

Inspection report for Spondon Children's Centre

Local authority	Derby
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY456206 Spondon Childcare
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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and members of the senior management team, parents and representatives of the local authority and partner organisations.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Spondon Children's Centre was designated as a phase one centre in February 2007. The centre is directly managed by Derby City Council and has a shared advisory board in place. In April 2012, as a result of a local authority review of children's centre provision, it became a part of the locality one and five structure for delivery of services. With six other centres, Spondon Children's Centre delivers the government's core purpose for children's centres under the leadership of one children's centre manager. The local authority review also placed the children's centre in a multi-agency delivery team serving the birth to 18 age range in the locality.

The centre is accommodated in a converted building in the grounds of Asterdale Primary School. Spondon Childcare provides onsite registered early years provision for children aged two to five years. This is managed by its own manager and overseen by a children's centre manager from another locality.

The population of the area served by the centre is predominantly of White British heritage. Much of the area served by the centre falls within the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country, although there are pockets of more affluence. The number of children working in households dependent on workless benefits is low. Unemployment in the area is low, however, there are identified areas where annual income is low. The area is made up of a mixture of residential, retail and industrial properties. There are currently 640 children aged under five years in the reach area

and almost 94% of them are registered with the children's centre. Children's skills and knowledge when they enter early years provision are below those generally expected for their age.

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

Spondon Children's Centre has, over the last 22 months, seen a significant amount of change in how services are delivered and how staffing and management are structured. In addition, the loss of staff due to the restructuring programme was compounded by a local authority recruitment freeze which left the centre understaffed. This affected the centre's ability to deliver some of its services as effectively as it has done in the past because some posts have only been filled in the last few months. The centre's service delivery is now included in the delivery programme across the seven centres in the locality. Positive steps have been taken to ensure that families who are most in need of support are able to access the services they need at other centres.

The centre has a satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement in its delivery. Although the data the centre receives about key performance indicators is specific to the reach area, the information is not presented in a format that aids the progress monitoring process. The centre's self-assessment is comprehensive but at present it does not always provide enough evidence of the impact that centre services have on improving life chances of families in the reach area. In addition, the development plans, while focused on local needs analyses, do not always have clear success criteria by which the centre can measure its success.

The centre provides a welcoming environment in which families feel safe. There are very effective systems in place to ensure that people working with families are suitable to do so. Information sharing at a local and strategic level about families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable is good because of strong relationships between the children's centre, health, social care and other partners. Staff work particularly well with partners to protect vulnerable children, especially those in local authority care, subject to child protection and child in need plans or

subject to Common Assessment Framework processes.

The centre provides good quality services that have a positive impact on the families who use them. Care, guidance and support are a strength of the centre. Skilled staff ensure that in times of crisis families are well supported to receive tailored and timely support. Most families with young children in the reach area are registered with the centre. The centre's overall effectiveness is, however, satisfactory because it has yet to gain a clear picture of the number of Spondon families who use children's centre services across the locality. High priority is given to meeting the needs of families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and ensuring that they have the support they need through one-to-one work and attendance at focused group activities.

Users have regular opportunities to express their views about activities and courses through evaluations and questionnaires. Since the restructuring of children's centres and the introduction of the shared locality advisory board, the consideration of parents' views has not been clearly visible on meeting agendas. In addition, few parents have taken the opportunity to become members of the parents' action group, from where their views are fed to the advisory board.

Children and adults who use the centre make good progress in their learning and development. Parents are developing their parenting skills well and have access to a wide range of information and services to support their economic and social well-being. Teenage parents are a particular success story, with the overwhelming majority of them engaged with the centre in some way.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the involvement of parents in decision making at the centre so that they have a clear voice and visible presence in the newly formed advisory board structure.
- The local authority should provide data to the centre in a useable format that enables tracking of progress over time.
- Improve monitoring and the collection of local data to:
 - robustly identify the difference the centre is making, so that the resulting development plans are well targeted with clear, measureable outcomes and success criteria
 - confidently identify which families are not using the centre and take steps to find out why.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Children and parents thoroughly enjoy the activities on offer to them. There has been a rapid improvement in the number of children in the area reaching a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, with the

proportion increasing by around 21% in the last three years. Children who have used centre services are noticed by the co-located school to be more ready for their school education than those who have not. In activities, children and parents engage very well and respond positively to the ideas and support given to them by staff.

