

# Inspection report for Eastover Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	404143
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 December 2012
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11–12 January 2012
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	The Olive Tree Nursery EY409425

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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**Report published:** December 2012



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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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

The inspectors held meetings with the cluster manager, the centre's senior management team, members of staff and parents using the centre. The inspectors met with members of the cluster advisory board, the local authority and several partner agencies including health, adult education and employment.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including important policies, evaluations of services, the centre's business plan and information about people who use the centre.

## Information about the centre

Eastover Children's Centre opened as a phase one children's centre in January 2004. Since April 2011, it has operated with two other children's centres, Sydenham and Woolavington, as a part of the Sedgemoor 2 children's centre cluster. The cluster manager has been in post since that time and many other members of staff work across the cluster. The lead centre officer has been seconded from another centre to cover the long-term absence of the usual post holder. The centre is governed by a cluster advisory board that is accountable to the local authority.

The centre offers access to a range of child and family services. Most users live in Eastover and other parts of Bridgwater. Four out of the five areas within the centre's catchment area are within the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. A much higher than average proportion of families in the local area live in workless households. There are 572 children aged under five years in the reach area. Around a quarter of children aged under four years live in households dependent on

workless benefits. The skills, knowledge and abilities of most children when they enter early years provision are lower than those expected for their age. A large majority of families living in the reach area are from White British heritage with a small, but increasing, proportion of users from minority ethnic families. These are mostly of Eastern European heritage. The small proportion of families whose first language is not English is also rising.

The Olive Tree Nursery is an independently registered childcare setting located within the children’s centre site.

## 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

Eastover Children’s Centre provides satisfactory support to the children and families accessing its services. The centre has improved markedly since the previous inspection when its performance was judged to be inadequate. Around three quarters of the families living within the reach area have registered with the centre, and increasing numbers use the services available. Users’ levels of satisfaction are higher than the average for Somerset. Two parents’ comments echoed the views of others when they praised the ‘safe and friendly environment’ and the centre staff who are ‘supportive of the whole family.’

Centre staff have worked with key partners so that outcomes are now satisfactory overall. Obesity rates for young children have fallen to below the average and the proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased substantially to be close to the national average. However, the gap between the lowest achieving children and the rest is not closing fast enough. Breastfeeding rates are below the county average and incidents of domestic violence remain too high. Not enough parents, particularly those from workless and low income families, take part in adult learning, training and employment opportunities.

The children’s centre cluster manager has worked vigorously with all stakeholders to

establish the vision and values that direct the centre's work. The centre staff have walked the locality and identified the users that have the most to gain from the centre's services. As a result, family support workers know the families they work with well. This enables them to provide effective care and support during times of crisis. Line management and supervisory responsibilities are secure and centre staff attend good levels of training to support them in their development. Nevertheless, service evaluations do not gauge clearly the difference that a service has made to the user and staff supervision records lack reference to the centre's performance targets.

The advisory board members know what they are responsible for and are beginning to use data to develop suitable action plans aimed at improving specific outcomes for families. The centre has only recently begun to collate information on the different groups using its services and has not set measurable targets to improve the take up and outcomes for these groups. The local authority recognises that it has not monitored and challenged the centre's performance as rigorously as it should. While the centre is well placed for further improvement, its overall effectiveness and capacity for further improvement are satisfactory.

The centre staff and cluster parent champions have increased the participation of parents from the Eastover reach area. Eastover parents lead the drop in groups held at the centre and have suggested several improvements to the rooms and outdoor area. Parents now set their own indicators to identify what they will gain from a programme. Recently, a parent volunteered to contribute to the formal governance of the centre by joining the parents' voice forum and becoming a parent champion.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase the take up of adult learning, training and employment opportunities, particularly for workless and low income families, in order to improve their economic well-being.
- Improve and expand the partnerships with relevant agencies in order to increase breastfeeding rates, reduce repeated incidents of domestic violence and improve levels of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Improve the leadership and management of the centre by:
  - increasing the rigour of the local authority's monitoring of the centre's work
  - setting measurable targets to increase the take up of services and to improve user outcomes, particularly for target groups
  - making sure that service evaluations assess the difference that a service has made to the users' outcomes
  - ensuring that staff supervision records review the individual's contribution to the centre's performance targets.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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Parents develop an understanding of how to provide healthier lifestyles for their families. Family support workers are suitably trained to raise parents' awareness of the importance of preventing childhood obesity. The 'Little Chefs' programme enables parents to learn about healthy eating with their children and how to bake on a budget. Children's physical development is well supported through programmes, such as 'Jumping Beans' and 'Gymbo Tots'. Activities such as baby massage promote both maternal and baby well-being. As one parent commented, 'He loves the contact, and I get to meet other mums with the same problems.' Centre staff work alongside health visitors to deliver weekly health clinics. The centre, together with health services and the National Childbirth Trust, promote breastfeeding well. Whilst attendance at the 'Breastfeeding Together' sessions is up 50% on last year, the breastfeeding rates for the reach area remain below the national average.

