

Inspection report for South Newbury Children's Centre

Local authority	West Berkshire
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Centre leader	Grace Ryder
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior leaders, parents and members of the advisory board. They met with a range of partners, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

South Newbury Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2007. The centre is located near to a primary school and operates in a double-size portable building. It has several multi-purpose rooms and an outside play area. It provides a range of services to meet its core purpose, including health support, adult courses and educational workshops.

The reach area consists of three local authority wards: Greenham, Falklands and St John's. The area is primarily urban with a rural area in the Greenham Ward. Families living in the reach area are mainly of White British heritage, with 95% of families in this group. The next largest group are of Asian heritage at 2.4%. The percentage of children attending school in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is 5%. The proportion of workless families is 19%. Currently, 17% of families in the area benefit from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.

The reach area has a diverse mixture of housing, with the majority of houses being privately owned, although there are some housing association and privately rented properties. Currently, 970 children under the age of five years live in the area; a majority of children are registered with the centre. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years education are above levels expected for their age.

The local authority is responsible for governance. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community and professional agencies. There have been significant staffing issues over the recent years with three

managers joining and leaving the staff. The current part-time centre manager has been in post since September 2012. The centre employs four members of staff and has two part-time volunteer workers.

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

South Newbury Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre that provides adequately for the majority of local families who achieve satisfactory outcomes overall. Centre staff use the centre effectively by making good use of the limited space available.

The centre works very well with partners in the community to provide an integrated service. The newly appointed centre manager works closely with staff, users and community partners to provide a varied range of services, activities and groups which meet the needs of those users who attend regularly. Users are overwhelmingly positive about what the centre provides for them and their children; 94% of parents surveyed said that they were pleased with the service offered by the centre. As one mother said, 'They've helped me so much...they do everything I need.'

Enjoyment and achievement are good because children enjoy learning and make good progress from their starting points; most exceed the levels expected for their age by the end of the Reception Year. Parents stated that they have learned much about their children's learning and development from knowledgeable centre staff and from each other.

However, the centre is unclear about the impact it has on some target groups, such as lone parents and children from workless households. A lack of data analysis at a reach level hampers the centre's ability to evaluate its effectiveness objectively. This also restricts centre staff from focusing activities on specific target groups. Some information, for example records of new births and sustained breast feeding rates, is not known by the centre due to difficulties obtaining this information from health partners.

The centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for families

very well. Walls are covered with the colourful work of children thus celebrating their achievement and raising their aspirations. Adults spoke positively about the impact the centre is having on their lives. As one young mother put it, 'I'm now succeeding at college and it's all down to the centre getting me to improve my English... that then gave me the confidence to go to college.'

Although governance is satisfactory overall, the advisory board is not fulfilling all aspects of its role and does not sufficiently challenge the centre about its work. Formerly, the advisory board had a combined function to govern another local project within the reach area which caused some blurring of its responsibilities. The advisory board has appropriately been reformed recently and separated from the project so that it can focus solely on the needs of the children's centre, although it is too early to judge the impact of this action.

The self-evaluation report accurately identifies that the centre was a satisfactory centre in all aspects. The development plan correctly addresses many areas for improvement, for example the need to strengthen the work of the advisory board. This explains why the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Parents make a good informal contribution to the centre's work through recently introduced monthly discussions. Annual surveys and post-activity evaluations are used appropriately to inform centre staff and help them to make decisions about future activities. However, too few parents are actively involved in a more formal role in shaping centre activities.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and health partners to improve the quality and use of reach area data to enable the centre to:
 - increase the proportion of families from the reach area who are registered with the centre
 - tailor activities more closely to meet the needs of different target groups, particularly lone parents and children from workless families.
- Press ahead with implementing the plans already in place to improve the effectiveness of advisory board members by ensuring they receive appropriate training on the role of the board, thereby enabling the board to robustly challenge and support the work of the centre.
- Formalise and increase parents' involvement in centre activities by establishing an active parents' forum, increasing the number of parent volunteers and ensuring that parents are represented on the newly constituted advisory board as soon as possible.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for families are satisfactory overall, although children and parents enjoy

and achieve well at the centre. Children learn well and improve significantly from their starting points. The centre is well resourced with a wide range of educational materials and staff plan sessions well. Good use is made of the creative Rhyme Challenge which is very effective in helping parents to get involved in their children's education. As one enthusiastic mother put it, 'When I came here I could only sing two nursery rhymes, now I know eight.' More significantly she added, 'That's good because I know it improves my child's vocabulary.' The proportion of children achieving 78+ scale points by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy, is improving each year. Outcomes are above the national average at 68%. The gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is closing faster than the national rate and is significantly better than the national average at 21%.

Centre staff work well with local midwives and other health visitors who run numerous clinics at the centre to provide appropriate advice to improve the health and well-being of users. Mothers are relaxed and enjoy the welcoming atmosphere in the knowledge that their babies and older siblings are happy. There are many helpful displays throughout the centre encouraging families to live a healthy lifestyle. The proportion of children classified as overweight or obese at the end of the Reception Year is slightly better than the national average at 8.6%. Initial breastfeeding rates are satisfactory and in line with national averages. However, the number of mothers who breastfeed their babies at six to eight weeks is not known by the centre, nor does the centre know enough about new births in the reach area, due to difficulties obtaining data from the local health authority.

