

Inspection report for Countess Wear Children's Centre

Local authority	Exeter County Council
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Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	113079 - Countess Wear Community School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY447886 - FISH Countess Wear

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's management team, the commissioned provider Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI), 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

Countess Wear Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. It was designated in 2008 and has been run by Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI) since April 2012. It is situated on the site of Countess Wear Community School. The centre works as part of a cluster alongside Flying Start and Chestnut Avenue Children's Centres. It meets its core purpose by offering a range of provision, which includes health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. Services are provided from the main centre and from community venues.

The centre's reach area covers St Loyes, Topsham, and parts of Priory and Alphington. 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 percentage of different ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. There are currently 968 children aged under five years living in the reach area. Overall, children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below developmental expectations, particularly in regard to communication and language development.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Countess Wear Children's Centre provides satisfactory support to children and families accessing its services. It currently has 88% of families living in the area registered at the centre, but just over 42% of families participate in services. However, staff have had significant success in engaging families within the areas that are subject to higher levels of deprivation and this remains a key priority for the centre's on-going development.

The centre is led and managed by a team of dedicated senior leaders who, together with staff, communicate high aspirations for the development of services and the improved life chances for families in the reach area. Staff know the families they work with well. This is because they use comprehensive systems to assess their needs, including using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedures where appropriate. Staff support families well to help them identify areas they wish to improve. Together they develop suitable actions plans aimed at improving outcomes for the whole family. Parents value the support they receive from staff. Those who spoke with inspectors expressed how much they appreciated the 'thoughtful and attentive staff' and 'really helpful team, advice and support'. Leaders are beginning to provide parents with opportunities to contribute to decision making, for example by involving them in the evaluation and direction of services. However, such opportunities have yet to be embedded as parents are not routinely involved in the governance of the centre.

Staff implement a range of programmes to improve the health of families, working well with health partners to deliver and reinforce positive messages. As a result, data show that health trends in the reach area are improving so that they are close to, or in line with, those seen nationally. Leaders have provided an improved focus on keeping children and their families safe and have prioritised the review of procedures designed to safeguard children to ensure they are robust. While the centre has recently introduced a scheme aimed at improving safety within the home, the rate of hospital admissions of children in their area is significantly above that seen nationally.

In the short time that the current commissioned provider has been responsible for the centre they have developed a clear and comprehensive understanding of the needs of the community. They are making use of data available to them to help to identify the needs of the reach area and how these can be met. For example, leaders are aware that data show some target family groups are under represented in the centre and leaders plan to develop the programme in order to improve levels of participation. As a result, the centre's overall effectiveness is currently satisfactory.

The centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve. Leaders have rightly focused their initial efforts on developing a well-qualified, cohesive staff team and on ensuring systems, policies and procedures are robust. Effective use is made of staff's skills to support service development as the centre manager is particularly skilled at delegating responsibilities. The centre now has strong foundations upon which to build and further improve. Leaders have a clear understanding of what the centre does well and are beginning to develop suitable plans to address priority areas for improvement. However, this is still in its infancy and it is too soon to assess the effectiveness of these strategies. Improvement measures include the implementation of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation process aimed at supporting staff to gather more secure evidence of the impact of the centre's work.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Engage families further in the governance of the centre so that they are more involved in decision making and in driving forward improvement.
- Develop the range of services in order to increase participation by target groups with particular regard to children with disabilities, teenage parents and lone parents.
- Drive forward the implementation of the proposed model for planning and evaluating services to provide secure evidence of impact on outcomes.
- Together with partners, implement strategies aimed at lowering the incidence of admissions to accident and emergency departments.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents develop an understanding of how to provide healthier lifestyles for their families. The centre has delivered the Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY)' programme aimed at raising parents' understanding of how to prevent childhood obesity. Those who have attended demonstrate a clear improvement in their understanding of how to provide a healthy diet for their families including suitable portion control. Staff work alongside health visitors to deliver health clinics, and parents are provided with advice on good oral health by a specialist adviser who visits groups. Maternal emotional good health is promoted through services such as baby massage and the delivery of Here's looking at you

Baby, a programme which focuses on the development of positive attachment.

Staff place a good focus on the promotion of breastfeeding. A comprehensive breastfeeding strategy is being implemented and this includes ensuring the centre is compliant with the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative criteria. To address this, support for breastfeeding is coordinated and mothers benefit from the provision of a breast pump loan scheme. This approach has seen the levels of mothers who sustain breastfeeding rise from 40.52% in 2008 to 50.25% in 2011.

Through the delivery of the Safe at Home Scheme, in conjunction with Devon Fire Service, an increased number of families are improving the safety of their home environments, although the rate of hospital admissions remains high in the reach area. Centre staff and leaders give good focus to the needs of families who may be subject to domestic violence. Staff are vigilant to indicators which may suggest that families are at risk and work alongside outside organisations, such as the police and The Safe Project, to offer families an integrated service. The centre has successfully improved outcomes for some families subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

Children who access groups run at the centre make suitable progress. Staff plan sessions taking account of children's interests and experiences. Children access good quality toys and resources in an environment which is well organised, spacious and inviting. As a result, they are beginning to make independent choices about where they learn and what they play with. Staff provide an improved focus on children's communication and language skills. They have recently introduced the Bookstart initiative, as well as including rhyme time in all groups so that parents can enjoy sharing books and songs with their children. Over time, the number of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved from 42% in 2009 to 54% in 2011. The gap between the lowest achievers and the rest has narrowed from 44% in 2009 to 38% in 2011.

