

Inspection report for Shinewater Children's Centre

Local authority	East Sussex
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre users and members of staff. They met representatives from the centre advisory group, partner agencies and the local authority. They observed the centre's work and visited a number of groups. They looked at a range of relevant documentation including case studies, risk assessments and the centre's self-evaluation and business plan.

Information about the centre

Shinewater Children's Centre is a phase one centre which was designated in 2005 and is run directly by the local authority. It is located approximately four miles from Eastbourne town centre. It is open weekdays from 9am to 5pm (4.30pm on Fridays) and provides a full range of services.

The centre serves an area that is socially and economically diverse. There are 940 children under five years of age in the reach area with nearly three quarters of children living in the lowest 30% deprived areas found nationally. Around 25% of children live in households dependant on workless benefits and approximately 16% of children live in families where adults are on a low income and in receipt of Working Families' Tax Credit. The majority of families in the reach area are of White British heritage with other families from ethnic groups including increasing numbers of those with Eastern European backgrounds. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are slightly below expected levels for their age.

The local authority provides governance arrangements for the centre and delegates responsibility to the Centre Advisory Group (CAG) and Eastbourne Local Advisory Group.

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

Shinewater Children’s Centre makes a good overall contribution to improving outcomes for families living in the local area. The centre has worked hard to establish itself as part of the community and has built up good links with a wide range of partner agencies which support families in the community.

Families enjoy attending the centre and value the environment, which is warm and friendly. High-quality resources are available to children and families and staff skilfully plan the space so that children can obtain the most benefit from the centre. The outside area and separate growing areas where children grow food and plants are particular features and enjoyed by families. The co-location of midwives at the centre means that parents become familiar with the centre while attending appointments.

The children’s centre management team members are clear about their respective roles and are all highly committed to improving outcomes for families. They are fully aware of the centre’s strengths and accurately identify areas they need to develop. There is good evidence of improving outcomes where the centre has targeted work and this demonstrates that the centre has good capacity to improve. Effective communication systems ensure that staff understand all aspects of the centre and can signpost families to other services within the centre and wider.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding as staff understand the possible issues that parents face and work with them sensitively, empowering them to make decisions by building their confidence and self-esteem. Staff have high aspirations for families. Inspectors heard many comments about how parents value the support of the centre including, ‘They (staff) go the extra mile’ and ‘The centre has been my lifeline.’ Effective assessment procedures ensure that families most in need of intervention and support receive a responsive service, which is adapted to their individual needs. Case studies demonstrate that families who receive additional

support make excellent and sustained changes to their lives as the centre tracks their progress.

Good safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and underpin all of the centre's work. Recruitment procedures for volunteers and staff are robust and families report feeling safe at the centre.

Parents have many opportunities to contribute to the centre's work and feel they are listened to. Formal evaluations for groups are regularly completed; however, information is not always used comprehensively to make changes and to improve services. Some parents contribute to governance, along with partner agencies, through membership of the CAG, which is beginning to hold the centre to account.

The centre's self-evaluation and business plan provide an accurate picture of the centre overall. Regular planned reviews of the business plan ensure that the centre makes sustained progress against priority areas; however data and evaluations do not always strongly contribute to informing future planning. The business plan is not updated to reflect changes in priorities and targets and therefore does not provide an ongoing accurate picture of the centre's development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Use data and evaluations more effectively to review services to ensure they continue to bring about improved outcomes for families.
- Further develop business planning arrangements to ensure that targets are revised and updated and that they are ambitious and drive improvement.
- Strengthen governance arrangements by ensuring that parents and partners effectively contribute to the CAG, are more involved in target setting and hold the centre to account.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Children enjoy attending activities and groups at the centre and are encouraged to becoming independent learners and develop new skills. Parents are encouraged to continue their children's learning at home and 'home learning ideas' provide information that parents can use. A language checker is used to assess children's communication and language development and to identify children who need additional support. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, 49% of children achieved 78 points, which, although being below the local authority average, is a 7% increase on 2011. The centre has developed a range of strategies to support children's development such as embedding the Early Years Foundation Stage principles in all areas of work and establishing links with local schools. Parents have opportunities to access training courses which develop their employability skills. The

centre is building links with local adult education providers and is working with parents to plan courses based on their individual interests and skills. The centre's volunteer programme provides a comprehensive package of support and the centre is actively recruiting new volunteers as the current numbers are low. Some volunteers have been successful in obtaining paid employment.

