

Inspection report for Plum Tree Children's Centre

Local authority	City of Plymouth
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Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre leader	Hannah Holdgate
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Plympton St Maurice Primary School, Plympton St Maurice, Plympton, Plymouth PL7 1UB
Telephone number	01752 283826
Fax number	01752 283826
Email address	plumtree@plymouth.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	URN 113316: Plympton St Maurice Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	URN 117215: Plympton St Maurice Child Care Centre

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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

Plum Tree Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. The centre was designated in 2008 and is run by the local authority. It is situated on the site of Plympton St Maurice Primary School. The centre works as part of a cluster alongside Plum Tree Woodford Children's Centre. It meets its core purpose by offering a range of provision, which include health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. Services are provided from the main centre, two satellite centres at Yealmpstone Farm Primary School and Chaddlewood Primary School and from community venues.

The centre's reach area covers Chaddlewood, Plympton St Maurice and Yealmpstone. It is in an area which is not identified as deprived overall, although there are some pockets of deprivation where some families are dependent on workless benefits. The population is mostly White British, with a small but growing percentage of different ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. There are 1,268 children under five living in the reach area. Overall children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early year's provision are in line with developmental expectations, although communication and language development and personal, social and emotional development are often weaker areas.

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

Plum Tree Children's Centre offers a good service which effectively promotes good outcomes for families within its reach area. The centre is well managed by an extremely committed leadership team who show a clear desire and passion for improving the life-chances of the families they serve. They lead a strong staff team who show equal passion for the work they do and rise well to leaders' high expectations. Staff work together effectively as a team and with outside agencies to provide families with a good range of well-coordinated services which has resulted in the vast majority of families known to the centre accessing services. Good use is made of the skills of staff to enhance service delivery and the centre manager is particularly skilled at delegating responsibilities in order that the centre always runs smoothly.

Leaders are well supported by a strong advisory board made up from a good range of stakeholders including parents. The board meets regularly and is well led by the chair. Board members regularly review the centre's performance, challenge the centre and hold it to account. Members draw well upon their professional knowledge and experience in order to support the centre to provide services which meet the needs of the community.

Leaders are motivated to seek improvement and demonstrate a good capacity to improve the centre further. They are clear about where they need to develop their provision and the ways in which this can be achieved. Together with the local authority they identify targets in order to help them to drive improvement although plans are not always sharply focused. Where data are available leaders accurately identify families' needs and develop services in order to improve outcomes. They are beginning to make better use of data to help them to identify gaps in service provision although they are somewhat hampered due to late availability of some data provided by the local authority.

A strength of this centre is the ability of staff to develop parents' levels of confidence. They successfully empower parents to make informed choices and decisions for themselves. Parents truly value the support that they receive from staff and this was summed up by one parent who told inspectors she 'couldn't ask for any more help'. Another parent shared how the advice she had received from centre staff had kept her 'sane'.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Together with the local authority drive improvement further by:
 - sharpening action planning to include targets which are clearly measureable
 - improving access to and evaluation of data to assist with better targeting of services and improved measurement of success.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre is having a positive impact on supporting health outcomes. Staff work well in partnership with relevant health partners to support those most vulnerable. They provide a good range of activities which promote physical activity and take-up of these sessions is good. Healthy eating is promoted through good role modelling such as providing healthy snacks in groups. Parents learn how to provide healthy meals for their families through courses such as 'Cook – Be Healthy' run in conjunction with the Family Learning Service. Recent evaluation by the centre demonstrates that one third of families who access services have adopted healthier lifestyles. This has contributed to a reduction in rates of childhood obesity in the reach area from 8.6% in 2010 to 4.85% in 2011.

Mothers who choose to breastfeed receive good levels of support. They have access to 'Latch-On', a breastfeeding support group, information incorporated within ante-natal programmes and a bank of breastfeeding peer supporters. The centre is contributing to the local authority's aspiration to be awarded the 'Baby Friendly Initiative' as they comply well with expected criteria. This support for new mothers has contributed to an upward trend in the proportion that sustains breastfeeding at six to eight weeks from 34.8% in 2010 to 39.65% in 2011. Staff place a good focus on promoting the positive mental well-being of parents and their children. Joint working with relevant agencies such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) supports this work well.

The centre's work with families to heighten safety matters has contributed to a decrease in the rate of children being admitted to accident and emergency departments. Families are learning about how to provide safer home environments as staff place a strong emphasis on promoting safety in the home through a range of activities including participation in national safety awareness programmes, the implementation of a 'Safe at Home' scheme and by providing parents with first-aid training. Staff work closely with families who may be at risk of violence in the home.

In conjunction with relevant agencies such as the 'Freedom Project' and Plymouth Domestic Abuse Service they have been successful in helping families to secure a safer place to live. Staff work pro-actively with children's social care to support children subject to child protection plans and this has resulted in positive outcomes. Where appropriate, staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to support families with complex needs.

Children and their parents enjoy playing and learning together. Children who attend groups at the centre make good progress from their starting points. Staff place an appropriate focus on supporting children's communication and language development and their social development. Groups such as 'Baby Talk' and 'Talking Together' help parents understand how to effectively communicate with their children. Through the 'Bookstart' project families are developing skills in sharing stories and rhymes. The proportion of children in the area achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased from 54.67% in 2009 to 62.8% in 2012. Data regarding narrowing of the achievement gap are not provided to the centre regularly enough to help it to securely establish whether its work is making a positive difference.

