

Inspection report for Beaminster and Lyme Regis Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Dorset County Council
Inspection number	404442
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Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre leader	Louisa Payne – Cluster Manager Nicola Rae – Deputy Manager
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	113851: St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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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

Beaminster and Lyme Regis Sure Start Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. The centre was designated in October 2009 and is governed by Dorset County Council. The centre has two sites. The main site in Lyme Regis is situated in the grounds of St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. The centre's outreach base is in Beaminster and is situated in Beaminster Area Youth and Community Building. The centre works as part of a cluster of five children's centres and works particularly closely with Bridport Children's Centre. 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, the outreach base and from community venues.

The centre's reach area covers Lyme Regis, Beaminster, Thorncombe, South Perrot, Charmouth, parts of Bridport, Salway Ash and Marshwood Vale. It is in an area which is not identified as deprived overall, although there are some pockets of significant deprivation where between 24% and 45% of families are dependent on workless benefits. Most of the population are White British, with a small and decreasing percentage of different ethnic groups. There are currently 692 children aged under five years living in the reach area. Overall children's skills, knowledge and abilities on

entry to early years provision are broadly average although their communication and language skills are low.

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

The centre provides satisfactory support for children and their families and, as a result, outcomes are satisfactory but improving. A focus on developing the centre's role within the community has seen the numbers of families who use the centre begin to increase. However, at present, the centre has only been successful in registering half of families in their locality and this limits the amount of families who participate in services, including those whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable.

The centre is doing some good work with individual families known to them. Staff complete comprehensive assessments so that they have a clear understanding of the help, advice and guidance needed. They offer tailored support to improve individual and family outcomes. Parents told inspectors how much they value this support: 'Staff are welcoming and friendly', 'They make a real effort to get to know you and your family' and 'My outreach worker is amazing in every way', were typical comments shared with inspectors.

The safeguarding of children and their families is given high priority. Parents learn about first aid techniques and fire safety when they attend the 'Stay and Play' and 'Little Wrigglers' sessions. Families are effectively supported to identify and reduce risks through a 'Safe at Home' scheme offering advice and access to home safety equipment, which has contributed to a trend of low hospital admissions for children across the reach area. Well-trained staff, comprehensive policies and a rigorous recruitment procedure all contribute to ensuring children are safeguarded well. Joint working with social care partners has seen improved outcomes for the majority of children known to the centre who are subject to a child protection plan.

The centre is beginning to focus on supporting families to improve their economic

stability and to develop their skills for employment, such as offering courses in literacy and numeracy and building links with relevant outside agencies. Leaders recognise that in order to better help families gain employment a more coordinated approach now needs to be developed and implemented.

The centre has a satisfactory capacity to improve. The leadership team is relatively new and in the short time it has been in place leaders have developed a good understanding of where the centre needs to focus its efforts in order to develop provision and improve outcomes for families. Plans to effect change are beginning to have an impact, such as the recent increase in registration and attendance rates. Leaders have rightly focused their initial efforts on building a strong staff team and dealing with urgent practical matters, such as ensuring that the premises are more conducive to providing services to children and their families. Suitable plans for further improvement are in place, although these are not always sharply focused and do not include measurable targets.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement strategies to improve the numbers of families in the reach area who register with the centre and engage in services, particularly those in target groups.
- Together with partners, develop and implement a cohesive strategy aimed at helping to tackle levels of worklessness in the reach area.
- Drive improvement further by sharpening action planning to include targets which are specific and clearly measurable.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents learn about how to adopt healthier lifestyles for their families and levels of childhood obesity are low at only 7.4%. Families who have attended 'Incredible Edibles' reflect how they have been able to reduce their shopping bills by £5 to £10 per week. The recently run 'Cooking on a Budget' course, in conjunction with Dorset Food Trust, resulted in the six families who attended reporting an improvement in the amount of fruit and vegetables they eat and improved confidence in cooking healthier options. Plans are in place to roll these opportunities out more widely.

Maternal emotional good health is promoted through services such as baby massage and the provision of the 'Little Wrighglers' group which offers mothers opportunities to socialise in the early days of parenthood. The take-up of support for mothers who choose to breastfeed varies across the reach area and this has led to an uneven picture of success. The breastfeeding support group in Beaminster is well attended

and rates of mothers who continue to breastfeed have increased from 67.3% to 72.2% in the past year. The group offered in Lyme Regis is not well attended and this area has seen a decline from 64% to 50% in the same period. Leaders are working closely with health professionals to reverse this trend. This includes ensuring staff at all levels are trained to offer guidance to nursing mothers as well as providing equipment such as breast pumps.

Families feel the centre is a safe place to bring their children. Those who may be at risk of domestic violence are supported well and staff refer parents to relevant programmes in order that they may be helped to make positive changes to their lives. Parents are gaining confidence and develop their parenting skills as they attend the 'Incredible Years' parenting course which empowers them to manage their children's behaviour positively. Outreach work is successfully tailored to support the most vulnerable families, including some whose children have been identified as in need of or subject to a child protection plan. Staff are trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and use this to good effect to ensure a holistic approach is taken to meeting the needs of families.

Provision across the reach area to help children to learn and develop is satisfactory. Data show that 60% of children reached a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest varies across the reach area. Staff are able to show how their support to set up a new pre-school in one part of the reach area helped to narrow this gap from 30% in 2011 to 18% in 2012. They have identified where the gap has increased over the same period and are already working with local early years providers to deliver 'Getting ready for school' as well as introducing a 'Bookstart Corner Project' and a 'Story Sack' scheme all aimed at supporting children's communication and language skills.

