

Inspection report for Swaythling Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Southampton City Council
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Hardmoor Early Years Centre EY319331

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 centre users, leaders and managers, health and local authority representatives, front line workers and partners.

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

Information about the centre

Swaythling Children's Centre was designated in 2006 as a phase two children's centre. The main building is located in the grounds of Bassett Green Primary School, which is situated in the centre of a large social housing estate. On the index of child deprivation lower super output areas, over 77% of families in the reach area live in one of the 30% most deprived areas in England. Overall the proportion of families in Southampton in receipt of workless benefits is below national averages. Currently 35.4% of children aged under five years living in the reach area are eligible for free school meals. The reach area is mainly made up of social housing and privately rented accommodation.

The centre is part of an informal cluster that includes two other centres. It delivers its services in the children's centre building and also makes use of venues within the local area to deliver some of its activities. Just over half of families living in the centre's reach area are from a White British background, with around 27% of families from a Black Minority Ethnic background, and 17% from other White backgrounds. The centre is governed by the local authority and has an advisory board made up of professional representatives and parents.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a much narrower range of skills and abilities than those typically expected for their age. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, 56% of children in Southampton reach a good level of

development across all areas of learning, including communication, language and literacy.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

The inspirational leadership and dedication of centre staff, who go the extra mile for families, underpin the success of this outstanding centre. Parents say, ‘I wouldn’t be alive today if not for this centre’. Parents fully acknowledge that the centre has had such an impact on their lives they could not imagine being where they are today without its support. The centre has established itself at the heart of the community. Parents direct their school-aged children to the centre if they are ever worried because they consider it a safe place and trust that staff will do all they can to help.

The centre has been successful in building the trust of the community. Parents feel listened to, resulting in the full engagement of families in the establishment and evaluation of centre services. Targeted strategies clearly identify key groups, barriers to the participation of some families and actions to overcome these. This ensures all target groups are engaging with the centre; they are fully involved in decision making and the vast majority express satisfaction with the centre’s work.

Children are very well prepared for transition to school and nursery through a robust and clear transition process that takes account of parents’ and children’s concerns. Planning in the crèche covers all areas of learning and provides interesting and enjoyable opportunities. Consequently, from children’s initial extremely low starting points, they make significant progress in their learning and development. The centre plays an outstanding part in this as tracking of progress over time shows children’s profile scores increased by 13% where they had 50 plus interactions with the children’s centre. Since 2006, profile scores have risen by 30% and the gap is consistently narrowing. Observations are made each week and are shared with parents. Staff know the children very well and, through observation and discussion with parents, identify their individual needs and interests. As a result, children’s learning builds on what they already know and can do. However, although observations identify children’s next steps, staff do not consistently record these in

children’s learning journeys or link children’s development levels to guidance such as ‘Development Matters’. This restricts the centre from clearly showing they impact it is having on all children’s progress.

Partnership working at all levels is exceptionally strong. Services are fully integrated and, as a result, the widest range of needs is met. The use of the pre-Common Assessment Framework (pre-CAF) ensures that assessment is very robust and support is individualised leading to outstanding outcomes for families. Many parents gave examples of how they have been supported at times of crisis and how they have been empowered to improve their own, and their children’s, lives. The centre is quick to respond to identified needs, resulting in services that are exceptionally well matched to their priorities. The views of families make a significant contribution to the evaluation of services. Parents’ local knowledge, alongside rigorous monitoring and analysis by centre staff and partners, ensures planning, priorities and actions are extremely well targeted. As a result, the centre is engaging with groups and families previously considered as almost unreachable.

The outstanding outcomes, excellent provision, strong leadership and robust analysis of need show the centre has outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further refine crèche planning, information and observations to:
 - formalise the monitoring of the progress of children who attend against expected levels of development
 - record in learning journeys the next steps for children who attend on a regular basis.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The exceptionally strong partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is having an extremely positive impact on the extent to which families are preparing for the world of work, accessing training opportunities and gaining employment. The advisor has supported over 460 families, of which nearly 30% were lone parents. As a result of this service being offered in the centre, over 30 parents have gained employment, and over 80 families have accessed training or gained qualifications. Over 230 parents have been supported with back-to-work interviews since 2011. The DWP adviser holds work- and benefit-related interviews in the centre with families. Parents and staff alike see the DWP adviser as part of the team. ‘It is wonderful having work interviews in the centre,’ state many parents. ‘At the Jobcentre, you can’t concentrate on what is being said because you are worried about the other adults there, that your children will be disruptive or that you can’t access a toilet – it is not a family friendly environment. But at the centre, you really gain a lot from the interview,’ say parents. ‘Our children play happily, we are not worried about other adults, leaving us free to concentrate on

our needs and plan for our future.'

