

Inspection report for Bridport Children's Centre

Local authority	Dorset County Council
Inspection number	406935
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Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre leader	Louisa Payne – Cluster Manager Deb Geraghty – Deputy Manager
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	St Mary's Church of England Primary School
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's management team, members of the advisory board, the local authority, 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

Bridport Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. It was designated in 2008 and is run by Dorset County Council. It is situated on the site of St Mary's Church of England Primary School and operates as part of a cluster of five children's centres and two outreach bases. The centre offers a range of services which include 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 covers the town of Bridport and surrounding villages. It is in one of the 30% most deprived areas of the country where there are high levels of worklessness. 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 633 children under five living in the reach area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early year's education are low, particularly in communication, language and literacy and in their personal, social and emotional 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Bridport Children's Centre provides a satisfactory service for the families who live in its reach area. The centre serves the needs of the families known to them well and a concerted effort by centre leaders and staff has seen the number of families registered at the centre and those who engage in services begin to rise. However, at present, the centre has only been successful in registering just over half of families in their locality and as a result, not enough families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable participate in services.

A particular strength of the centre is the good quality care, guidance and support offered to families. Visitors to the centre receive a warm welcome by all staff. Those on reception are well trained and knowledgeable and offer families accurate advice and guidance on services available. In times of crisis families are able to confidently turn to the centre for support and guidance; one parent told inspectors that staff provide her with 'absolutely amazing support'. Outreach workers effectively empower families to make positive changes to their lives and parents reflect on how they have been 'nudged' to make necessary changes and to 'break things down and see light at the end of the tunnel'. The centre seeks the view of families in order to evaluate the quality and suitability of services; however, it is yet to involve families fully in making decisions about services and in driving improvement.

Staff have built strong partnerships with a range of relevant agencies so that families who are known to the centre access a good range of services. Agencies work particularly well together in identifying the needs of families and developing an integrated approach so that outcomes for those families who receive targeted support rapidly improve. Together with the co-located primary school, the implementation of 'Story Magic', a strategy to promote the communication and social skills of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, has seen a very positive impact upon these aspects of development.

Staff implement a range of programmes to improve the health of families, working well with health partners to deliver and reinforce positive messages. However,

despite concerted efforts, some concerning health trends remain; levels of childhood obesity have increased over time and there has been a dip in the percentage of women who sustain breastfeeding and in immunisation rates.

Centre leaders and managers are clear about what they need to improve and are implementing suitable action plans. They have made good use of the recently provided local authority data to analyse their success and where they need to improve further. This has led to a recent rapid improvement in some areas of the centre's performance, such as improvements in registration rates, and the centre has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement strategies to improve the numbers of families in your reach area who register with the centre and engage in services, particularly those in target groups.
- Together with health partners, strengthen strategies aimed at improving health outcomes, in particular rates of breastfeeding, obesity and completing programmes of immunisation.
- Develop the role of families in governance and decision-making.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents are beginning to understand how to promote healthier lifestyles for their families. Programmes such as 'Incredible Edibles' successfully target some families who benefit from learning about healthy eating. Parents with very young babies value the advice and support they gain in the 'Little Wrigglers' sessions, such as encouraging appropriate sleep patterns. Groups have a good focus on both physical activity and healthy eating and staff model healthy eating so children learn through good example. However, levels of childhood obesity have risen in recent years.

Staff place a good focus on the promotion of breastfeeding. Staff at all levels are trained in breastfeeding support so are able to confidently offer advice and guidance and talk about the benefits of breastfeeding. Staff work well with health colleagues to promote breastfeeding as messages are incorporated into groups such as 'Young Mums to be' and other ante-natal programmes. However, although the rate of mothers who sustain breastfeeding is above that seen nationally at 52%, rates have been on a downward trend in recent years. This pattern is also seen in the rates of parents who complete programmes of childhood immunisations.

Parents' understanding of how to keep their children safe is developing well due to

the good attention paid by staff to this outcome. Many users have successfully reviewed the safety of their homes through participation in the 'Safe at Home' scheme which provides both advice and free home safety equipment. Safety professionals, such as fire officers, visit groups to offer advice and guidance. Centre staff give good focus to the needs of families who may be subject to domestic violence. They link well with a local women's refuge to support families in need of help to build a safe home environment. There is good evidence of improved outcomes for families who are subject to child protection plans.

Children accessing groups at the centre make good progress. Their progress is tracked and staff use this information effectively to support the early identification of concerns. Staff support parents to ease children's transition into school through the distribution of information packs. They make particularly good links with the co-located school and share information regarding the needs of families known to them. Over time the number of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved from 53% in 2008 to 63% in 2011. The past 12 months has seen a rapid narrowing of the gap between the lowest achievers and the rest from 27.6% to 23.1%.

Children behave well within the centre. Parents receive good support to help them to understand how to effectively manage their child's behaviour and build positive relationships. They are well supported to make informed life choices and to consider the impact these choices have on their families. While the centre seeks the views of parents and values these, for example by displaying a 'you said, we did' notice board, parents are yet to fully participate in decision-making and the governance of the centre.

Some families are improving their economic position as they are supported to claim benefits, budget effectively and have access to debt counselling where needed. There is support in place for those who wish to return to work such as developing job application techniques and gaining basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). This has led to some families successfully gaining employment.