The centre promotes healthy lifestyles for families and giving children the best start in life. It has successfully implemented a wide range of strategies to promote breastfeeding and is committed to improving the percentage of mothers who breastfeed, which is currently below the local authority average. Early indications are that more mothers are now breastfeeding as a result of initiatives including providing information on breastfeeding-friendly venues and breastfeeding peer supporters. The provision of healthy snacks and access to the outdoor play area for physical exercise contribute to reducing obesity rates, which have decreased year-on-year and are currently at 5% which is significantly below local and national averages. Displays and information around the centre promote healthy lifestyles and signpost parents to other services. Children benefit from eating food they have grown at the centre.

The security of the building and the vigilance of staff ensure that families feel safe at the centre. Staff work sensitively with families and are skilled in identifying those who need additional support. Family outreach work successfully empowers families who need additional support to bring about positive changes to their lives. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used effectively and families benefit from the multi-agency approach to improve their lives. Parents are able to make changes as a result of the intervention of centre staff. As one parent told inspectors, 'They (staff) give you confidence.'

Parents are encouraged to contribute to the work of the centre through initiatives such as 'parent voice' and the graffiti board. As a result of their contributions, the centre makes changes to services and activities. Some parents contribute to the governance arrangements through attending the CAG and are asked for their comments on their experiences which are then displayed to encourage other parents to attend.

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
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How good is the provision?

2

The care, guidance and support the centre provides are outstanding. Staff demonstrate great insight into the barriers families face and work sensitively with them to overcome these. They act as excellent role models and skilfully empower parents to make decisions that will bring about positive changes and improve their lives. All staff build positive relationships with families, and as a result families are very confident to discuss issues with staff and approach them, including in times of crisis. One comment from a parent which echoed the views of many was, 'I would be lost (without the centre)'. The work of the Family Outreach Service is effective in bringing about positive changes for those families most in need.

High-quality resources and an attractive environment encourage children to enjoy their time at the centre and explore freely. In addition to the main children's activity room, the centre has developed a smaller children's area in the reception area which provides children with further play opportunities while they wait for appointments such as with the midwife.

The outdoor and growing areas are popular and staff actively promote their use to families and encourage families to become involved in the growing area. Groups, crèche staff and centre teachers work closely to provide a wide range of activities linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage designed to improve children's attainment and close the achievement gap. Adults enjoy spending time at the groups, and benefit from advice and information about how to continue their children's learning at home.

The centre uses data and evaluations to assess the effectiveness of services. Systems for assessing whether groups and activities are meeting the needs of all target groups are included in service evaluations, however they do not always feed successfully into shaping future services and driving improvement.

Centre staff are committed to working in partnership with families to provide purposeful, enjoyable learning. The centre has recently introduced systems to track adult learning, and many parents attend short courses and training at the centre. Links with local adult education providers and Jobcentre Plus mean that families are signposted to appropriate services. 'Priority pathways' support some of the most vulnerable families in accessing adult education to improve their skills and confidence. The centre is keen to ensure that adult learning is responsive to the needs of learners and there is evidence of courses being adapted as a result of parental feedback. There is a small group of volunteers who support the centre's work. They receive good quality support from the centre.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Staff use their extensive knowledge of the community to engage with a wide range of partner agencies and to ensure that the centre provides services which meet the needs of families in the reach area. Some services for specific groups, such as fathers and male carers and disabled children, run from other centres in the Eastbourne area and staff signpost families to these services. The centre is welcoming to all families and provides an inclusive environment. Information is available in a range of community languages and dual-language books are available for children. The centre analyses the Early Years Foundation Stage profile data to identify particular groups who are not doing as well as their peers and the centre is beginning to focus work at target areas. This is contributing to reducing the achievement gap between the lowest 20% of children and the rest.

Management arrangements are good and the senior management team works well to support staff and bring about improvements for families in the reach area. Comprehensive induction procedures are in place for all new staff and volunteers and there is good access to training and development opportunities. Professional supervision arrangements are in place for all staff and used effectively to reflect on practice and identify areas for development.