Health outcomes are improving and the centre is making an outstanding contribution to supporting this. The centre is fully aware of the impact of the multitude of cheap take-away outlets nearby. As a result, it concentrates on promoting healthy eating and only allows healthy snacks in the centre, 'You couldn't even get a chocolate-coated peanut through the door,' stated one parent. Breastfeeding rates are continually improving, with 55.2% of mothers breastfeeding their babies at six to eight weeks after birth. Smoking cessation rates are improving and immunisation rates currently stand at just over 95%. The baby clinic runs alongside 'stay and play' sessions, encouraging families to be involved in other centre activities. As a result of midwives holding their appointments at the centre, they no longer have 'did not attend' appointments. Midwives are also targeted with gaining 100% registration of the parents they work with. As a result, 100 lone parents are registered with the centre and the vast majority of families are fully engaged with health services.

The home safety check, which every family is offered before children become mobile, is improving families' understanding of dangers and how to keep children safe. As a result, visits to accident and emergency are reducing. The use of the pre-CAF ensures that issues and needs are identified and families who are experiencing change and challenge are extremely well supported. It also identifies when a full CAF is needed due to child protection issues. As a result, a number of referrals have been made to social care, ensuring children are safeguarded. The social care pilot ensures all children with social care involvement are identified and enables staff to focus their work where it will have the most impact. All parents spoken to expressed their confidence in the centre. 'You only intend to tell them one thing,' stated one parent, 'but it just all comes tumbling out and you end up telling them everything because they really do care and it is such a relief.'

Children make outstanding progress from very low starting points in developing skills that will prepare them for the future. Parents are fully involved in training and some have gained qualifications. There are many highly effective opportunities for parents to play and learn with their children through activities such as 'stay and play' and courses such as 'Incredible Years'. These are outstanding at helping parents to develop their skills, and giving them confidence to promote children's learning.

Parents are fully involved in the governance of the centre through the parents' forum and advisory board. They are keen to express their views and feel they are listened to. For example, activity times are changed and services are adapted in response to parents' feedback. Parents volunteer at the centre and support annual fun days. There are clear examples of where parents' views have been acted on and clear explanations are provided about reasons why sometimes they are not.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1
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	1

How good is the provision?

1

A large majority of local families participate in centre activities, including harder to engage families. As a result, the centre is busy and sessions are very well attended. The mix of universal and targeted services ensures those who find it difficult to engage in activities in the centre building have their needs met through outreach services in the home and wider community.

Activities for children are very well planned and cover all areas of learning. Crèche provision to support access to courses ensures parents can attend training to promote their own learning and enjoyment. Parents are able to improve and value their own and their children's learning through parenting courses as well as through literacy, numeracy and information technology (IT) training. As a result, parents' aspirations are raised and they make rapid progress. There are many examples of when parents have had complex needs when they start attending the centre but are now full of confidence. Parents who become learning champions show to others what can be achieved and encourage other parents to do the same. All achievements at the centre are celebrated and families are rightly proud of their accomplishments.

Families are provided with highly effective, personalised support. If someone in the centre cannot help, they will find someone who can. The exceptional knowledge and expertise of all staff, and their dedication and commitment, ensure all families consistently receive the support they need. Cases studies clearly show where centre staff have helped to turn families' lives around. This, combined with exceptionally strong partnership working, ensures those most in need of care and support receive it.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The data provided by the local authority are used extremely well to analyse impact and identify needs. Leaders carry out rigorous monitoring and searching analysis ensuring services and activities are cost effective and meet the needs of families. As a result, there is a very clear link between evaluation and the priorities for improvement. The views of families are central to self-evaluation, resulting in targets that are focused on what will have the greatest impact. The centre is aware of the possible impact of reducing budgets and is already looking at innovative ways of keeping services and activities running with the support of parents.

Governance arrangements are firmly embedded and highly effective. The advisory board understands its role in challenging the centre and ensuring integrated provision that meets local needs. Meeting minutes clearly show they are effectively holding the centre to account for its performance. High quality supervision arrangements are clear and well understood by staff. Staff regularly update their knowledge and gain new skills and expertise. As a result, staff feel valued, they are dedicated and enthusiastic, and performance is outstanding. Every inch of the centre is used well to ensure families' needs are met, providing outstanding value for money. The well-resourced and bright centre and the friendly and welcoming staff show that families are valued.

The comprehensive awareness of safeguarding issues in the reach area and the exemplary safeguarding arrangements in the centre result in exceptionally high quality practices which enhance children's safety and well-being. This includes rigorous recruitment checks and exacting risk assessments, The 'social care pilot' has resulted in clearer knowledge about children in the area who are involved with social care services, enabling the centre to effectively focus its work and liaise with the appropriate person if concerns arise.

