

Inspection report for The Corner House Children's Centre

Local authority	Wiltshire
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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 centre coordinator, the data information administrator (acting coordinator), representatives of the local authority, representatives from the charity 4Children, members of staff, and partner agencies, including a representative from health and members of the advisory board. They also held informal discussions with families using the centre's services.

Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. This included key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, the centre's development plan and data about users of the centre.

Information about the centre

The Corner House Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre designated in 2007. Since April 2011, the centre has been managed on behalf of the local authority by '4Children', a national charity for children and families. The day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the children's centre coordinator. She also manages two other centres in the cluster. The centre coordinator took up post in September 2012.

The advisory board contributes to the management of the centre and includes representatives from a number of community and statutory partners and includes parent representatives. The centre is open from 9am to 4.45pm, Monday to Friday, for 51 weeks of the year.

The children's centre is based in a building that used to be the tourist information centre, in the corner of a car park in the market town of Marlborough. The centre covers a large geographical area in the east of the county. It has 13 super output areas (SOA) within the reach. The majority of these areas are rural and seen as affluent. Two of the SOAs covering parts of Kennet have higher levels of deprivation.

The population is mostly White British with small percentages of families from different minority ethnic groups. There are around 965 children under five years of age living in the area. Around 10% of families with children aged 0-4 are living in households dependant on workless benefits. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision are typically at the levels expected for their age. However, in the most deprived areas, children's skills are not as well developed, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

The centre offers a range of services for children and families which include child health services and family support including outreach and signposting for those seeking employment. Services are run from the centre and community venues, including the Pratten Hut at St Mary's school and the Lawrence Acre Day Room. The children's centre works in close partnership with the Pewsey Children's Centre and shares some services.

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

The Corner House Children's Centre makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for families. The centre provides a welcoming and inclusive environment within the community where families and children feel safe. One parent said, 'The centre is a safe haven where I can trust people.' A particular strength of the centre is the individual outreach work, which is helping those families who are in greatest need or experiencing difficulties in their lives to make significant improvements. One parent said, 'They go the extra mile to help you when things get difficult; they supported us with rehousing.'

The centre exemplifies high quality practice to enhance children's safety and well-being due to the effective and robust implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures, which are securely understood by staff. Staff work closely with key agencies, and case studies confirm there is significant and sustained improvement for children on child protection plans.

The centre has been resilient through a recent staffing restructure. The new staff

team show high levels of enthusiasm and good effectiveness to help children and families make positive changes in their lives. This is because '4Children' demonstrate a clear vision and inspire continued improvement. All leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. The centre analyses data provided by the local authority and partners effectively, together with local knowledge, to accurately identify the needs within the area. Centre leaders work effectively with partners on the advisory board and use an outcome-based approach to planning and reviewing services. This has led to a more targeted approach for services and, as a result, the centre is reaching an increasing number of families, including the large majority of families living in the areas with most deprivation and other target groups. These features demonstrate the centre's good capacity to improve further.

The centre provides a range of different opportunities for parents to develop skills to support their child's learning. 'Baby Babble' provides opportunities for parents to develop an awareness of how music and singing can stimulate their child's language development. At the end of these sessions, babies are mesmerised as they watch the sensory lights shine around the room, vocalising as they move with excitement. In 2011, around 75% of children achieved a total of at least 78+ scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile. However, in some of the most deprived areas, lower scores were achieved, particularly in communication, language and literacy. The centre recognises that it needs to build on good practice and provide more opportunities to encourage language and communication so that all children who access services are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.

Parents feel their views are important to the staff and members of the advisory board. They are routinely involved in the governance of the centre. Parents have developed a greater understanding of how to respond in an emergency and deal with accidents through attending first aid courses. The centre engages with 50% of all new births in the area and provides home safety packs which help parents to keep their families safe. There is good evidence of families in most need of support improving their independence and economic stability, and examples of parents who have gained employment as a result of volunteering at the centre. The centre works with some adult learning partners, such as 'Learning Curve', to provide training opportunities for volunteers, for example an NVQ course in customer service. However, it has plans to improve opportunities for parents to access training and education, such as courses to improve literacy, which have not yet come to fruition.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance opportunities for parents to support their children in developing language and communication skills to further aid their readiness for preschool or school.
- Continue to develop the work to support parents in improving their education, learning and development.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

'My daughter and I have grown so much in confidence and independence' and 'They helped me support my children and family' are typical comments made by parents who feel that engagement at the centre has had a positive impact on their lives. There are examples of families improving their economic stability as outreach workers help them to access benefits and housing advice. There are six new volunteers currently going through an induction process. One volunteer said, 'I wanted to do more with my life and the centre has helped me.' The centre recognises it can build on this success further by providing more opportunities for parents to access training and education to develop skills for their future.

