

Inspection report for Crediton Area Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon County Council
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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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361

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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's management team, members of the core purpose group, the local authority, Action for Children, partnership agencies, members of staff and families using the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre and about the wider community.

Information about the centre

Crediton Area Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. The centre was designated in 2008 and has been run by Action for Children since April 2012. It currently operates as part of a cluster of two children's centres, although the cluster is due to expand imminently to incorporate two further centres. The centre offers a range of services which includes health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. Services are provided at the children's centre as well as in venues in the community.

The centre's reach area, of approximately 88 square miles, is mainly rural. It covers the town of Crediton and surrounding villages. It is in an area which is not identified as deprived overall, although there are some pockets of deprivation. Although levels of worklessness are not high, a high proportion of families are dependent on low incomes. The population is mostly White British, with a small percentage of other ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. There are 1,191 children under five living in the reach area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are low, particularly in communication, language and literacy development.

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

Crediton Children's Centre is a good children's centre which is making an effective contribution to improving outcomes for families within its reach area. This is because leaders, managers and staff know their community well. Staff and management show high levels of commitment to improving the lives of families and work extremely well together, and with partners, in order to achieve this. They make good use of data as well as information provided by other agencies to identify the key issues faced by those who live locally. Realistic and challenging targets are set and used effectively to improve most outcomes. Where impact has been less successful, suitable action plans are in place. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the areas they need to develop through good self-evaluation and service monitoring. As a result, they have a good capacity to continue to improve.

Leaders maintain a clear focus on meeting the needs of those in target groups. Staff have had particular success in engaging with families from Eastern European countries who reside in the area. The provision of the dedicated Rainbow group, led by a member of staff who speaks Polish and Russian, introduced families to the work of the children's centre and now over 70% access the range of services provided. Families are becoming increasingly involved in helping to plan services, although leaders are aware that representation is not yet fully reflective of the range of families who access services.

Staff have built strong relationships with a range of partner agencies. This is particularly true of their partnership with the co-located health visiting team. Both agencies work extremely closely in order to develop comprehensive packages of support for specific families and together offer fluid service delivery. Staff implement a range of programmes to improve the health of users and their families, working well with health partners to deliver and reinforce positive messages in a fun and enjoyable way. However, despite concerted efforts, some concerning health trends remain. Levels of childhood obesity are high, and on the increase, and too many parents are known to be smokers.

Families who experience difficulties in their lives express their true gratitude for the care, guidance and support they receive which have made a discernable difference to their lives. They confirm that their contact with the centre has provided them with improved confidence and enhanced self-esteem. Comments from parents, such as, 'Staff always have time to make sure I am OK,' and, 'Everyone has been a great support,' were common. One user described their contact with the children's centre as being 'life changing', citing staff as being the centre's 'greatest asset'.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Together with health partners, continue to develop and implement strategies to contribute to lowering the levels of childhood obesity and parents who smoke in the reach area.
- Develop the role of families within the governance of the centre so that a greater range is systematically involved in decision making and driving improvement.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Staff place a good focus on the promotion of breastfeeding. Their participation in the Baby Friendly Initiative has ensured they positively promote the benefits of breastfeeding. Mothers who choose to breastfeed are supported well through a support group and volunteer peer mentors. As a result, the percentage of mothers who sustain breastfeeding has increased from 59.8% in 2008 to 65.24% in 2011, well above that seen nationally. Parents are provided with a range of opportunities to help them to adopt healthy lifestyles. Through access to programmes such as Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY) and cookery classes, parents' understanding of how to provide a healthy diet is beginning to improve. Staff place an appropriate focus on supporting families to become more active, including through 'Pramble' walks and outings to physical play areas. Despite these concerted efforts, rates of childhood obesity are on the increase. Parents are able to access information about smoking cessation and can be referred to the appropriate health agency although levels of smoking, particularly at delivery, remain high.

Staff place focus well upon parents' good emotional well-being. They are aware that levels of isolation and postnatal depression are high within the reach area and provide good levels of care and support. For example, groups such as New Beginnings help new parents to build social networks and baby massage sessions support parents to bond with their new babies. Staff effectively signpost families to a local charitable counselling service.

Parents learn about how to keep their families safe by exploring topics, such as first aid and Child Safety Week, and through access to home safety equipment. Staff are very vigilant to indicators which may suggest that families are at risk of domestic violence. Good links with local organisations, such as Stop Abuse for Everyone

(SAFE), enhance this work by, for example, the joint delivery of Pattern Changing courses. When staff identify concerns they swiftly refer to appropriate agencies in order that children are protected. Through effective packages of support for families, the centre has successfully improved outcomes for the majority of families subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process.

Parents and children enjoy learning together. Good role modelling by staff develops parents' understanding of how to provide effective learning experiences for their children. Parents are given new ideas of activities to provide at home, such as messy play, and they value the access given to the centre's free toy and book library. Staff place appropriate focus on the development of children's communication and language skills and benefit from having the guidance of a trained speech and language therapist on the team. Parents' understanding of the importance of effectively communicating with their child is developed through sessions such as Chatter Matters and Bringing Stories to Life. Over time, the number of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved from 35.7% in 2008 to 44.5% in 2011. The gap between the lowest achievers and the rest has narrowed rapidly from 41.1% in 2008 to 31.1% in 2011.