The centre is fully inclusive and has been very effective at removing barriers to access and improving engagement of all target groups. Very effective and personalised support is provided to disabled parents and those with learning difficulties. This ensures all parents fully contribute to the governance of the centre and are very effectively supported on courses. Disabled children, and those with special educational needs, are very well supported as the centre teacher works with

local providers to improve equality and ensure all children are fully included.

Partners hold the centre in very high regard. Very effective relationships have been established and, as a result, services are of very high quality and meet the needs of families. Leaders and staff constantly evaluate, monitor and reflect on their work and how it can be improved. Partners sit on the advisory board and encourage parents to register with the centre whenever they can. Partnerships at all levels are very strong and partners value the child-friendly environment provided by the centre, enabling parents to benefit from an extensive range of services. For example, health and DWP colleagues commented that parents are able to focus on appointments, knowing their children are in a safe environment.

Parents are fully involved in centre governance, the set-up of services and the evaluation of their effectiveness. They take an active role in the parents' forum and advisory board, contributing to decision-making. However, although parents are anxious about what budget cuts will mean to their centre, they are realistic about what can be provided. They have been fully involved and consulted on plans for the future and are extremely complimentary about how staff have not let this impact on the care and support they provide. Parents who have made exceptional progress through their engagement with the centre act as excellent role models to families in the area and this is improving engagement.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	1
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	1

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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Swaythling Sure Start Children's Centre on 30 and 31 January 2013. We judged the centre as outstanding overall. During our visit, we spoke to a number of you, observed activities and met with staff and professionals who work with the centre.

The very strong centre leadership, alongside the work of the dedicated staff, have provided you and your children with a wide range of excellent services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities, and have benefited from the services provided through the centre, how you think of the centre as your second home and do not know what you would have done without the support provided by the staff. All of you we spoke to said that staff are friendly, helpful, supportive and non-judgemental. The number of parents, especially those who are harder to reach, registering with the centre is improving as the centre is extremely good at removing barriers for vulnerable families, and those with additional needs, to ensure they can access centre services easily.

The centre has developed very strong partnerships with other professionals, especially health and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Many of you told us about the difference it was making to you to be able to attend work-related interviews in the centre. You said it meant you didn't have to worry about the smoking, drinking and sometimes abusive language of adults that happen at the Jobcentre; your children were engaged and happy in a child-friendly environment and the adviser was knowledgeable and approachable. This enabled you to really concentrate on your future without worrying about what was happening around you. You told us about the support you had received from the DWP to improve your qualifications and how beneficial you had found the literacy and numeracy courses, and the positive impact these have had on improving your confidence. As a result, some of you have returned to employment or volunteer in the centre and many more of you are much better prepared for returning to work.

We could see how comfortable you felt in the centre and that you made good use of the bright and cheerful facilities. We also noted how accessible the excellent care, guidance and support you receive are. Many of you commented on the help you have been given by centre staff and how this has made a big difference to you and your children's lives.

Children have enjoyable, well-planned activities to do, which help them learn. They do well because centre staff are skilled in providing interesting activities during stay and play sessions and crèche sessions to help them develop. They share children's learning journeys with you if your children attend crèche sessions and they observe children's progress each week. As a result, your children enjoy their time in crèche, enabling you to concentrate on your own learning. However, we asked the centre to make a few changes to planning, observations and information gained from parents before the crèche starts. This will make it easier for staff to show how well your children are progressing and ensure they are building on what children already know and can do. We were impressed by how well you are supporting your children's learning at home by attending training courses to improve your own knowledge and skills.

Keeping children safe is given the highest priority in the centre and staff have an excellent understanding of how to protect families. Relationships with other agencies ensure you get the help and support you need. Those of you we spoke to said how much you appreciated there is always someone to help when you need it. Many of you who have felt isolated and alone with your problems say you feel stronger now and able to cope with life's difficulties as a result of the help and support you have received from the centre. You told us you had made friends from attending the centre, especially where you were new to the area or had no family close by.

One of the biggest strengths of the centre is the involvement of users. Some of you are now involved in volunteering at the centre and represent parents on the advisory board. All of those we spoke to said how they could speak to anyone about their concerns or ideas and they would be listened to. You have many opportunities to contribute to the evaluation of the centre and your feedback is essential to staff in ensuring that delivery plans continue to meet your needs.

Thank you to everybody who took the time to come and speak with us and to let us know what you thought about the centre. We are very grateful to you all and wish you and your families every success for the future.

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