

Inspection report for East Cowes Children's Centre

Local authority	Isle of Wight
Inspection number	407187
Inspection dates	10–11 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

Centre leader	Sue Gleaves
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Beatrice Avenue East Cowes Isle of Wight PO32 6PA
Telephone number	01983 294701
Email address	sue.gleaves@childrenssociety.org.uk

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.

Report published: October 2012



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 children, parents, managers and staff. They also spoke with representatives from partner agencies and the centre's advisory board. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. They also made a brief visit to the early years provision the centre uses for the large majority of two-year-old funded places.

Information about the centre

East Cowes Children's Centre is located in the north of the Isle of Wight. It was established as a service for families in 2009, and opened as a phase three centre in 2010. It is located on the same site as Queensgate Foundation Primary School. This school was formed in September 2010 when two schools amalgamated. These remained on two separate sites until moving, in February 2012, to the school's current site, which is adjacent to the children's centre. The Children's Society has managed the centre on behalf of the local authority since April 2011. The advisory board, known as the Core Offer Monitoring Group (COMG), includes parent and partner representatives. Most services are delivered from the main centre premises, and some are run from community locations in East Cowes, Ryde and Wootton. It offers a range of services that are provided by centre staff and other providers, including early years provision, health and social care services. The centre works closely with nearby Ryde Children's Centre (also managed by The Children's Society) to deliver some of its provision.

Over the past year, there has been a steep increase in the number of eligible families living in the area as a result of a large housing development. The catchment area of the centre is socially and economically diverse, with some areas of affluence. Approximately one fifth (21.5%) live in areas classified in the most 30% deprived nationally. The centre is located in this area. The proportion of families claiming workless benefits is above local and national averages. There are a small minority of

families from minority ethnic backgrounds living in the area. Children’s levels of learning and development are very variable when they enter early years provision.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

East Cowes offers outstanding services for families living within its reach. It puts children’s well-being at the heart of all it does. It provides welcoming provision for families, who thoroughly enjoy their engagement. A parent’s comment, ‘Centre staff try to help everyone out as much as they can with whatever they can’ is typical of how many view the services. The centre has weathered the numerous changes that have occurred since its opening exceptionally well, and services have continued to develop rapidly. Outcomes for families are outstanding overall. In particular, children and adults are developing an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Exemplary safeguarding procedures permeate every aspect of the centre’s work. The manager has a wealth of expertise in this area and partnership working with the social care team is exceptionally communicative and effective.

Leaders have an excellent grasp of local need and a very large majority of families (over 80%) in the catchment are involved with the centre. The proportion of those most in need is much greater, because staff target services very well to reach those who need it most. Outstanding partnership, working with an extensive range of agencies including social care, health, Jobcentre Plus and Homestart, provides a comprehensive understanding of issues and enables the provision of highly relevant services. Parents are fully involved in all aspects of centre life, and make an exceptional contribution to services and governance through the successful volunteer programme and their forum, ‘Families’ Voice’. The local authority and The Children’s Society provide superb levels of challenge and support. Rigorous performance management arrangements are well established; staff have a very high level of expertise and an exceptionally positive enthusiasm for their work, which is infectious throughout the centre and volunteers relish the challenges of developing their skills further. Ambitious targets are set and achieved because everyone who works at the centre is completely focused on making the lives of families better. Operational systems are introduced after thorough testing and evaluation of their effectiveness,

such as methods used to demonstrate outcomes. As a result, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

There have been some recent changes in some health outcomes: the proportion of women breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has dropped below local and national averages, and levels of childhood obesity have risen. Some of these are the result of the changing composition of the catchment area. Leaders are already working closely with health colleagues and others to address these changes. They are proactive in developing relevant services such as the recent breastfeeding workshops. Strategic discussions between children centre and health services are frequent and health child clinics and midwifery services are delivered from the centre premises. These strong links enable well-informed decision making and planning. Health visitors and midwives gain almost all new parents' consent for sharing basic contact information with the centre, which provides almost universal knowledge of eligible families. However, systems to accelerate this identification process through routinely sharing information about births in the area are under discussion but not yet implemented.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen partnership work with health services so that:
 - information about births in the centre's catchment area is shared routinely with the centre to enable comprehensive knowledge of new parents and their children. (Health services)
 - families living in the local area benefit from improved health outcomes, including reduced childhood obesity and increased levels of sustained breastfeeding.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The health of families is significantly improved through their engagement with centre services. Parents value the delivery of many health services at the centre, because the location and child-friendly environment makes it easier for them to attend, and the large majority engage well with health services. For example, 78% of local pregnant women attend midwifery services at the centre. Opportunities to learn how to prepare healthy meals at 'Cooking Academy' sessions enable parents to learn and make nutritious meals in everyday life to address concerns about increased rates of obesity in young children. Improving emotional well-being for adults and children is given high priority. Individuals make good progress through their engagement with outreach, individual attention, and sessions with the centre counsellor. Early intervention strategies are successful in developing children's language skills, such as their referral to the speech and language therapist and attendance at 'Chatter Matters' sessions.