Health outcomes are good and improving. The promotion of emotional well-being is an important aspect of the centre's work as it has identified that families with mental health issues is a particular need in the area. Baby massage has helped parents to develop warm and responsive relationships with their baby. Parents comment that accessing the centre has helped to reduce isolation. Obesity rates are below county and national average. Sessions such as 'Wacky Wednesday' are effective in promoting physical exercise. Mothers are actively encouraged to breastfeed their babies and provided with guidance and support. Around 64% of babies are breastfed at six to eight weeks, which is above the county average.

All services within the centre ensure children and their families stay extremely safe. There are striking examples of families facing challenging circumstances showing improvement in their parenting skills, such as strategies to manage children's behaviour and to keep themselves and children safe from domestic abuse. Staff complete Common Assessment Framework (CAF) referrals to ensure children receive the correct level of support, including children with disabilities.

Parents' aspirations for themselves and their children are raised through their involvement with the centre. Sessions such as 'Creation Station' are popular and provide opportunities for parents and children to engage in messy play and interact with others. Children are developing their social skills and becoming inquisitive learners. The centre has recently introduced 'progress wheels' to measure children's starting points against the revised Early Years Foundation Stage development matters. This is also identifying where children need extra support, such as speech and language. Parents report the benefits of their children accessing two-year-old funding and how this helps their learning and development. The centre has identified the need to further promote speaking and listening during 'Stay and Play' sessions.

There are high levels of respect between parents, staff and children. Families who speak English as an additional language are encouraged to share songs in their first language, such as Afrikaans. There are many opportunities for parents to share their views, such as the comments box and completing evaluation questionnaires. 'Gilbert' the bear is used effectively to encourage children to share their views.

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 has a good understanding of the needs of the community. It uses data effectively to target services. For example, a session for young parents, 'Growing Together', is run from the Lawrence Acre Day Room, within the community, an area with higher deprivation levels. It has been successful in increasing the number of fathers and children living in workless households accessing services. It receives new birth data and ensures each family receives information about the centre.

Staff build trusting relationships with families, and parents greatly appreciate the good care, guidance and support they receive. One parent said, 'No problem is too small, I can always come here.' There are good assessment procedures in place to assess the individual needs of vulnerable families using the soft outcomes universal learning (SOUL) records. Staff effectively tailor specific support packages, and measure the impact of this work and celebrate families' success.

There is a good range of weekly activities provided at the centre and community venues. Staff use the Early Years Foundation Stage to plan activity sessions that ensure maximum enjoyment and joint learning of children and families.

The centre has initiated a series of cluster transition meetings with early years providers and schools to improve children's readiness for school. Early years professionals report that communication and language is an area of weakness, and partners are working together to develop a greater understanding of how to support children's language and communication development. A book share scheme is due to be implemented at the centre to promote children's and parents' enjoyment of books.

The '4Children' education, training and employment officer works across the county

and supports the centre to provide guidance for families in improving their economic stability and access to employment. The 'menu of support' is a useful tool for staff when signposting opportunities for training, volunteering, employment and finances.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance and accountability arrangements provided by '4Children' are clear and understood at all levels. The local authority provides good levels of challenge through quarterly monitoring and the annual conversation. There are clear links between service provision and strategic direction. The advisory board provides both support and challenge to centre leaders. It regularly monitors the effectiveness of services, seeks the views of families and provided continuity during the recent restructure.

There are clear line management and supervision arrangements, and staff feel supported and valued. There have been a few changes in centre coordinator during the last year, but the '4Children' management structure has ensured good quality provision continued to be delivered to support families. The centre has been successful in increasing the number of families it reaches from target groups and those in most need of support and intervention. As a result, it is narrowing the gap for the most disadvantaged.

Effective monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to ensure services are targeted, of high quality and identify what needs to be developed further. Key priorities for improvement are based on the needs analysis of families in the area and contain measurable success criteria. Targets include building on good practice to further promote children's communication and language skills and provide greater opportunities for parents to develop their skills for the future.

