

Inspection report for Silver End Children's Centre

Local authority	Essex
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, centre staff, parents including those on the focus group, professionals from linked organisations including health and social care services, data and area managers for 4Children, the deputy head of service for 4Children and a representative from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Silver End Children's Centre is a phase two centre and received its designation in 2007. It is sited in a refurbished building on the top floor of the village hall in Silver End. A team of health visitors is co-located in the centre and a private pre-school is based on the ground floor of the village hall. A second pre-school based on site closed recently and this means that there is a shortage of places for early learning in the local area. The centre meets its core purpose by providing child and family health services, family support and parental outreach, and links with schools and children's information services. While it does not provide integrated day care directly or through a linked provider, it works with local pre-schools, day-care providers and childminders.

The reach area is mainly rural, covering the villages of Silver End, Kelvedon, Cressing, Bradwell, Rivenhall, Stisted, Feering and North Coggeshall. The most recent data show that there are 830 children under five years old who live within 462 families. Families in the area are predominantly from White British backgrounds. There are pockets of high deprivation in the reach area. About 15% of children under five are living in households dependent on workless benefits. Approximately 75% of families in the centre's reach area have accessed its services. Children's

skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those expected for their ages.

In April 2012, the local authority renewed its contract with 4Children, a national children's charity, to manage the centre on behalf of Essex County Council. As a result, a new partnership board, the mid-Essex Children's Centre Strategic Group, has been established to provide governance for all 22 children's centres in mid-Essex. This had yet to hold its first meeting at the time of the inspection.

In addition to its core purpose, the centre is involved with local youth projects, such as an 11 to 14 play strategy group.

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

Silver End Children's Centre provides a good level of service and meets the needs of its local communities well. Parents are fulsome in their praise of centre staff and the quality of support they and their children receive. This particularly reflects the outstanding care, guidance and support provided to families both through outreach work and contacts made in the centre. Many parents and partners spoke warmly of the centre being a key part of the local community.

Outcomes for children and families are good. The centre has done much to support early learning, and a good range of courses is available to parents to support their children's development. However, while the gaps in educational outcomes between different groups of children are narrowing at a good rate, the overall outcomes remain low, especially in literacy. Nonetheless, the centre is achieving good outcomes in relation to raising the confidence of parents and families in keeping their children safe, managing their behaviour effectively and helping them to read. It is also supporting families to improve their own learning and development opportunities.

The centre focuses well on its target groups. It has engaged the large majority of families in its reach area and most families in the more deprived and disadvantaged

areas. Outcomes relating to safety are excellent as a result of the outstanding provision for safety and arrangements for safeguarding including the support provided for looked after children, foster parents and children subject to child protection plans.

Partnerships are well established, and those with the police and the local parish council are particularly strong. While there is much good work on the ground with health partners, the relationships are not consistent enough to ensure that the centre receives accurate localised data on breastfeeding. Take-up of breastfeeding support has been low and staff are aware that some parts of the reach area have low rates of breastfeeding.

Outreach work is particularly effective in meeting individual needs on a one-to-one basis. Many families and parents are encouraged by this contact to engage in activities in the centre. The outreach work is sensitively delivered and used to identify and assess needs accurately. It provides considerable information on mental health needs. However, partnerships with health providers are not leading to such needs being fully met.

Parents and families make a good contribution to the work of the centre through the focus group and through the regular and constructive feedback they provide on the centre's work.

The local authority and 4Children oversee the centre's work well and have ensured a smooth transition to new governance arrangements. They provide the centre with useful data and staff collect further data and information diligently to add to what is already known about the effect of services on families and children. However, the data are not analysed sharply enough to provide really clear information to support the centre's self-evaluation. Nonetheless, the centre has an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for development. This knowledge is used well to focus on the right priorities and target resources efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families in the reach area, especially those most in need, thereby demonstrating the centre's good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the partnership with the health service providers with a particular focus on:
 - providing the centre with localised information on breastfeeding rates
 - improving the rates of breastfeeding, especially in parts of the reach area where they are low
 - promoting and improving services to support mental health needs identified by the centre.
- Build on the work with pre-schools and schools to improve children's skills, especially in literacy.

