

Inspection report for Summercourt Children's Centre

Local authority	Southend-On-Sea
Inspection number	406976
Inspection dates	6–7 February 2013
Reporting inspector	Mary Dudley

Centre leader	Gayla Rowling
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Milton Hall Primary School and Nursery URN 115313
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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, members of staff and professionals from partner agencies. Discussions were held with members of the steering group, parents and representatives of the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

This phase two children's centre is located in the Victoria ward of Southend-on-Sea. It shares the same site as Milton Hall Primary School and Nursery. The local authority has delegated responsibility for the running of the children's centre to the governing body of the school which is supported by a steering group and an active parent advisory group. The children's centre manager is line managed by the headteacher of the link school.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of integrated services that include health, family support, outreach provision and adult training. The centre serves a diverse community in an area of significant deprivation. It spans four super output areas, three are in the 30% most disadvantaged in the country. The most deprived areas include tower block estates with few open spaces for children to play.

The majority of families who use the centre are of White British origin. There is a very small Asian population and a growing number of eastern European and Black African families moving in to the area, some of whom speak English as an additional language. The children's centre has 444 children under five years living in its reach area. More than half of children live in households comprising lone parents with dependent children. Just under half of children under five years in the area come from homes that are dependent on benefits or where no-one is in work. When they

start in early years provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are below 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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

This happy, vibrant centre in the heart of the community provides excellent support to the families it serves. The small enthusiastic staff team, led by a highly committed centre manager is supplemented by volunteers keen to put something back into the centre which they feel has given them so much. As one parent volunteer said of the centre, ‘I feel more confident as a parent and person, it’s changed my life and my child’s life and I can help other parents now.’

The centre is highly effective in ensuring the safety of the children and families it supports. Many parents see the centre as a refuge; they feel safe, cared for, and know that their children are very well protected. The safety and security of families is given the highest priority by all staff, and parents recognise this. A particular strength of the centre is its proactive work with children and families new to the country and for whom English is an additional language. This exceptionally inclusive centre provides a valuable conduit for many families to access other services and support in order to meet their needs.

Children using the centre make good progress from their starting points as a result of high quality individualised learning. This is well reflected in the rapidly narrowing achievement gap. Adults also achieve well. One parent told inspectors that, ‘It is nice to be learning in an environment where you are loved.’ Parents gain qualifications in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and get certificates for completing courses such as Assertiveness training, and Developing Everyone’s Learning and Thinking Abilities (DELTA). For some parents this enables them to go on to further training, become volunteers and then gain employment. Despite initiatives being in place the centre has recognised that further support for families in workless households is required to extend their achievement and economic well-being.

Most families using the centre develop a good understanding of how to keep

themselves and their families healthy. New and prospective mothers benefit from a full range of integrated services which effectively promote their health and well-being. Immunisation rates are good, however, the transient nature of some families mean that children may not receive all the necessary vaccinations.

Staff at the centre are extremely knowledgeable about the needs of families in the area, and parents' views are key in deciding the nature of the services and activities the centre offers. Programmes are of a very high quality and are well attended and in some cases over-subscribed; in addition, highly individualised support for families is extremely effective, particularly in times of crisis. This very high quality provision and support enables individuals and families to improve their circumstances, achieve educationally and improve their personal development. These achievements are actively celebrated and used to raise aspirations.

The centre manager is strongly focused on ensuring positive outcomes for families in the area and puts high expectations for the community at the heart of the centre's outstanding work. Staff work flexibly to respond to changing local needs and are supported by a team of volunteers, ensuring resources are maximised. Where groups or families are disadvantaged, staff work proactively with partners to support their good progress.