The centre uses a unit costing approach to delivering services. The recent staffing restructure has resulted in more front-line staff to deliver services to families. The centre works in partnership with another centre in the cluster to ensure services are not duplicated and staff expertise is maximised, therefore providing good value for money.

Inclusion of families is promoted well and, as a result, all families feel welcome irrespective of their background. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile data show

that the gap for those children in the reach in the lowest 20% continues to close. The views of children and families are routinely sought in a variety of ways. The last satisfaction survey carried out by the local authority confirmed that around 91% of families were very satisfied with their experience at the children's centre.

The highest priority is given to safeguarding children. Policies and procedures are highly consistent and extremely robust. Rigorous recruitment practices ensure all adults, including volunteers, working with children are suitable. All staff and volunteers are trained in child protection issues and this ensures that families are clear about their responsibility to keep children safe. Staff are highly proactive in all safeguarding matters and take prompt action to work with key partners, such as health professionals and the early years intervention team, to reduce the risk of harm to children, including those subject to a child protection plan.

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 Corner House Children's Centre on 8 and 9 October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection, we held meetings with the centre's staff, some of the other people who work from the centre, and members of the local authority and advisory board. We looked at evaluations of the centre's work and a range of other documentation. We were pleased to be able to talk to some of you about the centre and the activities. The children's centre is making a good contribution to improving outcomes for you and your families.

We agree with you that staff at the centre are welcoming and provide you with good levels of care, guidance and support, especially when you need it the most. One parent told us, 'The centre is a safe haven where I can trust people.' We found that a particular strength of the centre is the individual work, which is helping those of you who are experiencing difficulties in your lives to make significant improvements. Another parent said, 'They go the extra mile to help you when things get difficult; they supported us with rehousing.'

You told us how much you enjoy the different activities and how these are helping your children's learning and development. The recent satisfaction survey supports your view as around 91% of families who completed the questionnaire stated they were very satisfied with the centre. We found that the centre exemplifies high quality practice to enhance children's safety and well-being due to the effective and robust implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures, which are securely understood by staff. Staff work closely with other professionals to ensure any risk to children is minimised. '4Children' have rigorous recruitment practices, which ensure all adults working with children are suitable to do so.

Some of you told us about recent changes in staffing. The new staff team are already working very well together and show high levels of enthusiasm to help you and your families make positive changes in your lives. This is because '4Children' demonstrate a clear vision and inspire continued improvement. All the leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and what they need to improve. The centre is provided with a whole range of data by the local authority. The centre uses this and local knowledge well to identify the needs of the community. Leaders have been reviewing the different activities they provide to make sure they are making a difference to those of you who would benefit the most. This has led to a more targeted approach for services and, as a result, the centre is reaching an increasing number of families, including those from target groups and families living in the most disadvantaged areas. This means that the centre has a good capacity to improve further.

The centre provides a range of different opportunities for you to develop skills to support your child's learning. 'Baby Babble' provides opportunities for you to develop an awareness of how music and singing can stimulate children's language

development. At the end of this session, babies were mesmerised as they watched the sensory lights shine around the room, vocalising as they moved with excitement. The data show that in 2011 around 75% of children achieved a good level of development across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile. However, in some of the most deprived areas, lower scores were achieved, particularly in communication, language and literacy. We have asked the centre to build on its current good practice and provide more opportunities to help you promote your children's language and communication skills so that they are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.

You feel your views are important to the centre, and some of you are members of the advisory board and are routinely involved in the governance of the centre. We found out that first aid courses are helping families to develop a greater understanding of how to respond in an emergency and deal with accidents. The centre engages with 50% of parents with a new baby in the area and provides home safety packs. We heard how these packs are helping new parents to keep their families safe. There is good evidence of how the centre has helped families in most need of support to improve their independence and economic stability, and how some parents have gained employment as a result of volunteering at the centre. The centre works with some adult learning partners, such as 'Learning Curve', to provide training opportunities for volunteers, for example an NVQ course in customer service. We have asked the centre to provide you with even more opportunities to access training and education.

You can support the centre by continuing to share your views and getting involved as a volunteer or an advisory board member.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us during the inspection. We are grateful for your views and comments and wish you a successful future.

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