is still not fully operative. Nevertheless, staff, especially teachers, outreach and health teams, are active across the cluster of centres in letting parents know what the centre has to offer, signposting them to the most relevant activities and generally communicating satisfactorily with parents.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

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

This inspection took account of data of the children's skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage across the range of primary schools in the area served by the children's centre. This inspection also took account of the shared Advisory Board and management arrangements that oversee the provision that is provided across the closely linked cluster of children's centres in the Weymouth and Portland area. The children's centre's partnership working with the linked school and day nursery also contributed to the judgements made.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Westham Children's Centre on 28 and 29 June 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Westham is an improving centre under the strong lead of the relatively new cluster manager. Additional guidance from senior local authority and Action for Children staff is also enabling the centre to emerge well from a period of uncertainty and change.

For some time, though, changes in management and senior staffing constrained the centre's ability to collaborate with other practitioners. This delayed, for example, the collection and use of data to check the number of families supported and measure the effectiveness of its services.

Inspection now shows that the staff of the centre and other service providers share a more united commitment to developing services to support an increasing number of families in the area that the centre serves. As a result, strengthening partnerships are making more effective use of specialist skills to meet the needs of vulnerable families and children with the greatest needs.

Improving links with partner agencies such as midwives and health visitors also mean that children and their parents can be referred and receive the help they need at an earlier stage. In addition, the developing use of venues across the area served by the centre is a beneficial feature, for example breastfeeding support at Chickerell village hall. This is because such locations are more accessible and effective in encouraging families to make first contact with the centre staff and welcoming them into the range of services that can meet their needs. Increasingly, as more families engage with services, so staff are better placed and enabled to respond to parents' views and tailor activities and support to better meet family needs. For example, you told us how much you now welcome the safe provision of hot drinks during 'Play and

Learn' sessions, which adds to the feeling of well-being enjoyed by all those attending.

Our observations of activities at the centre such as 'Bumps to Baby Club' and 'PEEP' for two-year-olds show that those parents and children attending all derive much benefit, notably developing self-confidence, social skills and new friendships. In addition, parents improve their parenting skills and value the specific guidance they receive about how to keep their children safe and healthy. Children, too, greatly enjoy the opportunities to mix with other children and learn well how to play safely in the centre's well-equipped indoor and outdoor facilities.

Like you, we recognise the good quality of the support some of you receive from outreach and health visitors when they visit you in your homes. You told us how much you appreciate and have learned about how to help your children with sleeping, weaning and hygiene issues. In addition, you welcomed the guidance about safety in the home, for example the value of window locks, and the additional information you receive about where to access specialist advice about benefits, training and preparing for employment. Above all, you told us how friendly and considerate staff are and how they all 'treat you as a new friend'. We also observed, and agree with you, that the staff welcome you with respect and promote warm relationships.

You also told us, and we agree that you make good contributions to the day-to-day life of the centre. For example, you are well represented on the Advisory Board, play an active role on the Parents' Forum and complete regular evaluations about the quality of services at the end of sessions. Staff welcome your contributions and respond positively to them. We recognise that, with your help, managers are ensuring that the range and quality of services that centre and its partners provide continue to improve.

However, some of the centre's improved services are relatively new, for example 'Time for Talk' and 'Making Sense' sessions for parents of children with additional needs. This means that they have not been in place long enough to make sure that all those in greatest need are supported. As a result, inspection shows that managers continue to face and tackle some important challenges. The first one is to strengthen partnership working through agencies communicating better with each other so that more vulnerable families receive help when they need it most. The second challenge is for managers to use data more effectively to check that the services provided are successful in meeting the differing needs of families. Third, we have asked managers to improve the way they inform you about the range of services they provide.

Thank you for allowing us to join with you during some of your sessions and for talking to us about the centre and its activities.

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