Parents are at the heart of the decision-making process and make an excellent contribution to shaping services through the work of the active parents advisory board. Governors, partners, parents and staff work closely to ensure that there are clear links between self-evaluation, strategic plans, the centre's development and provision. Everyone is keenly aware of the challenges facing families in the area, of the centre's strengths and where there is need for further improvement. However, the analysis and use of data is not yet sufficiently robust to ensure that all families in most need of support readily access services. As a result the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is currently good rather than outstanding.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Make greater use of reach area data to ensure that all children and families most in need of intervention and support are accessing services.
- Build upon the success of current initiatives for:
 - increasing the uptake of immunisations
 - enhancing the support for families in workless households.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families using the centre treat each other with respect and consideration. Exceptionally strong bonds develop between parents, children, and with staff. Parents identify how their positive engagement with the centre has changed their lives for the better. One parent told inspectors, 'The children's centre built my confidence and self-esteem, gave me skills, knowledge and opportunity to completely

change my life.' Other parents who live in high-rise accommodation shared with inspectors how they only got to know their neighbours by attending the centre. Parents recognise the difference the centre has made to their lives and are keen to put something back. There is an active parent's advisory group that is very involved in the decision-making for the centre, and in organising fund-raising and community activities. The centre also has many volunteers that support and run sessions such as 'Twins and More' 'Dads' Club' and the weekly work club.

Children and families feel very safe at the centre, for most of them the centre provides a safe haven. Many families that seek support in the centre are in circumstances that make them extremely vulnerable. They gain self-respect, improve their self-esteem and confidence, and become better parents as a result of the support they are given. Excellent procedures ensure that children are safeguarded very well. Relationships between staff, children and families are very trusting and staff know them very well. Consequently, early identification and prevention of potential risks play a key role in reducing harm to children. There is significant and sustained improvement in outcomes for children on child protection plans, and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used appropriately as part of the centre's outstanding work with families.

Support for families' emotional health and well-being is a particular strength of the centre. Parents with emotional and mental health needs make significant progress due to the effective support of staff and partners. A large majority of families in the area are engaging well with health services. Centre users show a good understanding of what a healthy lifestyle is, an increasing number of mothers are breastfeeding at six to eight weeks, less than 1% of children in reception year are obese and many parents have made positive changes to their families' diets. Immunisation rates are good, however, with many families in the area being new to the country, staff and health partners are keen to ensure all children are immunised.

The highly effective integrated working between centre and school staff ensures children's individualised learning is of high quality, and in consequence they make rapid progress from their starting points. In 2012 the percentage of children attending the children's centre who achieved at least six points on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is higher in all areas than the cohort as a whole. Additionally, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is narrowing each year. Data for children's achievement across the reach area as a whole is not available in the same detail.

Adults show good improvement in their educational and personal development, and the accredited ESOL and literacy and numeracy courses are much valued by parents. Moving testimonies from students explain the difference the classes have made to their personal development and how they have been able to progress to further training, volunteering and in a few cases paid employment. The majority of families are improving their economic stability and independence. Good individualised support helps parents gain appropriate benefits and support to apply for jobs and training at the weekly job club sessions. Information provided by the centre also helps parents

to access appropriate childcare. However, the centre recognises that families in workless households require increasing support to achieve financial stability and improved economic well-being.

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	2
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	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	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	2

How good is the provision?

1

Provision is outstanding and users of the centre are highly enthusiastic about it, saying how, 'Staff were really there for me and my child,' and 'The family outreach worker was my rock.' Outreach is an integral part of provision and is highly effective, particularly in engaging with families new to the area. Families facing complex difficulties are assessed and supported very effectively through positive, high quality inter-agency working and communication. The centre is highly successful in meeting the needs of the wider community and targets services to meet a wide range of needs. However, the centre is not yet making full use of available data to achieve an even more accurate tailoring of services, especially for workless families.

The outstanding learning opportunities provided by the centre, including individualised activities of very high quality, result in children and adults' outstanding relationships and positive achievement. Sessions are designed around planned outcomes and 'Wonderful Wednesdays,' and associated crèche provision; for example, result in happy, relaxed, engaged learners.

Children and their families from different target groups take part regularly in activities and the centre often provides the main interface between families and any additional support they need. The centre raises the aspirations and expectations of parents and children and celebrates their achievements. For those families with complex needs, the care, guidance and support provided by centre staff is exemplary. Information, advice and guidance are of a very high standard and empower families to improve their circumstances. Sensitive, individualised support helps families achieve positive outcomes and, in times of crisis, families feel extremely well supported. One parent said, 'I would be lost if I wasn't here.'

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	2
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

Leadership and management of the centre is exceptionally strong overall. The centre manager sets high expectations and demonstrates effective leadership.