- Develop the analysis of data further so that it provides a clearer picture of trends over time and better supports the centre's judgements of how good it is.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for children and families are good, including for key target groups. Childhood obesity levels and numbers of children who are overweight are lower than national figures. Parents report improved confidence in cooking healthy meals and that their children enjoy eating vegetables and fruit. However, breastfeeding rates are low in parts of the reach area. Teenage pregnancies have gone down due to the centre's partnership work with the local youth and youth groups. Teenage parents engage very effectively with the centre's services and are actively involved in promoting its work. The focus group benefits well from the input of parents and it provides helpful suggestions that help to shape the centre's services. Some parents are taking a lead role in organising and facilitating groups such as the lone parents group.

Children and parents are exceptionally safe at the centre and parents say they feel very safe and secure. They say the centre has helped them to become more confident in supporting their children's safety and welfare and to pursue their own learning and development. Outreach is used extremely successfully to identify and address welfare issues or concerns. This results in high levels of confidence in the centre to resolve problems and a strong sense of safety among users. The centre contributes strongly to the multi-agency work with vulnerable families through the use of the Common Assessment Framework.

Parents and children gain much enjoyment from their experiences at the centre which enhance their learning and development. Children now join Reception classes better prepared for learning than before, especially in relation to their social skills. The centre's work with pre-schools and schools locally contributes well to narrowing the gap between the lowest attainers and others. Phonics and reading courses for parents have helped them to develop and improve their children's literacy skills. However, while good progress has been made in this area, overall skills in literacy, speech and language remain low. Outcomes for children with disabilities or additional needs are strong. Parents of these children are thrilled with how they have been supported to access the right services and how well their children have developed and improved their learning.

Almost half of parents in the area have attended at least one training or learning session at the centre, and many have attended more. Parents say they enjoy learning and have benefited significantly from the opportunities provided through the centre. A reasonable number of parents have gained further qualifications improving their employment prospects. Work experience at the centre or with a partner organisation, such as the pre-school, has enabled some to secure employment. Support with housing, advice on benefits and training and learning opportunities are

improving the economic well-being of parents and their children.

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	1
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 positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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

The centre meets the needs of families in the area well. There is good focus on key target groups and the centre has successfully focused services where most needed. The centre is seen as being at the 'heart of the local community'. It is well resourced and used for a broad range of activities that support families well. Activities focus well on supporting parents to contribute to their children's learning and development as well as behaviour and well-being. Work on learning and development for under-fives is well developed in most respects to ensure that there is a tangible improvement in children's skills before they begin school. However, this work is not yet extensive enough to help improve achievement levels so that they compare more favourably with age-related expectations. Learning and development opportunities for parents are good. Families have good access to computers and the internet so that they can look for jobs and produce CVs, and employment advice is provided on site through partnership with Jobcentre services. Signposting to other services, such as housing, is good.

Centre staff know their families and local communities well. Outreach work is a particular strength and used very effectively to support families facing complex difficulties. The one-to-one outreach work builds confidence which encourages families to use the centre and its services. The outreach work enables the sensitive identification of needs, such as mental health problems and those suffering from domestic violence, which are not easily captured in the data provided by the local authority.

Well-established partnerships help to deliver services effectively. However, there is not yet a sufficiently consistent relationship with health professionals to ensure that centre staff have access to localised data on aspects of health such as breastfeeding.

While centre staff and health professionals have worked jointly to provide breastfeeding support, take-up was low. This is acknowledged in the centre's plans for improvement.

Families receive outstanding care, guidance and support both in the centre and in their homes. Extensive work is done to ensure the safety of families and to enable parents to keep their children safe. The centre is very responsive to families that suddenly find themselves in difficulties and gives very timely and highly effective support, drawing in other agencies as necessary.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Day-to-day management and supervision in the centre ensure a highly professional approach to the care of families and provision of key services. Staff have a strong sense of common purpose and a clear focus on supporting parents and families in most need. The centre coordinator provides a clear steer and strong leadership in relation to the care, support and guidance for families in the reach area.

