

Inspection report for Cumberland Children's Centre

Local authority	Portsmouth City Council
Inspection number	404507
Inspection dates	10 and 11 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Kenneth Jones HMI

Centre leader	Ann Marie Grogan
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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with local authority managers and the centre coordinator and staff. They also met with representatives from the local authority, partnership board, partners and parents.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Cumberland was designated as a phase two children's centre in November 2007. It provides a range of services including health, family support, parenting programmes and family play sessions from Devonshire Baptist Church, Eastney Methodist Church, and St Margaret's Church as well as outreach venues. The centre works closely with the nearby Milton Park and Southsea Children's Centres as well as other centres to broaden its offer to meet the needs of children and families. Cumberland also works closely with local Early Years Foundation Stage providers, one of whom shares facilities at Devonshire Baptist Church.

The centre is not in an area of high deprivation and the number of children living in workless households is relatively low. Three quarters of housing is privately owned and by far the majority of rented accommodation is let by private landlords. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills typically expected of their age. Of the 911 children in the reach area just over 10% are of Black or minority ethnic heritage and no particular group predominates.

Portsmouth City Council has overall management responsibility for the centre and governance is provided through a partnership board which oversees five centres with representation from local schools, health, social care, Portsmouth City Council, parents and the local community.

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

Cumberland Children's Centre is a good centre which is managed well. Children and parents enjoy attending the centre and find it welcoming and supportive. The large majority of parents in the reach area are registered at the centre and engagement with it is good and improving. Families are supported well and outcomes are mostly good and improving. Partnership working with health professionals is good, obesity rates are lower than for the city overall, breastfeeding rates are higher and families are encouraged well to eat healthily. The centre works well with schools and early years providers in supporting children's development, and support provided for parents is effective in preparing children for transition to school. The children with whom the centre engages achieve much better in the Early Years Foundation Stage than those who do not. Support and challenge provided by the local authority is very effective in bringing about improvement. Self-evaluation is used well to identify areas for improvement and capacity for improvement is good. Available resources are used well and the centre provides good value for money.

The centre works well in partnership with different services and professionals as well as with neighbouring children's centres and those further afield in the city, enabling it to offer a good range of provision and signpost families to specialist services where necessary. Parents do not however always find it easy to find out what is available. Safeguarding is given a high priority and procedures for ensuring children are protected are implemented well. Good use is made of the common assessment framework to provide support and families are helped well to improve their parenting skills. Equality and diversity are promoted well and the centre works effectively with different professionals in improving outcomes for vulnerable families. Parents who are isolated or lack confidence benefit from individualised support from home visits and the very large majority are helped to join centre-based activities.

The centre knows the area well and data provided by the local authority are used well to improve services although it does not receive information about all live births

directly and is not notified promptly of incidences of domestic violence. Governance and accountability arrangements through the partnership board are good and the local authority performance management arrangements provide effective support and challenge to the centre coordinator. These procedures, together with self-evaluation arrangements, are very effective in identifying areas for development. There are appropriate arrangements for parents to express their views through questionnaires and the parents' forum, and good use is made of this information by the centre to develop provision. The numbers of parents expressing their views is relatively low, as is the number taking up opportunities to volunteer and contribute to the work of the centre. A sound foundation has been laid through working with Jobcentre Plus for increasing the number of parents taking advantage of training opportunities and progressing to employment, although numbers are currently low.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure the council makes information about the provision available to parents across the partnership area more easily accessible.
- Ensure the council and partners inform the centre promptly of incidences of domestic violence in the reach area to help the centre support vulnerable families.
- Encourage more parents to volunteer and support the work of the centre.
- Jointly with neighbouring children's centres and partners develop a programme of opportunities to help parents learn, train and progress to employment, based on the identified needs of the area.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

At 4.1% and reducing, obesity rates across the reach area are much lower than for the city and the national average. Parents receive good advice during activities on how to improve their children's health and talk of how they now 'hide vegetables in their children's food'. Healthy snacks are provided by the centre and the Health Improvement and Development Service provides targeted support for individuals and groups to help them buy and prepare healthy food. Mothers receive good support with regard to breastfeeding their babies. Both initiation rates of 85% and prevalence of 65% after six to eight weeks are much higher for the reach area than across the city and the national average. Centre staff and health visitors are alert to signs of post-natal depression and isolation. Sensitive referral to support groups or the Home Start service is effective in improving confidence and in helping mothers join activities at the centre.