Centre leaders and staff give good focus to the needs of families who may be subject to domestic violence. Staff are vigilant to indicators that may suggest that a family is at risk and use well-established referral systems to ensure that they get any help they may need. While the recent outcomes for families supported by specialist agencies are very positive, incidents of domestic violence in the reach area have been above the local authority average for two years. The centre's established procedures have improved the safety of children in need and those that are subject to a child protection plan. Parents' evaluations of the 'Triple P' programme demonstrate a clear awareness of how to keep children safe at home. Parents learn to manage children's risky play through participation in the 'First Friends' and 'PEEP' (Parents' Early Education Partnership) programmes. Other parents have improved the safety of their home as a result of home safety checks by the fire service. The rate of hospital admissions has been below the county average for the last two years.

The centre provides regular meaningful opportunities for parents and children to learn and play together. Activities, such as baby massage and 'Doodle Time' are enjoyed because they make a positive difference to children's development, as well as parents' understanding of how to support learning at home. Children demonstrate their creative development in 'Messy Play' activities. The centre staff have worked with a range of partners in the reach area to improve children's mark-making skills to good effect. The proportion of children developing well by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage rose from 32% to 60%. Writing scores quadrupled for boys and almost doubled overall. Despite these improvements, the gap between the lowest scoring 20% of children and the rest has not narrowed.

The centre has a clear programme for volunteering and parents' participation. The parent champions have used social media to establish a parent voice page. This has led to 80 'friends' signing up. Centre staff seek the views of users and make changes as a result, such as relocating a cooking course and the associated childcare provided. Families are informed of other changes by a series of 'You said...We did...' posters.

Increasing numbers of parents are beginning to improve their economic well-being through a reasonable range of pathways. Some parents have participated in accredited learning programmes provided by Somerset Skills and Learning, and Bridgwater College. Participants are suitably prepared for the workplace through programmes, such as 'Ways into Work' and 'Make Your Experience Count'. Centre staff display vacancies and there are good arrangements with partners to support parents with their job applications. However, the numbers of parents using these opportunities are not high enough and shared working arrangements lack targets to increase the take up.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for families*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

**3**

The centre provides a reasonable range of sessions and activities for families to engage with services through outreach. A partnership with Home-start enables a limited number of families to be supported in their home or in group sessions held at the centre. The families of children with autism are supported through a similar agreement with the Children's Autism Outreach Services. The centre has made efforts to reach other families whose circumstances may make them isolated. For example, the parent champion delivers 'Play and Stay' sessions in the showroom of a new housing development because community amenities have yet to open. Nevertheless, the children's centre cluster manager is aware that around a quarter of families that are not registered with the centre are unaware of its existence. 'New home' and 'new baby' information packs now inform families of the services that can be accessed through the centre.

There is encouraging evidence that the centre's contact with targeted groups is increasing. The 'Teenage Parenting Group' enables young parents to develop their

parenting skills and mix with others their age. Those parents that access the centre’s parenting courses value the support they receive. A father’s attendance at a parent-led drop in led him to complete the PEEP programme before being challenged to complete another course with the friends he has made. Another user commented on the difference that the ‘Triple P’ programme had made. ‘We now know how to deal successfully with the behaviour problems ...the anxiety levels have dropped dramatically.’ Whilst another parent reported that the children’s centre was the ‘only place that made a difference.’