Safety is the top priority at East Cowes centre and is underpinned by the core values

of The Children's Society. Although it is a very busy centre, a calm and purposeful atmosphere is evident. Parenting advice and support have a significant impact on parents' understanding of their children's behaviour. These lead to safer home life and more enjoyable parenting for the overwhelming majority of parents who receive support. Home safety advice and first aid training improve safety in the home. Parents demonstrate exceptional trust in centre staff and readily seek their help in times of crisis. Staff adopt an enabling approach to empower adults, rather than providing a quick solution to a problem. Use of the Common Assessment Framework is fully embedded to protect children effectively. Exemplary partnership working provides rapid response and rigorous monitoring of cases. Parents value the honest dialogue they have with staff and fully understand the centre's responsibility to protect children. As a result, the outcomes for children subject to a child protection plan are excellent. All staff react quickly and professionally to concerns and dangerous situations to protect those who are vulnerable, including those children who might be at risk and victims of domestic abuse.

Children come rushing into the centre full of enthusiasm and eager to play. They show great affection for staff, and some hug them lovingly when they say goodbye. The parents' forum is extremely representative of the local area and members are wholly respectful to one another. Parents' views are central to governance. Meetings include members' children in the play room and children give their opinions on topics under discussion about groups and activities. Well-established systems ensure issues are taken on to the advisory board meetings where these influence decisions.

The large majority of children and adults demonstrate outstanding educational and personal development. The centre makes very good use of two-year-old funded places for relevant families, and is responsible for over 20% of the total of funded places in the local authority area. This means that those children at risk of falling behind make excellent progress in their learning and development and catch up with expected levels. The centre rightly prides itself on supporting individuals to achieve their full potential, sourcing training and opportunities that meet their needs, especially for teenage and young parents. Many have achieved superb results: for example, basic literacy or numeracy courses have led to other qualifications and a few are now on university degree courses as a direct result of their engagement with the centre. Others receive excellent support which improves their self-confidence and enables them to consider more formal learning opportunities.

Outcomes for economic well-being are good and continue to improve rapidly. Adults make effective inroads into improving their economic stability. They use centre services such as Jobcentre Plus and adult education services, including those helping adults who have other first languages to learn English. The proportion of families seeking Working Tax Credit has increased as a result of information and services. Qualification courses in first aid and food hygiene are extremely popular and several adults have been able to move into employment as a result, in catering for example. A parent explained the breadth of training and learning opportunities on offer saying, 'You can see your future panning out in front of you.'

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	1
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	1
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?

1

Provision is of exceptional quality. Excellent use is made of partnership arrangements with agencies and with the nearby children's centre to commission services, such as the recent Job Club or more established services such as Homestart. Outreach is delivered extremely well to provide tailored care and support and is aimed at moving families forward in their development. The centre volunteers are very proactive at engaging those considered hard to reach. Participation rates of target families are excellent. The proportion of teenage parents using centre services has doubled in the last year and the very large majority attend. Almost all vulnerable lone parents engage with the centre, and the large majority of those living in the most deprived areas of the catchment are engaged. There is popular provision for fathers, with a dedicated weekend 'Dadly Dad Days' session, and many also attend groups during the week.

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to all who use the centre, especially those most in need, is outstanding. A great deal of thought has gone into what is offered. There are informative displays throughout the centre to advise on matters of sexual health, domestic abuse, training, sessions and job opportunities. There are also spare children's clothes, and raincoats to protect those walking back from the centre in the rain. The kindness of staff underpins a resolute aim of helping each family improve as much as they can, so adults and children can achieve greatly improved outcomes.