Arrangements for governance are good. In the period of change between the previous partnership board and the current one taking over, both the local authority and 4Children have overseen the centre's work and held it to account for its performance. This has enabled a smooth transition from the previous partnership board to the new one. The membership of the partnership board also ensures it is working at a good strategic level. New performance management arrangements set out a robust framework for presenting data, on a quarterly basis, against challenging targets. Reports for the first meeting of the partnership group show that this is particularly helpful in relation to demonstrating the success the centre is having with target groups. However, three-year trends are not included nor are indicators to show how on track the centre is to meet its targets.

The centre has access to a significant amount of data which provide helpful information about its reach area and key outcomes. Feedback and evaluation from users are used well to inform the centre's services and identify any gaps that might exist. Attendance at sessions and take-up of activities, including advice and guidance, are monitored carefully so as to improve the quality of provision. However, routine analysis of data is not as rigorous in pulling together the information to provide a clear overview of the centre's success in relation to key outcomes.

Consequently, while the centre has good knowledge of its strengths and areas for development, it is less accurate in judging how good it is.

Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and thorough. Staff are very well trained, and background checks on staff and volunteers are robust. Work with key agencies to meet the needs of vulnerable adults and children, including early intervention, is excellent. When the centre first opened, the issues of youth crime put many families off from using the centre. This is no longer the case because the work done by the centre coordinator in partnership with the police and the parish council has had a significant impact on reducing youth crime and anti-social behaviour. Partnership work with the police is particularly strong as a result and it is also strong in dealing with issues of domestic violence. Good partnerships exist with local schools and pre-schools. However, the centre acknowledges that there is more work to be done with these partners to support children's learning and development even further. It is also working hard with local providers, the parish council and the local authority to address the current shortfall in pre-school provision. While there is much good work on the ground to identify families with mental health needs, partnership work with health at a strategic level is less well developed to ensure there is sufficient and timely provision to address these needs.

Diversity is promoted well and celebrated. For example, the centre worked in partnership with the local library to facilitate 'Bindis to Bollywood' and introduce families to different cultures. Childminders talked animatedly about an event on the beach with Diwali-related activities which had a very positive impact on their children. The centre provides excellent support for children with disabilities or additional needs.

Overall, given the good levels of engagement of parents and families and the particularly large number from the more disadvantaged and deprived parts of the reach area, the centre provides good value for money.

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	1

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Silver End Children's Centre on 18–19 July 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We very much enjoyed our visit to your children's centre and we would like to thank all those of you who gave your time to speak to us. The views and experiences you shared with us were invaluable in helping us to understand how well the centre is working.

Those of you who spoke to us told us how much the centre and staff have helped you to develop your skills in lots of different ways. You talked about how much you enjoyed sessions as diverse as cooking and phonics and how these have helped you and your children to improve and grow in all sorts of ways. From talking to you, it was clear that the centre is at the heart of the local community. Some of you said that you would not know what to do if the centre had not been there to advise you. We agree that the centre staff provide excellent advice, support and guidance and signpost you well to other organisations and agencies.

The centre itself is a warm and welcoming place where you and your children feel comfortable and at home. It was lovely to see children knowing their way around the crèche so well and confident to get toys and other resources out by themselves. They were good at putting things away too! The work the centre does with you and your children is preparing them well for school and learning. We have made recommendations as to how the centre could help children be even more ready for school, especially in relation to their literacy.

The outreach work done by the centre is equally important and, those of you who have had experience of one-to-one sessions in your home have been very pleased

with the support you received. Some of you also said it gave you the incentive to come into the centre.

The centre works well in partnership with others to meet a wide range of needs. This includes strong partnership working with the local police and the parish council. Partnerships with local schools and pre-schools are good, and the centre is working with others to try to increase pre-school places in Silver End following the recent closure of one of the pre-schools. While there is good work with health partners, we have made recommendations on how this can be improved especially to support breastfeeding mothers and better meet mental health needs in the area.

The focus group, and some of you are part of this group, makes a good contribution to the work of the centre. Feedback from you and the focus group helps the centre to know how well it is doing and how it could do better. The centre has lots of data as well to help it to check its progress. However, this information is not always analysed sufficiently so that the progress of the centre can be judged accurately. We have made recommendations on how this could be improved further.

It was a privilege to be able to talk to you and we wish you all the very best for the future.

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