Through their attendance on programmes, such as Mellow Parents and Incredible Years, parents are developing their parenting skills. For example, they confirm that they now have improved levels of patience when dealing with their children's behaviour. Some parents are involved in developing services such as Bosom Buddies breastfeeding support and delivering the Baby Sign and Wigglerhythms groups. Centre leaders have recently introduced a parents' forum and have been successful in recruiting parents who are keen to become involved in the life of the centre, although regular involvement in decision making, such as membership on the advisory board, has yet to be established.

The recent introduction of a volunteer programme has been successful and a number of parents are already engaged in giving something back to their children's centre and developing skills for future employment. Family Support Workers help families to address their housing and benefit needs and staff are developing a partnership with Family Action Programme (FAP) for the provision of employment support.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

Countess Wear Children’s Centre is well attended by local families who appreciate the services they receive. Leaders and staff have an increasing understanding of their community as a whole and are making improved use of data to help them to identify where they need to target their work. Systems and strategies are now being implemented to ensure that individual services are well focused on outcomes for families and meet an identified need.

Staff make effective use of outreach work to provide support to some families who may have been traditionally harder to reach. Families with complex needs are well supported by staff who take time to get to know them well. Staff develop trusting relationships with families and, as a result, are able to offer them support when it is most needed. Support is in place to help families in times of crisis. For example, staff have access to a local food bank and keep a supply of children’s clothes which they make available to families.

Parents have access to a range of opportunities to develop their parenting skills. An adult learning programme is in place and is being developed to build on parents’ current skill level. Through courses provided in conjunction with the local authority’s family learning service, parents are able to improve their levels of literacy and numeracy as well as improve the home learning environment, for example by understanding how to use story sacks with their children. Staff celebrate parents’ and children’s success; certificates are awarded to parents on completion of training and learning journeys recognise the progress and achievements of children who attend the groups.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Centre staff are led effectively by a committed management team who is clear on the priorities for the centre. Staff have been well supported through the recent management transition and reorganisation. As a result, families saw little impact upon the delivery of services during this time. A comprehensive supervision system has recently been introduced which provides staff with regular performance management and case supervision which they value. The centre is governed by a local charity whose senior leaders support the centre's manager in developing a clear strategic direction for the centre. Together with the advisory board, they satisfactorily monitor the quality of services and the implementation of the centre's policies and procedures.

Leaders are motivated to seek improvement. They have rightly focused their efforts initially on developing a strong staff team who are clear on their roles and responsibilities. They have made some inroads into developing and implementing appropriate systems to ensure the centre provides a range of services which meets the needs of the community. The local authority challenges leaders and managers to improve. They set relevant, challenging targets in respect of local authority priorities. Staff seek the views of families who participate in services and act upon their feedback.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. Families enjoy good quality accommodation which offers them a warm and welcoming environment. Staff are well qualified and deployed appropriately to make use of their individual knowledge and expertise. Leaders have made good use of their experience in managing other centres to develop a structure and are now focusing the centre's work more closely at providing targeted support for families through a greater focus on outreach services.

The centre shows a commitment to inclusion. Staff and leaders draw upon the good links that Exeter Community Initiatives have with the partners such as the Racial Equality Council and faith groups across Exeter to support the work they do. The centre has a long-standing relationship with the deaf and hearing impairment team and have hosted Happy Hands, a group for children with permanent hearing impairment across Devon for several years. This aids children's transition into the co-

located school as many move onto the school's hearing support unit. Through detailed analysis of data, leaders and staff now have an improved understanding of their target groups. They are beginning to develop strategies to break down barriers to engagement with some key target groups, such as utilising translation services for families who do not speak English. However, some target groups, such as young parents, children with disabilities and lone parents, remain under represented in the centre.

Staff at all levels are trained in child protection. They have a secure understanding of their responsibilities and are clear on procedures. Two of the senior leaders are qualified social workers and have a clear understanding of how to assess and manage risk. Established relationships with key agencies, such as the local authority family service, provide support to families who may be subject to a child protection plan.

Centre leaders and staff have worked hard to develop improved relationships with a range of agencies. Staff are now working more closely with the co-located school in order to provide a more integrated approach to service delivery. The centre is also developing some creative partnerships, such as working with a parent to deliver groups aimed at improving communication skills in very young children.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Countess Wear Children's Centre on 14 and 15 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre's leaders and staff show a strong commitment to improving the lives of all families. Since Exeter Community Initiatives took over responsibility of the centre they have worked hard to make sure that the running of the centre is well organised and that there is a strong staff team in place. They have also worked hard to make sure they understand your needs so that they have the information they need when developing services. One of the things they have found out is that there are some groups who do not participate in services as often as others and we have asked them to take account of this when they are considering what new services to offer.

It is clear that staff know you and your families well. This is because they take time to work alongside you, helping you to identify how you would like to change your lives and the steps you need to take. You told us that you really appreciate the help, support and advice that staff give you. Some of you are now on the parents' forum so that you can contribute to the life of the centre. It is important, however, that more of you are involved in making a direct contribution to the management of the centre, helping to identify how services should be developed. We have asked managers to support you to do so.

The centre provides you with a range of opportunities to help you and your families become healthier. Some of you have attended the HENRY programme and found this to be very helpful. Centre staff are helping some of you to identify how to make your homes safer for your young children. However, this work is relatively new and at present there are still too many children in the area are being taken to hospital because they have had an accident.

Leaders know what the centre does well and where they need to expand further. They have developed systems to help them to evaluate how well existing services meet the needs of your community so that they can make any necessary changes. We have asked them to quickly move ahead with using these systems so that they can be sure that they are doing all that they can to help you all to make positive changes in your lives.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts about the centre. We are very grateful and we wish you all every success for the future.

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