Centre staff complete thorough risk assessments and parents have a good understanding of how to keep their families safe. New parents receive advice from the Home Check service, home visits are carried out when required and home safety kits provided. Centre staff have a thorough understanding of child protection arrangements and two referrals have been made to children's social care services recently. The centre is now informed of children in the reach area who are subject to

a child protection plan but does not receive prompt notification of incidences of domestic abuse. Staff work well with health colleagues in identifying families in need of support and are effective in securing early support through the use of the Common Assessment Framework. Case files demonstrate the centre to be improving children's safety and welfare. One nursery manager commented that, through working with the centre to support families, they now have significantly fewer children with social care services involvement. Targeted parenting courses are having a positive impact in improving parents' skills in managing their children's behaviour.

Children enjoy attending the centre, develop in confidence and improve their social skills. They learn to share, take care of toys and help staff tidy up at the end of sessions. Parents increase in confidence and are better able to support their children in their development and learning. Saturday events are improving the engagement of fathers. As one parent put it 'The centre has let me see my child mix and play with all sorts of children and given me reassurances about my parenting and tips for songs and activities'. Group activities are planned well using the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of their Reception Year in the reach area is improving and children who attend the centre develop more rapidly than others. The development gap between the highest and lowest achieving 20% of children attending the centre is 18% and reducing compared to 25% for other children.

Staff take full account of parents' views and the interests of children when planning provision through questionnaires and the parents' forum. Parents who express their views gain in confidence as do those who volunteer and help the centre in its work. The proportion of parents participating in these activities is however in the minority. Although the centre is not in an area of deprivation or high unemployment, families are helped take up training opportunities, improve their economic position and have access to advice on financial matters. The centre recognises the need to extend opportunities for learning and employment and a Jobcentre Plus advisor works with Cumberland families one day a week. The centre is analysing the education and training needs of parents in the area in order to broaden opportunities.

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	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
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How good is the provision?

2

The centre has a good understanding of the reach area and the families accessing services. Data provided by the local authority are increasingly comprehensive and are used well to establish needs, target provision and assess its impact on outcomes. Almost all teenage parents are engaged and the majority of fathers are registered as a result of successful recent targeting through weekend activities. Involvement of lone parents has also improved over the last six months with almost half now registered. Regular meetings with social care and health professionals are providing opportunities for sharing concerns about vulnerable families. The centre now has access to live birth data through close working with health professionals.

Provision is kept under review. Stay and play sessions, for example, have been restructured recently and a new Little Explorers group set up for children under two. There is a good range of play sessions, for example Boogie Mites, Jiggly Wrigglers and Skilful Soccer on Saturdays to help physical development and parents are encouraged to exercise through activities such as Buggy Blasts. A strength of the centre is the way in which it works with neighbouring centres and those further afield in developing and signposting provision thus ensuring that a wide range of family needs are met. Parents do not however always find it easy to find out about the opportunities available for them. Registration levels are improving rapidly with the large majority of parents now registered with good engagement. Rates for parents of Black and minority ethnic heritage are improving and in line with others. Specific sessions are provided for teenage parents and they are engaging well. One parent explained how the centre made her feel 'like I belong to part of something positive, a safe place to meet people with similar lives trying to improve'.

Improving children's communication, language and literacy skills is a priority for the centre. An early years advisory teacher works closely with the centre and the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework is firmly embedded across the provision. There is now more emphasis on speech and language development with more singing, stories and books. A range of opportunities has been developed to engage fathers in their children's development, including Men Behaving Dadly events on Saturdays. Centre staff are active in supporting parents prepare their children for transition to school and in helping parents establish routines which will ensure good punctuality and attendance when they start. The headteacher of one school who spoke to inspectors confirmed that there has been a significant improvement in the preparedness of children for school this year as a result of this support.