Parents receive good support to help them positively manage the behaviour of their children. Many report that they now have greater levels of patience and have learnt how to listen to, and understand, the needs of their children. Some parents are engaged in developing provision such as the work undertaken by Friends of Crediton Children's Centre to develop the garden. Parents are becoming increasingly involved in helping staff to plan programmes of activities and have worked alongside staff and partners to identify key areas for the centre to address. There is parent representation on the core purpose group, although staff recognise that the views of all groups of parents are not currently represented.

Staff have successfully improved the economic stability of some families. Some have been supported to seek and secure work, and access to specialist benefit advice has been of particular benefit to families who are on low incomes. Staff support families well to obtain food parcels and furniture and to secure improved accommodation when experiencing severe financial difficulty and poor housing conditions.

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	3
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	2

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

Effective outreach work means that staff successfully engage a good proportion of families within target groups and their participation in services is good. The use of venues within the community enables families within the centre's large reach area to easily access services. Leaders recognise that their reach to one area is not as high as that in others and plans are already in place to work alongside the health visiting team to take services out to that community.

Staff undertake clear and effective assessments for those families who benefit from targeted support. This includes very good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process, effectively monitored by a lead practitioner within the centre. Staff develop tailored packages of support in order that they ensure they meet the needs of families. They work well with partners, particularly health, to ensure assessment of need is robust, resulting action plans are comprehensive and the delivery of services is well integrated.

The centre promotes purposeful learning well and activities are of a good quality. Provision to help children to learn and develop is good. Sessions such as the crèche and Stay and Play are well planned and executed. They are led by skilled staff who promote curiosity and engage children well in their learning. Families are able to access good support to improve their levels of literacy and numeracy and take-up rates have been good. Those wishing to achieve higher qualification levels are also supported, for example by providing a placement to a parent completing a degree.

Those who experience crisis in their lives confirm that they are confident to turn to staff in the centre, knowing that help would be provided to ease their personal situation. Many reflect how isolated they felt prior to engaging with the children's centre and fully appreciate the social relationships they have developed.

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

Centre staff are well led by a committed management team who are clear on the priorities for the centre. The staff team is well organised and leaders make very good use of individual expertise of staff who are given responsibility to lead particular aspects of provision. Staff have been extremely well supported through a well-planned and organised management transition. As a result, families saw very little impact upon the delivery of services during this time. Parents express strong satisfaction with the range and quality of services provided. Effective systems in place provide staff with professional supervision so that they are well supported to deliver effective services to families. Centre leaders and staff have developed some very strong partnerships which have led to improved outcomes for families, such as with health visitors and the local church who provide the Journey Counselling Service. All partners understand their role in supporting and developing integrated provision.

Leaders and managers make good use of data in order to develop a clear understanding of the make-up and profile of their reach area. They use this information well to plan and develop services. The centre is supported and challenged well by the local authority, Action For Children and the core purpose group. Development planning involves all key partners and some parents. Systems are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of services and staff act upon feedback from parents in order to improve and modify services. The centre is further developing its systems to capture more evidence of the impact that services are having on outcomes for children and their families. Families are represented on the core purpose group and their role in decision making and in shaping future services is developing.

Staff make very good use of community venues to deliver a good range of services, both in outlying rural communities as well as within the town as accommodation within the centre itself is restricted. Families report that the services meet their needs and are of good quality. A range of rigorous monitoring activities undertaken by the local authority ensures the centre meets its expected outcomes, demonstrating that the centre provides good value for money.

The centre's values of equality, integration and removing barriers underpin all the work the centre does. As a result, staff successfully engage the majority of families within its reach area, including good levels of engagement from families within target groups. Many families who speak English as an additional language benefit from access to a member of staff who speaks their home language. The centre has also seen families with disabled children access services well. A monthly group for dads and male carers has seen success in engaging them in the learning and development of their children. The small numbers of Traveller families, that are occasionally resident within the reach area, have accessed guidance, for example on claiming benefits to support their economic well-being.

Staff are very well trained in child protection. They have a good understanding of their responsibilities and are clear on procedures to take. Protocols and practice for making referrals and sharing information within and outside the centre are very effective. Staff monitor families closely, liaise well with relevant agencies and maintain high levels of effective case recording in order to ensure children are well protected.

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	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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Crediton Area Children's Centre on 15 and 16 August 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that both staff and managers provide you with a good service as they work very well together as a team. They understand what challenges you face and they show a strong commitment to improving the lives of all of you. Staff and managers have developed some very strong partnerships with other professionals and organisations, such as health visitors, so that they can be sure that they are able to offer you the right range of services. They work hard to help you to adopt healthier lifestyles, although their work has yet to have sufficient impact on reducing the numbers of five-year-olds who are overweight or obese or the numbers of families who smoke.

Staff are committed to providing an inclusive service and to ensuring that as many of you use their services as possible. They do this by taking services into your communities to make it easier for you to get to groups. Their skills are used well to support you, for example the member of staff who speaks Polish and Russian who has been able to communicate with families from Eastern Europe to help them to access the services they need from the children's centre.

We agree with you that the staff are caring and supportive. Those of you who spoke to us during the inspection told us how much you value the support network that the centre has helped you to develop and what a difference this has made to your lives. You particularly value the opportunity attending activities at the centre gives you to meet people and make friends.

We noticed that you have opportunities to share your views with staff about the services they offer you. Staff listen to you and make any changes that they can. Parents who are involved in the Friends of Crediton Children's Centre have successfully helped to make improvements to the centre through their hard work to redesign the garden. It is important, however, that more of you are involved in making direct contributions to the management of the centre, helping to identify how services should be developed. We have asked managers to support you to do so.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts about the centre. We are very grateful and we wish you all every success for the future.

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