Parents are encouraged to share their views and influence the running of the centre. Their role in governance is developing as some parents are becoming engaged on the advisory board. Although they are very new to the role, they are committed to ensuring that parents' views are heard. The centre is developing opportunities for staff to volunteer their services and give back to their community. For example, some act as breastfeeding peer mentors and plans are being developed with a young parent for the introduction of a young parents group in Beaminster.

The centre has some provision in place to support the economic position of families. Recently secured funding has enabled staff to set up a 'food bank project' which is beginning to be used by local parents. This is being delivered alongside support from the Citizens Advice Bureau and debt counselling in order to help families address wider financial issues. While the centre has seen some success in supporting families back into work, such as recruiting a parent and a local childminder into positions within the centre, leaders have yet to develop a cohesive strategy aimed at engaging with and supporting families in workless households.

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	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	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

Leaders are making improved use of data to help them to identify which groups of families would most benefit from support. Staff work hard to understand the needs and priorities of families living in their reach area and use information from a range of professionals to support this process. A concerted effort by staff has recently seen the number of families who are registered at the centre rise to 50% and those who engage in services rise to 28%. Although engagement of most target groups is also improving some groups such as lone parents, young parents and children in workless households remain under-represented in the centre. The centre offers a suitable range of activities aimed at supporting families to improve outcomes. Staff are in the process of reviewing the activities and groups they provide in order to be assured that they are appropriately targeting areas of need and to securely evidence outcomes for children and families.

Staff know the families they work with well. For those receiving targeted support outreach workers focus on families' health and social needs by ensuring these are properly assessed and reviewed. Together with families they complete an 'outcome wheel' to identify areas of strength and those areas which families feel need development. Regular review of this information helps to track families' progress. Staff develop trusting relationships with families. In times of crisis families can confidently turn to the centre for support, for example, accessing the centre's food bank when they are struggling to feed their families. Parents access a range of information at the centre through displays and noticeboards which are strategically placed; for example, information on safeguarding, domestic violence and sexual health is found within toilet cubicles and enables parents to read this information in private.

Parents have access to a suitable range of opportunities to develop their parenting

skills. They are provided with some opportunities to improve their educational and personal development; staff signpost parents to courses run by Dorset Adult Learning in literacy and numeracy and some young parents are supported to remain in education through attendance at the 'Young Mums to Be' group. Parents are also given guidance on how to improve the home learning environment, for example by understanding how to use story sacks with their children.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Staff and leaders are committed to the community they serve and to improving outcomes for families. There is a clear management structure in place and systems are well organised so that all staff receive relevant levels of supervision according to their role and involvement with families. The centre has a recently restructured advisory board so that there is now one dedicated to this centre. The new board membership consists of parent representation, professionals and community members. Board members understand their role is to support the children's centre and hold it to account; however, as it is very early days their impact upon improving services is yet to be seen.

Systems to monitor the effectiveness of the centre are developing. Leaders now review performance data on a regular basis to help them to identify where they need to target the centre's work. The local authority is working hard to improve the quality of information it provides to leaders to assist them in this process. Systems for the local authority to monitor the work of the centre are developing. Through self-evaluation leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths of the centre and where further development is required. A development plan appropriately addresses key priorities, although it is not yet sharp enough to swiftly drive improvement. The views of parents are satisfactorily taken into account and used to help shape services.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. Leaders make sensible use of resources across the cluster in order to support service delivery. They have recently worked with their co-located partners at Beaminster to improve the location of services within the outreach centre and have also successfully secured funding to improve the environment at both locations. Staff are well trained to deliver services such as parenting programmes and the centre is in the process of disseminating this

training to partners to increase their capacity for programme delivery. Safeguarding arrangements are a strength of the centre and play a crucial role in keeping some of the most vulnerable families safe. Good attention is paid towards recruitment procedures, ensuring all staff working with children have been suitably checked to do so.

The centre holds equality as one its principle core values and strives to ensure no group is intentionally excluded. Through detailed analysis of data leaders and staff now have an improved understanding of their target groups and are working to identify barriers which are preventing engagement. 'Saturdays', run in conjunction with another local children's centre, is seeing the attendance of fathers increase, and disabled children are supported through 'Buddies' run in conjunction with a local special school. In addition, staff work with a range of professionals to offer support to families with children who have complex needs such as Portage, Occupational Health and Physiotherapists. Centre leaders and staff have worked hard to improve relationships with a range of agencies; for example, they are now beginning to work more closely with local schools, pre-schools and toddler groups to develop a more integrated approach to improving early education for children in the reach area.

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	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	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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Beaminster and Lyme Regis Sure Start Children's Centre on 28 and 29 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We agree with you that staff provide you with good care, guidance and support. Staff take time to get to know you and your families so that they can provide you with the help and guidance you need. When you are facing particular problems in your lives, such as experiencing difficulty affording food, you can turn to staff who offer you practical help and support. You told us how much you value the work that staff do. We have asked the centre to increase the number of families they offer this good level of support to because at present not enough families who live in the area access services at the children's centre.

Centre staff do all they can to make sure you and your children remain safe. For example, they are well trained in how to safeguard children and management has taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable. Staff work closely with you to help you ensure that your homes are safe places for your young children.

Centre staff provide some support to those of you who wish to seek employment. They are able to help you to access some training such as 'Improve your English' and 'Improve your maths'. They also direct you to agencies that support people to apply for jobs. However, as there are very high levels of unemployment in some areas of your community we have asked the centre to increase the range of help they offer.

It is clear that the whole staff team are determined to make your lives the best they can be. They know what the centre does well and where they need to develop further. In order that they improve quickly, we have asked the centre to make sure its plans for development 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 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.