

Inspection report for Southernway Children's Centre

Local authority	City of Plymouth
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Date of previous inspection	November 2011
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Linked school if applicable	135145 Beechwood Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY412378 Catkins Childcare

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 a group of parents who use the centre, the centre's management team, the director of the Wood View learning community, a governor with responsibility for safeguarding and the local authority acting advisor for children's centres. The inspectors spoke informally with families using the centre and observed the centre's work. They looked at a range of documentation including policies relating to safeguarding, day-to-day supervision of staff, case studies and a wide range of evaluations of the services, together with data pertaining to the outcomes for people who use the centre and the wider community.

Information about the centre

Southernway Children's Centre is a phase 2 children's centre located within Beechwood Primary School and designated in June 2009. It is sited on a multi-agency campus that includes the children's centre, a primary school, 'I CAN' speech and language services, a nursery and a doctor's surgery. There are 658 children under five living in the centre's reach area.

The management committee of Wood View Learning Community federated governing body, on behalf of the local authority, manages the centre. An advisory board acts as a link between the centre's users and the management committee. The centre operates in a cluster model with Whiteleigh Children's Centre and staff work across both centres. There is an interim centre manager in post since May 2012.

The centre offers a range of services that include health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. Services are provided at the children's centre main building as well as in venues in the community.

The centre is located in a densely populated, urban locality with a high proportion of social housing. It is in an area that is not identified as deprived overall, although there are some pockets of deprivation where a high proportion of families are either

dependant on workless benefits or low incomes. The population is mostly White British. Children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are typically low, particularly in their communication, language and literacy development and 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

This rapidly improving centre has made excellent progress in dealing with weak and inadequate elements of its services since its last inspection. The overall effectiveness is good. Managers have built effective partnerships with local and citywide services to meet the needs of the community, especially the more vulnerable families. The centre has a high quality of outreach work, excellent supervision of the centre's workforce, a determined focus on the emotional welfare of families and preparing children for school results in good outcomes.

Parents are warm in their praise of the centre workers and managers, describing the centre as 'a lifeline', saying that it has 'changed my life'. The parents welcome the training they receive in helping to develop the centre's services to families. These include the safe management of crèches, support for the breastfeeding programme and help with the numerous outdoor activities. Improving the literacy and numeracy skills of adults, where these are required to help them return to work, does not go far enough.

A very successful feature for children attending the centre is the good improvement they make in communication skills and in personal, social and emotional development. Excellent collaborative working between the children's centre, its linked school and early years providers is a key factor. Several parents reported how useful they find the discussions and practical sessions in helping them understand and support their child's development. A few parents are motivated to organise stay-and-play sessions for families. The rapid reduction in the proportion of children who do not meet expectations by the end of the Early Years Foundation stage is further evidence of the impact of this team.

Health visitors working closely with the children's centre managers have led to strongly improving health outcomes for families. All staff are highly alert to families' differing needs. There is constant informal communication between staff, helped by the sharing of rooms at the centre. A formal and wide-ranging approach to initial assessment and prompt early intervention is ensuring that the children's centre is exceeding the expectations in its work with parents who find themselves in vulnerable situations. Parents, who experience times of crisis, feel very comfortable approaching the centre and are supported very well.

Leaders, staff and partners share a clear vision for the centre's work. They are dedicated to providing the best possible support for children and their families and identifying where provision and outcomes should be improved even further. The successful work over the last year to increase the number of vulnerable families gaining early access to high-quality childcare is a good example. Great care was taken to establish the needs of this group and understand the barriers that might hold back benefits for the children, such as through setting up programmes to help families understand children's behaviour and small group support for women subjected to violence in the home.

The centre provides good value for money. There is a much-improved flow of data about the effectiveness of the centre, its reach and the targets for other services in the locality. Good use is now made of parents' views, case studies and feedback from partner organisations. This is ensuring the centre is much better at reviewing its provision and directing its staff at areas of most need. The centre is reaching two thirds of its families and the vast majority of those who have specific needs. There is comprehensive advice for families available at the centre but communicating the work, and successes, of the centre and its partners to families is weak.

The local authority regularly and thoroughly reviews the performance of the centre. The reviews are instrumental in providing a rationale for action. Individual action plans have been drawn up to take this work forward, for example in improving learning outdoors or extending the emotional well-being of the community. There is strong representation of parents on the forum and advisory board but there is no connection between their input and strategic planning because the centre has not updated development plans.

The improvement objectives following the last inspection, particularly to implement good safeguarding arrangements, are met. Record keeping is a very strong feature of the centre. The good management, accuracy of self-evaluation and flexible approaches to managing resources give the centre a good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Prepare a suitable development-planning document that:
 - carries forward the work already achieved
 - links the local authority priorities to those of families in the reach area
 - shows how developments will be managed
- Seek ways to improve the economic stability of the reach area by developing links with services and training opportunities for those wishing to return to work
- Improve the way that the centre communicates with its families by developing the use of the centre's website to signpost activities and celebrate successes of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Sessions and activities observed during the inspection showed a very good take-up by the range of groups represented in the area. The proportions of children under one and under five with registered contact have shown a marked increase in the last year. For example, the number of families in vulnerable circumstances or facing crisis accessing services has almost doubled. The number of families receiving home safety kits has tripled while those attending health, early learning and childcare sessions have risen significantly. The centre compares favourably with other centres against a range of health measures. Analysis of data shows that the centre is reaching almost all of the families who live in the 10% most deprived parts of the centre's designated area, while the vast majority of registered contacts involve children who live in the 30% most deprived wards.