Centre staff generally care for, and provide for, families’ individual needs well. Records of the regular child health meetings show each family is assessed carefully and appropriate action is taken. Case work training has ensured that staff are adept at identifying the safety needs of families who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances and following them up with partner agencies. Parents value home visits and the personal assistance they receive in times of need. One lone parent fed back that, ‘The children’s centre has been the only place that has made a difference.’ However, there is not enough emphasis on providing adults with advice and guidance on training, further education and employment.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The cluster manager and senior leaders are strongly committed to the work of the centre and set high expectations for other staff. Each senior leader has taken a lead on a specific outcome to ensure a greater focus on improving the lives of families in the reach area. Effective action has been taken to address inadequacies so that all aspects of the centre’s work are now satisfactory. Registration rates increased to be above most other centres in Somerset. While recent evaluations identify the characteristics of those using the services, this information is not aggregated to demonstrate how well the centre is reaching targeted and under-represented groups.

All key partners are represented on the advisory board. Members understand their roles clearly because each member is provided with an information pack. The local authority has worked closely with health services so that more information about the outcomes of families in the reach area is shared with the centre. However, the local authority’s checks on the centre’s work have not been robust enough. Despite this, the centre knows what it does well and where further improvement is needed.



Actions to promote equality have resulted in the increased take up of some services by under-represented groups. Crèche facilities and transport are provided so that families can access the more targeted services delivered at Sydenham Children’s Centre. Good partnership working with health and education services supports families of children with special educational needs. Healthy child meetings are attended by a range of agencies to ensure easy access to specialist advice. Translation services are made available for the increasing number of families that speak English as an additional language.

Safeguarding arrangements meet current statutory requirements. Staff at all levels are trained in child protection and have a secure understanding of their responsibilities. The cluster manager, who is experienced in social care work, ensures that procedures to support families that may be subject to a child protection plan are followed consistently. Staff discuss safeguarding procedures with those using the centre to ensure they understand the policy on the use of mobile phones. Risk assessments for activities are in place and follow guidance provided by the local authority.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. The outcomes for families are satisfactory and resources are utilised across the cluster. However, the business plan lacks targets to increase participation rates and this has led to some programmes not being well attended.

The centre’s leaders ensure that services are responsive to the views of parents and families. A ‘Blooming Ideas’ tree in the reception area is one way in which parents can share their experiences of services. While parents participate informally in making decisions about the delivery of services, they have only recently shown a willingness to join the parents’ voice forum and the cluster advisory board.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>3</b>

<p><b>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</b></p>	<p><b>3</b></p>
<p><b>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</b></p>	<p><b>3</b></p>

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

The Olive Tree Nursery Early Years Foundation Stage provision was inspected on 3 December 2012.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Eastover Centre on 5 and 6 December 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

As part of our inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents. We also talked with a number of you, staff and the centre partners who work with you.

The centre has got much better since it was last inspected. At that time, it was judged to be inadequate. More of you have registered with the centre and use the services available. More of you are happy with the services you receive than families at other centres in Somerset. Most of you like the environment and the helpfulness of the staff.

We found that the centre generally works well with other partners to make sure that you get the help and advice you need. Some outcomes for families in the area have got better. For example, more mothers are breastfeeding, fewer children are obese and children's development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved. There are a number of other outcomes that we have asked staff at the centre to improve. Children with the lowest levels of development need to catch up with the rest. The number of mothers that breastfeed is not as high as in most other areas. Not enough parents take part in adult learning, training and employment opportunities.

The children's centre cluster manager has involved everyone in setting the values, beliefs and attitudes that guide the centre. Family support workers know those of you they work with well so you get good care and support when you need it the

most. Staff are managed well and are appropriately trained, but there are some weaknesses in the way that staff review how well programmes have run. We have asked the leaders of the centre to improve this.

Members of the cluster advisory board know their responsibilities and have started to use information about the Eastover area to decide which groups have the greatest needs and plan what action to take. We have asked the advisory board and the centre's leaders to set targets so that families with the greatest needs and those that are under represented make more use of the centre's services. We have also asked the local authority to carefully check the centre's performance and hold the centre's leader to account.

We found that more of you are involved in telling the centre about your experiences and leading groups and suggesting improvements. Many of you now tell the centre staff what you want to gain from a programme. One of you has volunteered to help make decisions about the centre by joining the parents' voice forum and becoming a parent champion.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).