Health indicators in the reach area are positive and messages about healthy eating and exercise are becoming embedded. The number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks after the birth of their baby is steadily increasing, following a period of decline. However, it is not clear how many families are engaging with appropriate health services in the area. Parents, especially those who attend parenting courses, progress very well and are developing a good understanding of how to keep their children safe. They demonstrate this, for example, through making requests for activities such as a paediatric first aid course.

Relationships between staff and families are positive. Case studies show that families who are identified as in most need of support, such as those subject to Common Assessment Framework processes, receive tailored support. They respond well to this approach and as a result see positive changes in their family life. Parents, especially those who have suffered domestic violence, have their emotional needs well met and report increased confidence and self-esteem. Parents take up the opportunity to give feedback on their experiences at the centre and this information is used to shape services. However, too few are involved in the parents' action group, and this limits their opportunity to influence decision making for the centre at a higher level.

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	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	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

The quality of care, guidance and support at the centre is good. Staff are very effective in delivering messages to families in a range of forums, from one-to-one sessions in the home to universal group activities, such as 'stay and play'. Family visitors skilfully model techniques, such as how to remind children of house rules and

engage them in more positive behaviour, for parents as a matter of course in their work. Displays of information in the centre are attractive and eye catching with information, such as the 'Back to sleep' campaign about safe sleeping practices, which is highly relevant to the reach area. Outreach work is an integral feature of the centre's work. Families who are not able to attend targeted activities are offered home learning packages and activities are offered across the locality to meet need by rotating them over different centres.

All activities have a purposeful learning objective. There has been a strong focus on children's communication and language skills as a result of Early Years Foundation Stage scores being low in these aspects and this has had a good outcome. Work with the school on the shared site has helped to identify younger siblings of children who might be at risk of not reaching their full potential at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This good practice has not yet been implemented with other schools in the reach area. Learning and development opportunities and outcomes are strong for young parents. The centre has a well-established and well-attended young parents' group. Progression pathways are in place for adults and some parents have been successful in gaining Open College Network accreditation or moving into employment, however, numbers are low.

Assessment of need at an individual level is robust and based on a good range of information about each family. Parents work with staff to identify their needs and create an individual action plan for their family to work with. Assessment of area need is based on data and local intelligence from partners, for example, health and the neighbourhood manager. Service delivery is appropriately meeting individual and local need based on this information. The centre does not yet have a robust overview of participation and attendance rates of Spondon families at activities in other centres in the locality or which families are not using centre services in order to be fully confident that services are meeting all local needs.

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

Although the governance and accountability structures have been in place for less than 12 months, they are clear and understood by centre staff and partners. Clear and effective line management systems are in place. Staff receive regular supervision from their line manager, which includes a review of their family case work. This system is quality assured through peer review processes to ensure fixed agenda

items, such as safeguarding, are included and that staff performance monitoring is appropriate. Senior managers show a good commitment to parents' views and voices having a place in the new advisory board structure and parents' feedback is presented by the centre manager. In the centre, however, the parents' action group has not been given as much priority as it had in the past and, as a result, few parents are currently involved in it.

Data received by the centre are not always in a format that is accessible or useful to enable managers to track and monitor the centre's progress or impact. The centre is just beginning to manually gather information about which families are accessing services at the centre. However, information about Spondon families' use of activities at other centres is not currently included in this. This means the centre does not have a clear view of how many families take up children's centre services and, alongside the overall satisfactory outcomes for families, demonstrates the centre's satisfactory value for money. Information about families working with family visitors is collected more robustly.

Attention to the promotion of equality and diversity is appropriate. The centre's reach area is overwhelmingly of White British heritage. The centre has been successful in registering and engaging a high proportion of families in the area but there is not a clear overview of the number of families from minority ethnic groups using centre services. Services for disabled children and those who have special educational needs are offered through the centre. The special educational needs toy library service was held there and the centre actively uses the resources in its provision. The centre also uses the Derby Signing Families group for families who have members with a hearing impairment. Access to services for all is well supported taking into account the pattern of service delivery across the seven children's centres in the locality. Families who are in most need of support are helped with transport when they are unable to access sessions using public transport.