Breastfeeding rates are improving strongly, up by 12% this year, while smoking during pregnancy rates have declined by 10%. Admissions to accident and emergency are similar to the citywide and locality data. However, this objective receives a strong focus and the number of families benefiting from home safety checks is increasing. Case studies show that the majority of these families take action to improve safety around their homes.

Children clearly feel safe at the centre and parents are confident that they can share concerns with adults. While at the centre and other bases, adults and children are kept safe by the good arrangements that are in place. Risks are also carefully assessed for outreach workers. When welfare concerns are identified, prompt action is taken to address these. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and pre-CAF processes are used very effectively to identify quickly where children's safety may be at risk. Assessment procedures are rigorous and carefully planned so that intervention and support are precisely tailored to individual needs. This makes a significant difference and the numbers of children subject to child protection plans is reducing.

During children's visits to the centre, they become familiar with routines. The nursery has a well-resourced baby room and this ensures smooth transitions when they are three. It offers good opportunities to play and learn. Intervention between the

nursery leader, specialist speech and language services and the centre's early years teacher is exceptionally well joined up to successfully tackle the deep-seated weaknesses in children's oracy.

In a chatterbox session, children were very responsive during the singing activities because parents were skilfully involved. The parents had good levels of information about the benefits of the activity for children. The good oracy outcomes were the result of respectful discussions about children's interests and how to work with these to set up good-quality play sessions.

Children's language and communication needs are identified early and a wide range of support put into place. Citywide initiatives to promote children's early talk have had a highly positive impact on children's language and communication. Outcomes are improving for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage with a marked increase in the proportion reaching a good level of development; from 55% to 82%.

Parents of children with disabilities or special educational needs receive well-targeted and prompt support. There are personalised learning programmes that match needs well, and progress towards discrete development stages is tracked carefully. Strong links with health partners and the nursery are a key factor in supporting these children and ensuring they are included.

Parents recognise the value of courses and events to help them understand and manage their children's behaviour and increase their parenting skills. Case studies show many of the parents who benefit from targeted parenting support also access other opportunities through the centre. For example, the forest school and buggy walks. First-hand reports clearly point to parents overcoming significant health issues and feelings of isolation and powerlessness in relationships. One parent commented that without the encouragement of the centre she would not have gone out of her home.

The partnerships with Jobcentre services are weak and not resulting in any significant increase in the numbers of parents accessing training, courses, volunteering placements and employment. The centre has provided some volunteer placements to support the breastfeeding programme and increase the number of adults qualified to supervise activities at the centre. This is boosting the confidence of these parents, helping these families make a contribution and promoting social cohesion.

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	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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre makes effective use of all the information from a wide variety of sources to ensure it matches the needs of users well. The centre makes good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) for identifying needs and action is closely monitored, reviewed and recorded. Families are treated with respect and sensitivity, and because the centre has a good reputation for being a welcoming place, families will often access the services themselves. There is a wealth of information about all aspects of health provided at the various crèches and play activities. Health visitors and services that support families in times of personal crisis are regularly on hand at sessions for families.

Staff training has a high priority. Well-trained staff run sessions such as baby massage and baby talk, and their expertise has a significant impact on learning and development outcomes and parental confidence. They share the purpose of the activity and help parents reflect on the gains their children have made. This ensures that parents acquire a better knowledge of how to intervene in their children's development. Staff are excellent role models, promoting strong and cohesive relationships. Subtle shifts in how the rooms are set up encourages adults and children to interact together. All activities observed in 'great expectations', 'baby morning' and 'chatterbox' were having a positive impact on children's social and emotional development.

The centre is constantly striving to reach out to the most isolated members of the community. They publicise their events and services widely. This, alongside the use of local knowledge, has resulted in a significant increase in families making use of the centre's services. There is a good range of written information available. For some families who may not venture out frequently, or who use internet technology to stay in touch, this potentially useful information is not available on the centre's website.

The quality and the impact of the outreach and community work is good and improving rapidly. Family support workers are kept well informed by health visitors and any new births are promptly registered. In this way, many families are quickly accessing universal, and where necessary, targeted and specialist services. For example, a link to children and adolescent mental health services and the freedom

project is benefiting those most isolated members of the community. Good use of government funding for two-year-olds to access places in the nursery is proving beneficial in giving these parents the time to attend targeted services as well as benefiting children's school readiness.

