

Inspection report for Devonshire Children's Centre

Local authority	East Sussex
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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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 representatives from the centre advisory group, a range of partner agencies, the local authority, and frontline staff. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation. They visited groups run at the centre and other local groups which families from the reach area attend. They spoke to families formally and informally around the centre.

Information about the centre

Devonshire Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2007 and is run directly by the local authority. It is situated in Eastbourne town centre and is one of seven centres within the Eastbourne area. The centre provides a full range of services, working in partnership with voluntary and statutory agencies. It is open weekdays from 9.00am to 5.00pm (4.30pm on Fridays) for 52 weeks of the year.

The centre serves an area that is ethnically, socially and economically diverse. There is significant overcrowding and high levels of transition of families and teenage parents in the reach area. Parts of the area are among the 10% most deprived areas in England. Overall, the centre serves one of the 30% most deprived areas nationally. There are 1,325 children under five years in the reach area, with around 10% living in households dependent on workless benefits. The majority of families in the reach area are of White British heritage with other families from ethnic groups including increasing numbers of Polish and Portuguese backgrounds. Families registered at the centre speak a total of 45 different languages. Children's levels on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are below those expected for their age.

The centre offers multi-agency services for families and children under five years. Some services, including a community café and weekly baby clinic, operate from the

centre. Many services are offered at local centres and community venues. Taxi bursaries are available.

The local authority provides governance arrangements and delegates responsibility to the Centre Advisory Group and Eastbourne Local Advisory 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

Devonshire Children's Centre makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for families. The centre is very welcoming and considered by families as an integral part of the community. A large majority of families accessing services are amongst the groups and individuals in most need of intervention and support. Staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of the issues families face; they are highly committed to supporting and empowering families and, as a result, the care, guidance and support offered to families are outstanding.

Effective safer recruitment procedures for staff and volunteers ensure the suitability of people working with children. Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and families report feeling safe at the centre. Ongoing good quality safeguarding training and refresher training enable those working with families to identify any child protection concerns and act promptly to ensure children are safeguarded. Outreach work provides families with a package of support tailored to their individual needs, with clear aims. Case studies indicate improvements to families' lives as a result of outreach work.

Families contribute to the centre's work through a variety of methods. The centre proactively seeks families' views, including those who do not regularly access the centre, and these effectively contribute to service evaluations and shaping future services.

The centre has excellent links with a wide range of partner agencies and, as a result, services are fully integrated and support families in improving their outcomes, from

generally low starting points. Highly effective communication and information sharing between partner agencies make a significant contribution to improving outcomes for families. For example, the local church provides those who are most in need, particularly those who are vulnerably housed, with weekly help and support which includes a hot meal.

The centre's self-evaluation and business plan link closely and effectively drive improvements. The local authority provides a range of data which the centre uses to assess its effectiveness in improving outcomes. Weaknesses in some of the data restrict the centre's ability to concisely assess its work, track families and measure the longer term impact of its work.

The centre is an inclusive environment and, as a result, all families are welcome. It knows families well and celebrates and promotes the diversity of the community through resources and special events. It makes good use of language interpreters and translators and they translate some information into the main languages spoken by families.

Staff work well as a team and are very supportive of one another. They build expertise in particular areas and take on additional responsibilities, for example leading on specific projects. The centre's quality assurance procedures for staff lack rigour in some areas. For example, work is not systematically checked to ensure it is of a consistently high standard to drive forward and improve outcomes further. Governance arrangements are clear. Parents are involved in the centre's governance and their contribution is increasing as staff actively encourage parental involvement. Management arrangements are clear and understood. Managers have a secure understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should strengthen the quality of data so that the centre can:
 - accurately assess the impact of its work on improving outcomes in all areas
 - effectively track families to evaluate the longer term impact of its work on improving outcomes
 - use accurate data more rigorously in its self-evaluation.
- Strengthen quality assurance for staff to ensure robust procedures are fully in place to drive improvement and improve outcomes for families.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents and their children thoroughly enjoy the opportunities to interact with others through a range of sessions such as Betweenies and Little Explorers. This enables children to become inquisitive, helping them to learn and develop social skills. The

language checker helps develop children's language skills and additional support is provided for any children identified as having a degree of language delay. The impact of the centre's work is evident in the rising levels of skills, knowledge and abilities at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, with around 65% of children achieving 78 points or more, which is above the local authority average. Parents' confidence and skills improve well through their attendance at courses at the centre. Some parents volunteer at the centre and benefit from a comprehensive package of support. Some have accessed work-related support and training and, as a result, have been successful in finding employment and improving their economic stability.

