

Inspection report for Sweetpeas Children's Centre

Local authority	Plymouth City Council
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Centre leader	Alison Walker
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's management team, members of the advisory board, the local authority, Barnardo's, 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

Sweet Peas Peverell Children's Centre is a phase three children's centre. The centre was designated in March 2008 and has been run by Barnardo's since July 2011. It is situated in a single-storey building which was previously used as a doctor's surgery. It meets its core purpose by offering a range of services which include health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. The majority of services are offered on site.

The centre's reach area covers Higher Compton, Hartley, Peverell and Mannamead. It is in an area which is not identified as deprived overall with only 6% of families dependent on workless benefits. The population is mostly White British, but the percentage of families from other ethnic groups, including those who speak English as an additional language, has grown sharply in recent years and now makes up approximately 23% of the population. There are 927 children under five living in the reach area. Typically, children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years education are in line with those 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

Sweet Peas Peverell Children's Centre now provides satisfactory services for families as centre leaders and staff have worked hard to make relevant improvements since the last inspection. Focus by the local authority on providing the centre with information to help them understand their community has seen the range and quality of data they provide improve. However, some information is not kept up to date, such as that relating to the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children in the area and the rest. Leaders and staff make sufficient use of these data so that they now have a much better understanding of the needs of those who live within their reach area and plan a suitable range of services and activities. Staff spend time getting to know families, including those who receive targeted support. They are beginning to use improved systems to assess the needs of individual families, such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes, although these are not fully embedded in the centre's work.

Since the last inspection, work has been undertaken to identify and engage with a range of families, including those who may be hard to reach. The centre is well used and activities are popular, although many families using the centre do not live in the reach area. Through consultation, leaders have identified a number of potential barriers to the involvement of more families who reside locally and are beginning to implement plans to remove these. Reintroduction of popular services, such as the Twins Group, are seeing new families coming to the centre as well as other families returning. Leaders regularly monitor participation rates by families in the reach area in the services they offer and continue to focus on ensuring more families access children's centre services. However, this work is somewhat hampered as they are not provided with information to help them identify which families engage with services in other centres in their locality to help focus their efforts. Data analysis has confirmed that the number of families from minority ethnic groups is increasing rapidly in the area. In response, centre staff are working with early years providers to identify ways in which they can make services more accessible, such as purchasing information technology to help with the translation of documentation. Leaders are aware that they now need to develop a more cohesive strategy aimed at

increasing the number of families from minority ethnic groups, including those with English as an additional language, who engage in services.

The role of the advisory board has now been strengthened. Clear terms of reference mean that board members understand their role in supporting the centre and holding leaders to account. Improved data now enable the board to monitor the centre's progress and challenge them to improve further. Through improved evaluation of service delivery, leaders have a suitable understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and, together with successful actions taken to address deficiencies, show that the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve further. A suitable service delivery plan is in place which covers most of the centre's key priorities. Action plans have been drawn up in order to inform service delivery, although leaders recognise these plans need to be refined to include specific, measureable and realistic targets in order to drive improvement further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Together with the local authority continue the drive for improvement by:
 - sharpening action planning to include realistic, but challenging, targets which are clearly measureable
 - having timely access to all necessary data, for example that which relates to the narrowing of the achievement gap and where families in the reach area are accessing services, to assist further with the targeting of services and the monitoring of success.
- Develop and implement strategies aimed at supporting more families from ethnic minority groups to engage in services, including those who may speak English as an additional language.
- Strengthen systems used to assess the needs of families receiving targeted support by, for example, increasing the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Families are provided with adequate support to help to improve their health and well-being as staff work closely with health professionals to deliver relevant services. Guidance on promoting good health during pregnancy is offered through the very popular Great Expectations antenatal programme. Mothers who choose to breastfeed receive suitable advice and information; breastfeeding is well promoted within antenatal provision and ongoing support is offered by Latch-on volunteer peer mentors. Breastfeeding rates in the reach are very positive with 88.85% choosing to breastfeed at birth and 60.25% continuing at six to eight weeks. Parents of young babies seek support and advice about health issues at Chatterbox sessions, which centre staff provide alongside health visitors. As babies get older parents access

groups which provide a focus on physical activity, such as Crawlers and Fallers, and outdoor activities offered in the park. Appropriate role modelling in groups, such as the provision of a range of fruit for snacks, has improved some parents' understanding of how to provide their children with a healthy diet.

Through the implementation of a 'Safe at home' scheme, parents are supported to conduct risk assessments in their homes and to access suitable equipment to reduce risks and prevent household accidents. While this is having a positive impact of the rates of admissions to accident and emergency for children between the age of one to four years, rates for children under the age of one year has increased and is above that seen across the local authority. In conjunction with health partners, leaders have identified that the majority of these visits relate to concerns about childhood illnesses. As a result, key infant health advice and guidance are being incorporated into sessions to give parents more confidence in recognising accurately when they need to seek help from their local hospital. Families whose children are subject to child protection intervention or the Common Assessment Framework process receive appropriate support, such as being provided with a safe place to spend time together.

Children make satisfactory progress in their learning and development. Their language and communication skills are suitably supported in groups such as Rhyme Time and Talking Toddlers where parents are provided with hints and tips on how to promote communication through play. Messy Madness provides parents and their children opportunities to explore and be creative together. Parents report that their children benefit from having access to activities and equipment they are unable to provide at home. Their understanding of how their children develop is increasing through their attendance on parenting programmes and through role modelling provided by staff in groups.