Many parents spoke of feeling improved confidence and self-esteem because of their links with the centre and family support advisers. For some parents, this has led to improved housing and prompt help with financial management. The centre is promoting some training that results in qualifications at levels 1 and 2, for example in first aid and food hygiene. Nevertheless, the centre has yet to develop its provision to help drive up aspirations, particularly of those families who are without work.

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

The experienced, interim centre manager has quickly ensured that responsibilities are shared well between leaders. Strong systems for monitoring the quality of the provision and its impact are in place and the outcomes from these evaluations are a key driver in matching services to the needs of families. Wide-ranging data are provided for the centre through the local authority that are now being used well by managers to guide and shape services.

The rigorous approach taken by the local authority in setting key performance indicators, discussing these with governors and reviewing progress regularly has been instrumental in changing the culture at the children's centre, driving forwards accountability at all levels. However, there is no overarching development plan in place for the future development of the centre and how this fits into the performance targets set by the local authority. In particular, the centre is not yet focusing sufficiently on how it can improve the economic stability of the area.

The centre provides a highly integrated service that is responsive and inclusive. The co-location of partner agencies in one shared office space helps improve arrangements for ensuring safeguarding arrangements are met, adhered to and are of good quality. Recruitment is rigorous and safeguarding is a prominent and regular

part of supervision arrangements. The staff receive regular training to ensure they are well equipped to support children and families and to identify where children may be at risk. Recent training is highly relevant to local context and specific identified need. Administrative staff are also trained to a similar level as the outreach workers, ensuring that they can identify potential risk when inputting and reviewing data on the e-start data base.

Referrals are fully recorded and followed up. The relevant centre staff are fully involved in core group meetings and child protection conferences. The alertness of all staff to potentially vulnerable situations has resulted in an increase of pre-CAF and CAF referrals initiated by the centre.

The recent advisory board meeting minutes show that parents are well represented alongside professional services. Their contribution to discussion and a wider responsibility for evaluating services are well documented and provide a good base to strengthening their role in governance and setting strategic priorities.

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	3

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

Catkins Childcare offers childcare provision for the children's centre and two primary schools within the Southernway Federation; Beechwood and Oakwood. It was registered in 2010. It is managed by an independent organisation, the Community Interest Company, consisting of a committee formed from staff from the local schools, governors and parents. The provision has use of purpose-built rooms within the main complex of Beechwood School and Children's Centre. It was inspected in January 2011 and the quality of provision was judged as good.

Beechwood School was inspected in November 2009. The inspection judged overall effectiveness of its Early Years Foundation Stage as good.

The Whitleigh Childrens Centre, shares staff with Southernway Children's Centre and was last inspected in December 2010. The inspection judged overall effectiveness as satisfactory.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Southernway Children's Centre on 10 and 11 October 2012. We judged the centre to be good.

Thank you for helping us with our work. We were very pleased to be able to talk to so many of you and to watch the activities and sessions that were taking place over the two days. Many parents told us how much they valued the centre and how much it helped in their lives and in their children's learning, health, safety and overall development.

This was a re-inspection because the children's centre safeguarding arrangements and aspects of its leadership and governance were inadequate last time we visited. The centre managers have worked hard to put things right. Their commitment and diligence have made a significant difference to the effectiveness of the centre. They have quickly established systems to ensure that all people working in the centre are who they say they are, cleared to work with children and have the right qualifications for the job.

The centre manager and deputy manager are always keeping a check on how families and children are benefiting from the centre, and are demanding a high standard of record-keeping from staff. You told us how much change you had noticed, particularly how much more you understood the benefits of sessions you

attended, and how much more confident you were about helping your children prepare for school, stay safe and keep healthy.

We agreed the staff are approachable, and knowledgeable and they are particularly good at directing families to the right services that will help them and their children. The outreach workers who visit some of you regularly are making a real difference to your confidence and parenting skills. By working positively and honestly with other service providers, they are building up trust in the community. They take time to listen to what you say. They are using the information from data gathered by the local authority to adjust the activities they offer.

A particular strength of these managers is that they always seem able to find solutions. For example, locating sessions in your church hall where it is easier for you to get to, putting on additional crèches so you can meet with visitors as well as helping your children enrol in the nursery. Or by offering space for health visitors to carry out important health checks in the centre's rooms.

The centre provides a good range of services. This is because many people from different agencies and organisations work with the centre staff, both here and at Whitleigh School. This makes it easy for you to receive any help you need. These services and the high quality of support you receive are making a positive difference to family lives. Health is improving, children are living in safer conditions and educational outcomes are getting better with each year that passes.

The centre managers are keen that those of you who feel sufficiently confident take on some responsibilities for supporting crèches, or helping new mums with breast-feeding, and are given the required training. We have asked that the centre also finds ways to support those families who would benefit from gaining experience and qualifications as a way back into work.

Most families in the community know the centre and the services it provides. But not enough is made of the centre's website for those of you who prefer this form of communication.

It was good to see from the minutes that the advisory board gives time to hear the views of those parents who attend these meetings, and that changes happen as a result. We know it will be helpful for all those working at the centre to have a current action plan to map out how they are going to keep moving the centre forward after what has been such a busy year putting things right.

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