Families and staff treat each other with respect and parents have very high regard for the relationships they have built with staff. Parents are contributing well to the shaping of future services and decision-making: they are represented on the advisory board and are regularly invited to feedback on the quality of services. Many parents develop the confidence and skills needed to either return to education or secure work. The centre has supported a number of parents to gain experience through volunteering opportunities and others to undertake accredited qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

All staff have a good understanding of the range of issues faced by the community they serve as leaders analyse data that are available to them and share the findings. Staff know the families they work with well. Robust assessment systems, including good use of the Common Assessment Framework, mean that the needs of families accessing targeted support are effectively assessed. Alongside families, staff develop action plans aimed at empowering parents to make positive changes for themselves and their families. An effective multi-agency approach to service delivery means that families access a good range of well-coordinated and integrated services. Staff assess children's progress in groups and use this information well to support the early identification of concerns. Good referral systems, for example to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the speech and language therapy service mean children access the support they need.

The centre promotes purposeful learning well and activities are of a good quality. Sessions are well planned and led by skilled staff who promote curiosity and engage children well in their learning. Families undertake both family learning and accredited training in order to improve family experiences and skills for employment. Opportunities include courses regarding healthy lifestyles, groups to promote the home learning environment, first-aid workshops and literacy and numeracy qualifications.

Families have easy access to good quality advice and guidance. Staff are very knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of when to signpost parents on to other agencies and do so effectively. Families with complex needs are well supported by staff who take time to get to know them. Through the provision of effective outreach services, staff develop trusting relationships with families and as a result, are able to offer them support when it is most needed. Parents confirm that staff are always there to listen to them. 'Whenever I've needed a phone call, they've been there' and 'It's like a security blanket knowing there is always someone there' were typical comments made by parents.

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 centre is well organised with clear lines of accountability and effective performance management systems in place. Regular professional supervision, including case management for outreach workers, means that staff are well supported. They are given good opportunities to access a comprehensive programme of professional development in order that they are knowledgeable and skilled. Staff evaluate the quality of provision on a very regular basis and involve parents fully in this process. Systems to measure long-term impact of their work are being implemented.

The local authority monitors the performance of the centre against a service-level agreement. Targets are set to drive improvement and these feed into the centre's own delivery plan. On occasion, however, targets set by the local authority are not always closely linked to the priorities of the reach area and plans are not always sharp enough to enable the centre to fully measure the impact of the work they undertake. Leaders make good use of the data provided by the local authority to help them to identify how best to focus their efforts. However, some data are not provided frequently enough and only limited baseline data regarding target groups are available.

The centre provides good value for money. Leaders make good use of unit costing tools to ensure best value for money is achieved. They capture a range of information about each family to help them measure the impact of services. Each service is planned with clear performance indicators to ensure a range of outcomes are met. Staff make good use of available space, premises are attractive, warm and welcoming and resources are of good quality.

The inclusion of all children and families is central to the work of the centre. Staff have worked hard to ensure provision is as inclusive as possible. Resources in play sessions depict positive images of a range of cultures and children have access to dual-language books. Staff have ensured that those who speak English as an additional language can access services by translating relevant documents into a range of languages and by using the services of a translator where necessary.

Staff make relevant adaptations to services to support increased engagement. For example, they deliver ante-natal classes in the evening and at weekends as high levels of parents-to-be work during the day. Staff have had success in increasing the number of fathers who engage in the life of the centre through the introduction of 'Saturplay', a group designed specifically to engage fathers in their children's learning and a specific baby massage class for fathers, both held at weekends. Disabled children receive good support through the provision of a 'Step-by-Step' group run in conjunction with the Portage service. This provides both children and parents with a relaxed environment where children can easily and safely explore indoors and outdoors and parents can obtain guidance and support. Sessions are well planned,

have a clear focus and take good account of each child's individual specific needs.

Safeguarding is a key priority for the centre. All staff are well trained and are confident in the steps they should take should they have a concern. Rigorous recruitment procedures for both staff and volunteers are in place. Centre leaders and staff have developed some very strong partnerships which have led to improved outcomes for families. For example, they work closely with health partners in order to improve health outcomes across the reach area. 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 good use of evaluations in developing services further.

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Plum Tree Children's Centre on October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We agree with you that the children's centre provides you with a good service which is helping you to make positive changes to your lives. We found that staff and management are highly committed to providing you with the best service they can and they work extremely well together to do so. They also work well with other professionals to ensure that they can provide you with a good range of services. The centre manager has worked particularly hard to ensure staff are organised so that the centre always runs smoothly. Staff are supported by an advisory board that is knowledgeable and effectively helps them to understand how best to provide services to your community.

Many of you told us how much you value the support you receive and how you appreciate the fact that staff are always there to listen and guide you. Many of you are actively involved in volunteering within the centre and beyond. These experiences and the other activities provided by the centre help you to develop confidence. We think that staff are particularly good at helping you to be confident enough to make changes which improve your life and the lives of your family members.

Staff and management show a very strong commitment to improving the quality of your children's centre. They already have a good understanding of the quality of the services they offer and what they need to do to develop further. They collect a range of relevant information to help them understand what services they need to provide to ensure they meet your needs. They receive relevant support from the local authority although sometimes the information given to the centre by the local authority is not as detailed as it needs to be and is not always passed to the centre quickly enough. In order that the centre improves further we have asked that it makes sure that development plans are as clear as possible.

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 wish you all the best of luck for the future.

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