Arrangements for supervision are robust, and staff are brimming with enthusiasm for their work and praise for the centre. There is an excellent sense of teamwork and ambition to provide the best possible service for local families. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear, and the centre is both supported and challenged by the governors, school and local authority. Resource planning is highly efficient, the centre is very well used, and this results in outcomes for families being good and in some cases outstanding. The centre clearly provides excellent value for money.

Self-evaluation is accurate and there is a clear link between service planning and provision. Rigorous monitoring of activities, which includes the views of families and key partners, usefully informs the self-review processes. The centre works well to support the most disadvantaged groups however, not enough use is yet made of reach area data to ensure that all target groups, are fully accessing appropriate services.

The centre celebrates diversity and values all cultures represented in the reach area equally. The inclusion of all children and their families is excellent and central to its work. Through its work in the community, and with partners, the centre is proactive in reaching out to families newly arrived in the area, often from other countries. Outcomes for these families are often life-changing. Disabled children receive focused support so that there is no negative impact on their development. A support groups for parents whose children have Autistic Spectrum Disorder, (ASD), was set up at the request of parents and is proving very popular. Parents who do not have English as their first language are encouraged to share their views on provision, often with the help of volunteer translators. Families using the centre are fully involved in the design, set up and delivery of services. They are represented in the governance of the centre through their roles on the parent advisory group, centre steering group and governing body.

Procedures for safeguarding are excellent. All staff and volunteers have undergone training on safeguarding, and have a very clear understanding of the steps they must

take if they have a concern. Children’s safety and well-being are significantly enhanced by the rigorous and highly consistent implementation of policies, procedures and practice. Staff have a sensitive approach to the variety of needs the centre’s users present, which ensures that families feel comfortable with staff and are very well protected. Security procedures and the attentiveness of staff mean that children are kept very safe on site

The centre is proactive in building strong partnerships, and highly effective collaborative working is having a positive impact on good and rapidly improving outcomes for families. The Community Support Group, which the centre was instrumental in setting up, is an exemplary example of partnership working which supports families with no recourse to public funds.

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	2
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

The inspectors took into account the inspection findings for Milton Hall Primary School and Nursery URN 115313 which took place in June 2011.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Summercourt Children's Centre on 06–07 February 2013. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We would like to thank those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups, or spoke to us about the centre. We were very grateful for your help with the inspection and interested to hear your views.

Many of you shared with us your stories of how the centre had made such an enormously positive difference to your lives. You were keen to tell us how important the centre is to you, what a happy place it is, and how much you enjoy the brilliant activities provided. Lots of you feel so strongly about what the centre has done for you that you become volunteers so that you can help other people who need support. We found the centre to be very welcoming, and very busy. You told us how friendly and approachable everyone is and how much your children benefit from the exciting learning experiences, and we agree with you.

The centre is particularly good at supporting those of you who need extra help from time to time. It has particularly helped those of you who are learning to speak English, new families to the area, and disabled children and their parents. You told us how safe you and your children feel in the centre and we agree. For some of you, it provides a safe haven and a place to go in times of crisis.

You are regularly asked for your views about the centre and the programmes and activities you are involved in. We were impressed by the enthusiasm of those of you who are on the parent advisory group. We found that the centre is supporting you in many ways, you have learnt about healthier lifestyles for you and your children and some of you have been helped to improve your emotional well-being. There are a few of you whose children may not have received all their vaccinations and we have asked the centre to work with you to make sure they do.

Children using the centre are very well prepared for school and do well when they go in to school. Staff in the centre and the school make sure you have information about your child's transition to nursery. Lots of you have gained qualifications at the centre and some of you have gone on to do more training and get a job. We have asked that staff pay particular attention to supporting more workless families in enhancing their opportunities.

The senior staff do an outstanding job in the way they run the centre. They have created a bright, clean, well-resourced environment where all are welcome. They are skilled in monitoring the work of the centre to see how it can be improved further. We have asked them to make better use of some of the information they have to enable more families in the area to benefit from the activities provided by centre.

Thank you very much for your welcome and willingness to speak to the inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and sampling the centre's work. We wish you every success in the future.

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