Health outcomes are improving as a majority of families in the reach area access the centre's services. The promotion of emotional well-being is an important aspect of the centre's work, with activities such as baby massage strengthening the emotional bond between parent and child. Obesity rates in the reach area are higher than the local and national average and the centre is tackling these effectively through the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity. For example, the layout of the crèche room has been redesigned to allow the children more opportunities to be physically active. Breastfeeding rates are good, and improving, with 54.5% of mothers breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks. The centre provides individualised support with breastfeeding from a range of sources including the centre's breastfeeding champion.

The centre gives priority to the safety of families. Sessions on improving home safety and the provision of home safety packs equip parents to provide a safe home environment for children. One parent told inspectors that, following the course, 'I don't have a coffee table anymore so no cups around as a hazard.' Families most in need of intervention and support benefit from outreach work where they develop strategies to work effectively with their children. The centre effectively uses the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process so that children stay safe and families receive good support from the most appropriate agency. Children with special educational needs receive good support and groups such as Something Special cater for their specific needs.

Children and families from a wide range of backgrounds get on well together and new friendships are forged. As a result, social isolation is reduced and community cohesion is enhanced. Centre staff give excellent support to families who are vulnerably housed and work with them to reduce their feelings of isolation and offer practical advice. Many parents contribute their views through discussions and informal evaluations with staff and through completion of comments on the 'graffiti boards' at the centre. There are good, and increasing, opportunities for parents to take part in the governance of the centre and staff show a commitment to actively involving more parents.

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	2
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lifestyles	
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
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 provides a familiar environment for families and many use it regularly. Staff use the limited space creatively and, as a result, the centre offers a range of different services. The community café based on site provides an informal meeting space for families and also provides a safe environment for children to play. The centre also makes effective use of other local buildings to provide groups which ensures services are accessible.

Staff use their excellent knowledge of families and the area and, along with partners, they skilfully identify families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable and in greatest need of support. For example, the centre engages effectively with many families who are placed in bedsits and other temporary accommodation and supports them during this time. Parents receive outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. Staff establish trusting relationships with families and, as a result, families regularly access the centre for support, including in times of crisis. A comment from a parent, which echoed the views of many, was how the centre 'helped build up my confidence in meeting new people and supporting my son'.

The centre makes accurate baseline assessments of the needs of families using the centre. It uses data and local information to identify the needs of the community and effectively plan services. The variable quality and accuracy of the data in some areas limit the centre's ability to target work more specifically. For example, when families move out of the reach area they no longer show as having been registered with the centre. A proactive approach to registering families, which includes health colleagues promoting the centre, is effective, with a 98% registration rate.

Families using the centre receive tailored support that promotes their outcomes well. Outreach work is effective; intervention and support are well planned, with a tailored package of support to meet the individual needs of each family. Provision for families to learn and develop is good. The centre broadly links session plans to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents attend a wide range of courses and training, and

evaluations demonstrate the positive impact this has on their skills and knowledge. Parents who attend structured parenting courses report improved skills and understanding. Those who receive support from the Priority Pathways programme at the centre have a clear programme of courses and receive priority course places. Individual case studies demonstrate the positive impact of learning opportunities for parents. However, limitations in tracking families restrict the centre's ability to assess the longer-term impact of this work on improving families' economic stability.

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

There are clear and effective governance arrangements. The centre advisory board has good representation from parents and partner agencies. Recent changes to the structure of board meetings mean that board members are now more involved in target setting and holding the centre to account. The centre actively seeks parents' views in a range of ways and changes are made to services as a result of their contributions.

Direct links exist between the centre's self-evaluation and business plans. Local authority data are not robust in all areas and restrict the centre's ability to succinctly target services and accurately evaluate the short- and long-term impact of services on improving outcomes. Business planning arrangements are good. Where accurate data exist the centre uses them effectively to assess its work and set targets. Staff make amendments and changes to services following regular reviews throughout the year of progress on improving outcomes. This ensures the centre effectively meets the needs of the community it serves. As a result, it provides good value for money.