Learning and development provision for both children and adults is outstanding. There is a wealth of groups on offer. Groups such as 'Stay and Play' and for the 'Under 24s' parents deliver superb and enjoyable learning, planned around user interests and delivered by highly trained staff, supported by volunteers. The learning environment is expertly organised to help children learn, and they thoroughly enjoy

activities like playing with the water pump outdoors. Attendance levels of groups have been analysed, and parents' views sought to ensure services match needs well, and some services are run from community premises located in areas furthest from the centre. Sessions are very well attended.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leaders are wholly dedicated to delivering the best possible services. They make superb use of resources to commission services that are needed, and the centre provides outstanding value for money. Governance between the local authority, The Children's Society, and the centre is streamlined well. Accountabilities for each strand of governance are very clear and fully understood. All parties, including the Core Offer Monitoring Group, have ambitious vision and a shared common purpose of sustaining services and improving the outcomes of those most in need. The management team combines expertise in social care and early years education, which provides an excellent foundation of joint knowledge. Sophisticated evaluation links very well with development planning. Aspirational targets, such as the Annual Conversation target to improve economic well-being outcomes, are exceeded.

Staff performance is managed very well, and staff are qualified to a high level. This includes training in child protection, which is supplemented by frequent refresher sessions and discussions at meetings. Recruitment procedures are rigorous for staff and volunteers to ensure adults are safe to work with children and vulnerable adults. Procedures for referring concerns and managing child protection cases are exemplary. Parents and carers are kept well informed whenever appropriate, and staff are tenacious in their referral and monitoring processes to achieve the best outcomes. Victims of domestic abuse access an extensive range of personal and group support to help them manage and improve their circumstances.

Families and children with disabilities benefit from individualised care and support whilst also enjoying regular attendance at universal groups which are wholly inclusive and accessible to them. The centre's community is harmonious, and adults greatly value one another regardless of background, religious belief, or culture. The centre is influential in pursuing support for those who need it the most, as exemplified in the high number of two-year-old funded places, and in the outstanding outcomes families enjoy. The majority of families from minority ethnic backgrounds and those

with English as an additional language are fully engaged in the centre's service. Leaders make excellent use of pertinent data to check all groups are fully engaged with the centre. Partner agencies greatly value the superb levels of communication with centre staff. An extensive range of agencies from state, private and voluntary sectors are fully engaged and almost all of these partnerships are very well established, bringing an excellent array of provision and opportunity to families living within the centre's reach. The views of families are sought frequently and these are central to shaping future services. In the most recent survey, the overwhelming majority reported they were satisfied with the centre and felt safe there, a typical comment stating, 'The centre has changed my life for the better.'

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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	1
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	1

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the East Cowes Children's Centre on 10–11 October 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall, which is the highest grade we give.

We were very impressed with your children's centre and all the services it offers. We found it to be a very happy and welcoming place where you and your children feel extremely safe. Your manager and staff are highly trained and very knowledgeable in the work they do. This leads to excellent activities, and groups such as 'Stay and Play' or the 'Under 24s' are fun and educational for both you and your children. Excellent outreach services are tailor made to suit individual needs, and help those who have particularly tough challenges to deal with.

Many of you help the centre through volunteering or being part of the 'Families' Voice' group. This contribution is very valuable and helps make sure the centre and its services completely meet the needs of all families. Your involvement makes the centre the happy and successful place that it is.

There are many strengths of your centre, but a particular strong point is the way you and your children are helped to keep safe. Many of you have taken first aid courses so you know what to do if there is any sort of medical emergency at home, or have had home safety equipment fitted. When times are difficult, staff are very good at helping you deal with a crisis, providing you with both practical help and emotional support.

The centre helps you and your families improve your general health through learning about breastfeeding and weaning, or about cooking through joining in with the 'Cooking Academy'. In the area you live, there are still too many children who are obese when they reach the age of five years. Also, there are fewer mothers who keep on breastfeeding their baby after the first eight weeks than happens elsewhere on the Island and nationally. There are already steps in place to help with these issues, but we have asked centre leaders to work even more closely with health services to improve these.

Another strength is the very large range of families that use the centre from all over the local area. Staff continually check that everyone who might benefit from the centre knows about it through analysing information and working with partner agencies such as health services. This means that those families who most need help can find out about what the centre can offer them. We have suggested to the centre leaders that they should work more closely with those who organise health services on the Island to share more basic information about when and where babies are born. This would let them know to contact a family to see if they want to come to the centre.

Finally, there are very many of you who have taken a wide range of courses to help you with English, mathematics, food hygiene and lots of other qualifications or courses. Those of you who speak English as an additional language attend sessions

to help you improve your understanding of English. There is also opportunity to have help with looking for work or help with debt or benefits. These services are helping to improve your general standard of living, and the centre has done very well to provide such a wide and effective range of services.

We enjoyed meeting many of you and your children during our inspection, and would like to thank you for taking the time to tell us about your experiences at East Cowes Children's Centre.

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