Safeguarding procedures are good. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and follow local authority practices to ensure the suitability of staff and volunteers. Clear procedures for the allocation of Family Outreach Service work ensure that families with the highest need are prioritised. Clear guidelines on record keeping ensure that these are of a good standard and consistent. The safeguarding policy is comprehensive and ensures that all staff are aware of their responsibilities. Ongoing training, case discussions and supervision ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge to deal confidently with any child protection issues.

The centre uses local authority data, evaluations and feedback to ensure that services continue to meet the needs of the community. Data are used effectively to show improvements to outcomes. However evaluations are not used as well to set future targets and drive improvements. Targets are not always ambitious and changes to priorities and new targets are not always reflected in the business plan.

When reviewing centre services managers are proactive in looking at the impact of work on improving outcomes and ensuring that services are targeted where they will bring about the most change. As a result the centre provides good value for money.

The centre has identified the need to develop the CAG so that it is more involved in holding the centre to account and setting challenging targets. Recent changes to the format of meetings have meant that work has been more focused, however representation from centre staff on the CAG is too great and limits the contribution of parents.

As a result of feedback, the parents' forum was replaced by 'parent voice' where staff visit groups to obtain parents' views and comments on different subjects. Their views and comments feed into the CAG meetings, however the 'parent voice' is not always sufficiently focused in order to inform the CAG. Some parents contribute by attending the CAG and the centre is working to increase parental representation at this group.

Partnership working arrangements are good and as a result staff are effectively able to signpost families to a range of partner agencies. Some partner agencies are involved in reviewing the centre's self-evaluation and business plan. Staff see parents as partners and are keen to develop their active contribution to the centre.

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Shinewater Children's Centre on 7–8 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for welcoming inspectors to your centre when we visited recently, to those of you we spoke to around the centre and at groups, and to those of you who came to talk to us.

You told inspectors that you feel safe at the centre and we could see that you and your children enjoy attending the groups and activities that the centre runs. The building is bright, well resourced and welcoming. All families who use the centre are treated with respect. Displays and information are available in different languages and the centre works sensitively with families to overcome any barriers they face to accessing the centre.

The security of the building is good and risk assessments ensure that any potential hazards are kept to a minimum. The outside area is a particular feature of the centre and your children enjoy being outside and exploring the environment. There are good procedures in place to ensure that centre staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children. Groups run at the centre follow the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage and are supporting your children to develop their skills. Some of you have also developed skills through attending courses and training such as the Solihull and Incredible Years courses and told inspectors how it has made a difference to the lives of your families. Some parents have volunteered at the centre and have been successful in going on to obtain paid employment. The centre promotes healthy lifestyles including through the promotion of healthy snacks and physical exercise.

Those of you who need additional support benefit from accessing the Family Outreach Service (FOS), which provides targeted support to work on areas where you are experiencing difficulties by providing practical help and suggestions. Parents who receive outreach services told inspectors that they have made a big difference to their lives and those of their families.

The centre undertakes regular evaluations of its services and many of you have been asked for your comments through 'parent voice'. Some of you have written comments on the graffiti board. Many parents report finding staff approachable and feel that they can make suggestions which staff positively act on or take forward to the CAG. We have asked the centre to look at developing ways for you to feed into the work of the centre's governance, including how 'parent voice' could be used to better inform the advisory group. Some of you have been part of CAG meetings in

the past, however we feel that more of you should be involved in this group and we have asked the centre to look at this.

The centre's senior management team is strong and works well to provide a good centre for you and your families. All staff are clear about their respective roles and have access to good supervision, support and training. They have recently introduced a 'communications meeting' where all staff meet together to share information about the centre. Centre staff have also worked hard to build links with Shinewater School and other local partner agencies. As a result staff have developed a good knowledge of agencies which can support you. We feel that these partner agencies could be more involved in the governance of the centre.

Centre staff treat you all as individuals and are highly committed to improving outcomes for you and your families. They have high aspirations for you and your children making improvements in your lives. You told inspectors that you value the support from staff and how you find them approachable and helpful. Comments made to inspectors by parents included, 'You don't feel alone' and 'Staff are caring and understanding.'

The centre uses local authority data and service evaluations to inform its self-evaluation and business plan. The effectiveness with which the centre uses this information is variable and often the business plan is not reflective of the work the centre is doing. We have recommended that the centre looks at strengthening business planning arrangements and using evaluations more rigorously to drive improvements.

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