Leaders are developing the role of parents in the life of the centre. Parents contribute to the governance of the centre as there continues to be parental representation on the advisory board. Parents value the opportunities for them and their children to socialise and make friends. Some express how their positive experience of children's centre services has led them to wish to give something back, such as by becoming a breastfeeding peer mentor. Leaders are looking towards how they can enable more parents to share their skills and professional expertise to enable them to make further positive contributions to their community.

Support for individuals who may be seeking employment is developing. The centre now links with local large employers, such as the local university and hospital, and advertises job vacancies. Where necessary, staff offer individual support in applying for jobs and signpost families to relevant agencies for support with benefits and money advice. The centre is able to evidence how contact with the centre has raised the aspirations of some parents who have progressed from volunteering onto adult education as part of a career plan.

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

Leaders now make better use of data to understand of the needs of the families in their reach area. Staff work closely with health partners to identify the families that need specific support. They are now beginning to formalise the information-sharing arrangements that were present at the last inspection in order that more robust, integrated assessments are undertaken on families, including the increased use of the Common Assessment Framework processes. Individual services are now better focused on outcomes for families as all activities are specifically planned to meet identified needs. Staff have worked hard to improve partners' understanding of the services they can offer, particularly for those whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. As a result, referrals for support are beginning to increase.

The centre offers a suitable range of services that provide children with the opportunity to learn and develop and support parents' understanding of how their child learns. Leaders have responded well to requests by parents for the provision of first-aid training. Some parents have been encouraged to access further education through their contact with the centre; several have trained as breastfeeding peer mentors and others have undertaken nursing and midwifery qualifications. The centre is now developing a more cohesive approach to the provision of learning opportunities through the introduction of a 'training pathway'.

Families receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. Those who receive targeted support particularly value the relationships they build with the centre's outreach worker who was described by one parent to be 'like my best friend coming through the door'. Knowledge of local services is used to develop suitable packages of help. As a result, families receive practical support to improve their well-being, such as obtaining furniture and food parcels.

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

In the short time the new centre lead has been in post she has quickly developed a good understanding of where leaders and staff need to focus their efforts. She has been supported well by Barnardo's senior staff to make necessary changes and drive improvement. Clarity that has been brought to the advisory board and participation by a range of stakeholders mean that they too have contributed to the shaping of services. A clear line management structure is in place and staff receive appropriate levels of professional supervision. Staff are given opportunities to access professional development in order that they are sufficiently skilled to undertake their roles.

Leaders and staff have continued to build upon the evaluation systems that were being introduced at the last inspection. Staff regularly evaluate the effectiveness of service delivery against identified aims and objectives to inform future planning. Leaders are aware of what the centre does well and where they need to improve further. Improvement plans have been developed to move the centre forward, although these are not always sharp enough to enable the centre to measure the impact of the work it undertakes or rapidly drive by providing clearly measurable targets. The local authority monitors the centre through quarterly reviews. A service level agreement is in place and used to monitor the performance. Targets are set to drive improvement, although some do not take full account of the centre's starting point and are overly ambitious.

The centre offers satisfactory value for money. Recent reorganisation of the accommodation has resulted in better use being made of the building. Leaders plan the delivery of services in conjunction with partner agencies and with other centres in the locality. This enables them to pool resources and ensure that families are able to access a sufficient range of services. The centre recognises that developing the role of volunteers will enhance viability of services. Staff aim to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all families. Leaders have responded well to changes to the make-up of their community, such as the implementation of the working party to develop strategies to engage more families from minority ethnic groups. Children with disabilities receive appropriate support by staff in groups as well as being signposted to specialist step-by-step groups.

Systems to safeguard children and their families are satisfactory. Procedures to

ensure the suitability of staff and volunteers are in place and the centre holds clear records of Criminal Records Bureau disclosures. Staff have undertaken relevant training and have sufficient understanding of how to protect children. They are trained to recognise when someone may be vulnerable to domestic violence and signpost families to relevant services, such as Plymouth Domestic Abuse Service and the Freedom Course.

Staff seek the views of families who use services in a number of ways. Through the recently redesigned parents' forum, staff consult about how to further improve services. A system for seeking parents' views through systematic evaluation of services is now in place and staff use findings to modify service delivery.

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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sweet Peas Children's Centre on 27 January 2013 and 31 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Leaders and staff have worked very hard in order to improve the quality of your children's centre since their last inspection. They show clear commitment to developing the services they provide for you and your families. The new centre leader has worked particularly hard with staff to ensure that they all understand the needs of the families who live in the area and provide suitable services for you. The local authority now provides the centre with a range of information that helps them to do this, although this is not always kept fully up to date.

Although Sweet Peas Children's Centre is well used, many families come from outside of the area. Staff have spent time finding out why some local families choose not to use their services and are beginning to make relevant changes, such as reintroducing the popular Twins Group. We have asked the local authority to help them with this aspect of their work by providing them with more information about where families go to use services. When families need extra support, staff take time to get to know them so that they can offer them relevant help. They are now beginning to make better use of systems to assess the needs of families so that they are sure they offer them all the help possible.

Leaders and staff are aware that the community they serve is changing. One of the biggest changes is that there are now many more people from different ethnic backgrounds living in the area. Leaders are beginning to work with partners to identify how best they can support families to use their services.

The work of the centre is guided by a group of parents and professionals who now all understand the needs your community. Together with centre leaders, they are developing plans to ensure suitable services are offered to you. However, they now need to make sure that these plans contain clearer targets to ensure that the services they provide are as good as they can be.

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.