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 positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3

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

3

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff know their families well and have an increasing understanding of the needs of the community as a whole. They implement a rigorous and effective assessment system which is used well to help families identify and prioritise needs. This includes very good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The multi-agency approach taken to the allocation of cases means that a comprehensive package of support is developed which meets the needs of the whole family. As a result, for those families known to the centre, outcomes are improving.

Services are regularly evaluated and appropriately adapted to meet the changing needs of the reach area. Participation rates by some target groups is beginning to increase, for example the centre has had success in engaging 42% of those in multi-ethnic groups who live in the reach area. The centre has recently improved its registration rates as it has more conscientiously registered the families who access services. However, current figures show that at present only 53% of children in the reach area are registered with the centre and only just over a third of families are accessing services.

Provision to help children to learn and develop is good. This is because sessions are well planned, take account of children's prior learning and provide easy access to a range of good quality resources. Parents also have good access to adult learning opportunities, including parenting courses and accredited qualifications. Comprehensive assessments undertaken by the adult learning services mean that parents are signposted to relevant training at an appropriate level and, as a result, uptake and completion of courses are good. Centre staff are particularly successful in developing the confidence of parents who access services. They offer them opportunities to share any skills and expertise they may have for the benefit of others. For example, a parent experienced in weaning her own children was encouraged to share this with those attending a course specifically aimed at supporting healthy eating practices. Another parent was supported to share aspects of her culture and religion with others.

The quality of information and guidance is good as this is well tailored to meet the specific needs of the families such as that provided for young parents. Centre staff place an appropriate emphasis on supporting the sexual health of adults who access the centre. For example, they have recently become an approved centre for the distribution of condoms and provide free home testing kits for sexually transmitted diseases. Information regarding these sensitive issues is appropriately located in toilets where adults can access it in privacy.

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	3
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?

3

The centre is led by a committed leadership team who manage an enthusiastic, passionate and cohesive staff team. Leaders clearly communicate a vision which is grounded in improving life chances for the families they work with. Clear lines of management responsibility are in place and provide staff with effective professional supervision. Good development opportunities have resulted in a well-trained staff team. The role of the advisory board is developing. Membership reflects key agencies well and, with the support of the cluster lead, the board is beginning to understand its role better in challenging the centre and holding it to account.

Senior leaders are motivated to seek improvement. They are clear about where they need to develop their provision and the ways in which this can be achieved. Links between strategic planning and service delivery are improving as leaders become more familiar with local authority data. Analysis of this data has enabled them to more accurately evaluate the needs of their community and the impact they are having on outcomes. Overall, parents express strong satisfaction with the range and quality of services provided. Regular feedback is sought from parents on the quality of services and staff make use of this in order to develop services further. Evaluation of services is now more comprehensive, for example parenting programmes now have clear entry and exit evaluations in order to measure impact, with plans in place to measure if this impact has been sustained.

The centre provides very good accommodation which provides a warm and welcoming environment for families. Staff are deployed well to make good use of their individual knowledge and expertise. Access by target groups and those most in need of intervention and support is beginning to increase and the leaders are aware of where they need to focus their efforts in order to improve participation rates still further. Overall, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The centre shows a commitment to inclusion. It is currently working to break down barriers to engagement of families although some target groups remain underrepresented in the centre. Those children with disabilities who engage in services are provided with good support through targeted provision delivered in conjunction with the local special school. This provision gives parents access to advice and guidance from a wide range of professionals. 'Part-time Ponies', provision

for children with specific behavioural concerns, has seen a positive impact on improving behaviour. The centre has had success with engaging those families from multi-ethnic groups and provision is in place to support those who speak English as an additional language to acquire improved English skills. Young parents known to the centre also receive good support. They are able to access tailored ante-natal care as well as an ongoing support group.

Staff are very well trained in child protection. They have a good understanding of their responsibilities and are clear on relevant procedures. Good case recording and liaison with relevant agencies mean that children are well protected. Protocols and practice for making referrals and sharing information within and outside the centre are very effective. This has resulted in families who are subject to a child protection plan receiving good levels of support. The 'Pathfinder project' has been particularly successful in breaking down any potential barriers to multi-agency partnership working and as a result key partners are clear on their responsibility to contribute to improving outcomes for families in the local area.

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	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	3

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bridport Children's Centre on September 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall with some good aspects.

We agree with you that a great strength of this children's centre is the care, guidance and support that staff provide for you. You told us how much you value the support you are given and how staff help you to identify ways in which you can address issues you are facing in your lives. We found that staff work well together as a team and with outside agencies in order to provide you with services that make a real difference to the lives of you and your families. We have asked the centre to increase the number of families they support in this way because at present, only a third of families who live in the area access services at the children's centre.

Staff have built some strong relationships with other professionals. They work particularly closely with staff in the school on the same site as the children's centre. Their 'Story Magic' project has been particularly successful in helping children to develop their literacy and social skills. Together with health professionals, staff work hard to help you to adopt healthier lifestyles. However, this work has yet to ensure that the number of five-year-olds who are overweight or obese does not increase and that the number of women who breastfeed their babies and parents who complete immunisation programmes does not drop.

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. It is important, however, that you are more 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.