Partnerships between the centre and other agencies are strong. The centre manager is a member of the vulnerable children meeting, which is a weekly review and allocation panel. Membership is multi-agency with statutory and voluntary agencies represented. The centre's commitment to this group means that families are quickly allocated to the relevant agency for their assessed need and reviews are timely and regular. The centre fulfils its responsibilities to ensure staff are suitable to work with children very well. Clear and meticulous records are kept of staff vetting checks including a record of the renewal date in line with local authority procedures. Training in safeguarding is prioritised and renewed in line with the statutory guidance for children's centres. Staff's excellent skills and knowledge in this area are reflected in the type of work they carry in their caseloads. They regularly work with families who are involved with the social care team, including working with children who are subject to child protection plans and with families who are suffering domestic abuse. The centre's commitment to this group means that families are robustly risk assessed. They are then quickly allocated to the relevant agency for their assessed need and reviews are timely and regular. There are excellent and open communication channels between agencies and centre staff are highly skilled in

working with Common Assessment Framework processes.

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	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	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	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 Spondon Children's Centre on 23–24 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much to those of you who spoke to us in meetings and in activity sessions. We found the information you gave us very useful. We also spent some time looking at the comments you have made about the centre and the activities you have used, to help us to make our inspection judgements.

When we visited your centre, we found that there has been a lot of change over the last two years. This has affected how and where you are able to access activities

with your families. There have also been changes to how the centre is managed and how staff work. We found that the changes left the centre with some staffing vacancies that they were not able to fill because the local authority were not recruiting new staff. This meant that, for a few months, the centre could not offer as many activities as it had done in the past. The centre now has most of its staff in place. The centre is now part of a group of children's centres in your locality that is sharing the responsibility for making sure a range of appropriate activities is on offer to you. We found that this means that you sometimes have to travel to other children's centres to a group. However, for families who are most in need of support, the centre is able to help with transport if it is needed.

The centre is given information about important outcomes for families in your area. However, we found that this information is not as useful as it could be to the centre because of how it is presented. This makes it hard for the centre to see how well it is doing in helping to improve outcomes for you and your families. We have asked the local authority to improve how useful the information is that it gives to the centre. The centre managers have a sound overview of what the centre is good at and what it could do better in but they are not always clear how well it is doing. The centre's development plans are not always clear enough about the targets they want to reach and how they will know they have reached the target. We have asked the centre to get better at gathering and using information it has.

We found that the centre provides a welcoming environment where you and your families feel safe. The centre has very effective systems in place to make sure that people working with you and your families are suitable to do so. When families are struggling or are vulnerable, we found that the centre is good at working with partners such as health or social care to share information so that you get the best support possible from the most suitable organisation. We found that staff work particularly well with partners to protect vulnerable children, especially those in local authority care, subject to child protection and child in need plans or subject to Common Assessment Framework processes.

The centre provides good quality services and we found that these have a positive impact on the lives of those of you who use them. The quality of the care, guidance and support that you receive from the centre is good. We saw from some of the documents we read that the staff are skilled at supporting you at times when you most need it and that the support is very much tailored to meet your needs.

We know that most families with young children who live in your area are registered with the centre. However, the centre does not have a clear picture of the number of Spondon families who use children's centre services. We have asked the centre to improve on this. We found, though, that the centre is very focused on making sure that the families who are most in need of support are involved with centre activities.

We know that you have regular opportunities to tell the centre what you think about activities and courses through evaluations and questionnaires that the centre asks you to complete. Since the changes were made to how the children's centre is

managed, we found that the way that your views are taken into account has not been clearly visible on advisory board meeting agendas. We also found that not enough of you take the opportunity to become active members of the parents' action group which is an important way for you to make sure your views about the centre are fed to the advisory board. We have asked the centre to encourage more of you to attend the parents' action group to express your views.

We were pleased to find that those of you who use the centre with your children make good progress in your learning and development. We saw in your feedback and in our discussions with you that you are developing your parenting skills well and have access to a wide range of information and services to support your economic and social well-being. The teenage parents' group is a real success story for your centre, with the overwhelming majority of them taking part in activities in the centre in some way.

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