Parents receive good care, guidance and support. A mother on maternity leave explained how she found it hard being off work for nine months: 'I don't know how I would have coped with a new baby and nowhere to go; they have been excellent

and have helped me to cope.’ Centre staff are very approachable, committed and respond quickly to needs. Parenting courses make a difference both to family life and children’s behaviour. The Common Assessment Framework is used well to focus the work of professionals. Respite care is provided promptly for families in crisis with careful planning of subsequent actions. Home start is very effective in helping those who are isolated and lack confidence and there is additional specialist support for those with drug and alcohol problems or those suffering from post-natal depression. The city’s family information service, Portsmouth CHAT, provides family information including information on financial matters and schools. Where parents have difficulty accessing specialist provision, a taxi service is provided. A sound foundation has been laid to help parents progress to employment through working with Jobcentre Plus.

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

Recent changes to the management of the centre have improved its capacity to respond to local needs significantly. The centre coordinator and staff are ambitious, as demonstrated by the centre’s delivery plan, and despite the challenges caused by the dispersed nature of the centre, have been successful in raising its profile in the community. Senior managers support the centre coordinator well. The profile of the centre in the community has been improved significantly and capacity to improve is good.

Data collated by the local authority are used well in quarterly performance reviews which provide effective support and challenge for the centre coordinator in developing provision, achieving targets and improving outcomes. Together with self-evaluation these procedures are very effective in identifying priorities for development. Governance arrangements through the partnership board for the cluster of five centres are good, and expectations and improvement targets are clear, challenging and kept under review. Value for money is good as the centre makes good use of available resources and has extended provision while improving registration rates and outcomes.

Partnership arrangements are effective at different levels. The centre works well with early years providers and schools, and partnership working with key services

including social care, education, health and the voluntary sector is good. Partnership arrangements across the cluster of five children’s centres ensure coherent planning, commissioning of provision and allocation of resources to meet the needs of families with differing needs. Procedures for families to express their views about provision have been improved recently through the use of questionnaires and the parents’ forum. Centre staff have worked hard to encourage parents to express their views and good use has been made of the information collected to develop provision. Users of the centre express a high degree of satisfaction with services and the help and support they receive.

The centre is fully inclusive and staff are very mindful of their role in removing barriers and improving outcomes for vulnerable families. A new sensory room is already well used by local groups including children with additional needs. Translation services are provided including additional language support for families to help, for example, transition to school. The successes of individuals and families are celebrated well, for example, through ‘In My Own Words’ files.

Policies and procedures for safeguarding children, including those for safe recruitment, are implemented well and safeguarding is given a high priority. Staff are appropriately trained and those who carry out home visits are constantly vigilant for signs of harm or neglect. There is strong multi-agency working to ensure vulnerable families are monitored and supported. Supervision arrangements for staff supporting vulnerable families are sound and provide regular opportunities for reviewing progress.

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	2

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cumberland Children's Centre on 10 and 11 October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. During our visit, we talked with a number of you, visited some of the sessions and met the staff and professionals who work with the centre.

The numbers of parents registering at the centre is increasing well and you told us you enjoy coming to the centre and find it safe and welcoming. Staff and partners give you good advice on breastfeeding, how to keep your children safe and healthy and how to prepare them for school. Children who attend sessions at the centre regularly develop much better when they start school than those who do not and it is important that as many as possible attend the centre. Staff are also good at safeguarding children and we have asked the council to make sure the centre has all the information it needs to do so.

The centre has developed good partnerships with other centres, pre-schools, schools, voluntary organisations, health and other services for children, which means more services are available to you than could be provided by the centre alone. Some of you told us that you do not always find it easy to find out what is available in your area. We have asked the centre and the council to make it easier for you to find the information you need.

Staff provide good sessions for you which are fun to attend and these help your children develop and improve their speaking and listening skills. Staff provide you with good care and support and you told us they are always ready to help. Parenting courses help those who attend establish routines and help their children behave well. Staff also help mothers who may be feeling low after the birth of their baby or who may feel unsure about coming to the centre by visiting them at home. Centre staff are particularly helpful at times of crisis and have helped many parents through difficult times by pulling professionals together quickly to provide support.

Some of you have helped the centre develop the sessions it offers by answering questionnaires and taking part in the parents' forum but more of you need to help in this way. We learned how those of you who volunteer and help the centre in its work

find it enjoyable and rewarding and have benefited from the experience. We have asked the centre to encourage more of you to help and volunteer. We have also asked the centre to provide more opportunities and advice about training and employment for those of you that need it.

We enjoyed talking to many of you during the inspection and would like to thank you for your contribution and time and for helping us in our work.

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