The day-to-day management of the centre is well organised. Line management arrangements are clear and understood. Quality assurance processes for staff are in place but the rigour of this is variable and, as a result, there are missed opportunities to develop the work of the centre further at a quicker rate.

Safeguarding procedures are good. All staff and volunteers are committed to ensuring children's welfare and keeping families safe. These are centre priorities and all staff and volunteers show commitment to achieve this by providing a warm and welcoming environment for children. There are thorough procedures for checking the suitability of adults in the centre and regular safeguarding training ensures that child

protection concerns are dealt with appropriately.

The centre knows the community it serves well. It provides a fully inclusive environment where all families are respected and welcomed. The Something Special group provides a group specifically for children with disabilities, although they also attend many other groups at the centre. Data indicate that the centre is effective in engaging target groups in its work. The centre works hard with families to overcome any barriers to access, for example translating the language checker into Polish for specific families. The staff use images and information around the centre to promote the diversity of the community; this is particularly strong in the books provided. Targeted work has resulted in the achievement gap closing for the lowest 20% of children.

There are excellent partnerships between the centre and partner agencies which ensure that families receive an integrated package of support. There are particularly strong links between the local primary school and church and joint working is improving significantly the outcomes for some of the most vulnerable families. Links with the Eastbourne Cultural Community Network have been successful in engaging families from minority ethnic backgrounds at the centre.

The staff team shows exemplary commitment to families. It empowers families to improve outcomes by offering sensitive and thoughtful support. A particular strength is the centre's engagement with families who are vulnerably housed. Staff have an excellent insight into the issues faced by these families, for example cooking courses are adapted to show families who are vulnerably housed how to provide healthy meals with very limited, or no, kitchen facilities.

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	2
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	2
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Summary for centre users

We inspected Devonshire Children's Centre on 15 and 16 August 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. We would like to thank all of you who took the time to meet us during the inspection and share your experiences about the difference the centre has made to your lives and your children's.

During the inspection we saw the positive relationships the centre staff build with you and your children. The care, guidance and support staff provide to you and your children are outstanding. The staff understand the many issues you may face and work extremely hard to support you, including when you may be in crisis. Those of you in temporary accommodation benefit from attending the weekly group at All Saints Church where your children can play and you can sit with your children and enjoy a hot meal. Staff are sensitive to your needs and work hard to empower you to make decisions.

The centre works exceptionally well with many other agencies in the Eastbourne area to provide a fully integrated package of support for families. You told us what a friendly and welcoming place the centre is and how you enjoy attending. Many of you regularly visit the on-site community café to meet friends or to talk to staff. As a result many of you feel less isolated. Those of you who receive support from the family outreach service are able to bring about improvements to family life.

The centre provides a comprehensive range of services for you and your children. It makes effective use of space and offers some activities at other local venues. Staff provide a good selection of activities and always look at ways they can further enhance the experiences of your children to help them develop. As one of you told us, 'Staff are very helpful, give me lots of practical advice.' We can see that your children are now achieving better at school as a result of the work of the centre, including with their transition to school.

All staff at the centre work hard to promote good outcomes for you and your children. We have asked managers to look at more effectively quality assuring their work at all levels to ensure that they continue to bring about improved outcomes for you and your families and make them even stronger.

The centre provides a welcoming environment to all areas of the community. The staff work sensitively with parents to overcome any barriers to accessing services, for

example by supporting you during your first visit to the centre. They have made effective links with the Eastbourne Cultural Communities Network and have attended some of their events to promote the centre to families from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre actively seeks your views and comments and many of you will have been involved in surveys and have seen the 'graffiti boards' in the centre where you are encouraged to make comments and suggestions. Some of you are now members of the centre advisory group where you are able to contribute your ideas and be involved in the governance of the centre. The centre highly values the contribution of parents and is keen for more of you to become involved.

The centre's self-evaluation and business plan are good. The local authority provides a range of data to the centre. The accuracy of this data and the usefulness to the centre vary. Therefore, we have asked the local authority to provide data which will help the centre to more precisely target services and show how their work is improving outcomes for you and your children in the longer term.

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