The centre takes appropriate actions to keep users safe. A recent survey revealed that the vast majority of users who attend activities say that they feel safe and that their children are well protected. As one mother said, 'It's relaxed here, a non-threatening, welcoming environment.' Parents and carers are confident that they know what to do in an emergency. Risk assessment of activities is appropriate. Families receive appropriate advice and guidance on being safe in the home. Accidental injuries in the reach area are below national figures at 78.9%. A small number of children are subject to a child protection or child in need plan; staff are clear about their responsibilities when working with families at a time of crisis and work appropriately with colleagues from other agencies.

Children behave well during all activities run by the centre. Staff are good role models for parents who demonstrate that they are learning parenting skills as a result of clear guidance and support from staff. However, parents are not sufficiently involved in running the centre. Although parents informally give feedback to staff following sessions they attend, there is no active parents' forum nor are any parents currently on the advisory board which helps govern the centre. Furthermore, not enough is being done to develop parents as future volunteers to help centre staff during centre activities.

Users of the centre are developing their economic stability and independence appropriately. Helpful information is prominently displayed on notice boards in the

reception area of the children's centre. Parents seeking advice and guidance about employment are appropriately signposted to other centres and various partners' services, including a range of appropriate courses. Parents attend a range of courses held at the centre to improve their parenting and other skills, with first aid and baby massage being the most popular.

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	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

Adults' and children's learning is good and promoted purposefully. The Parents As First Teachers (PAFT) programme is very effective in improving parents' awareness as their child's first educator. As one mother said, 'It's very useful in helping me to understand my child's development.' Staff skilfully identify the next steps for children's learning and provide additional resources to support and extend their play. Children engage fully with a varied and plentiful range of toys and resources. Children learn to share toys and resources amicably. Parents enjoy joining in with their children's play and value being able to let their children play in the knowledge that they are safe.

The range of activities, services and groups offered by the centre appropriately meets the needs of the majority of local families who engage with the centre. Registrations at the centre have increased significantly recently as a result of focused centre activity to improve engagement with more families. While services are satisfactory, the centre does not fully meet the needs of families who live in the reach area because a significant number has not been accessing services. The lack of detailed data about different target groups in the reach area makes it difficult for the centre to ensure it engages with families who are most in need of its services.

Care, guidance and support are appropriate. Particularly helpful support is provided by a local credit union and a benefits adviser for users seeking financial advice,

although both services are under utilised because they are not advertised well enough. The centre displays a wide range of helpful advice and guidance for users. Enquiries by users are promptly and appropriately dealt with by knowledgeable staff who know their families well and are skilful in noticing any changes in mood and quick to offer confidential and discreet support when they do. Activities and groups enable users to support each other. The centre gives appropriate support to families in the home or at specific and tailored groups. Families receive good support during times of crisis.

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	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre has strong links with other agencies, such as health services, social care professionals and community groups who use the centre. A clear vision to enhance the centre's location at the heart of the community is evident in the approved plans to build a large nursery adjacent to the centre. Partners were united in their praise for the significant recent improvements in outreach activities conducted by centre staff. The multi-agency use of the centre ensures that families' needs are met seamlessly.

The centre has come through a period of significant instability and, under the effective leadership of the new centre manager, is firmly on an improving course with the right set of core priorities guiding its development. Despite many recent changes to the leadership of the centre, staff morale is high and managers and staff are keen to provide a good service for families. Senior managers within the local authority are supportive, understand the issues facing the centre and are working closely with centre staff to improve services. Centre leaders acknowledge that there is a need to make better use of data to plan to meet the needs of all groups in the area.

Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and result in families being safe. Staff appointments are vetted carefully and the centre is generally diligent in making health and safety checks. Staff are alert to child protection matters and regular training helps keep their knowledge up to date. The centre caters caringly for members of all groups and establishes good relationships with the families who come into the centre. Information about provision made and outcomes for victims of domestic violence who have asked for help are recorded carefully. As a result, all

those involved in supporting these most vulnerable families know this work is effective.

Close attention is paid to equality and diversity and including everyone in activities. Families speak highly of how well the centre has helped remove barriers to their well-being, for example parenting courses offered to assist families affected by drug and alcohol abuse. There is appropriate disabled access to the centre and the profile of families using the centre is broadly in line with the demographic profile of the reach area. The welcoming atmosphere within the centre is something parents and carers are particularly pleased with. As one mother said, 'Its great here, everyone makes you feel at home.'

The centre recently conducted a thorough review of activities, which included in-depth consultation with current users and, as a result, introduced a new activity timetable. This has proven popular for families. As one mother said, 'Coming to the centre has stopped me from going mad.' Staff are already targeting resources more effectively as reflected in the increase in user engagement. This, together with the satisfactory outcomes and provision, means that value for money is satisfactory.

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	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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the South Newbury Centre on 30 and 31 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for telling us about how much you and your children enjoy coming to the centre. Many of you told us how much you value the personal support you have been given from time to time and how you value the groups that take place. Positive relationships with staff and each other help those of you who have a concern or worry to seek help quickly. We judged that the centre works well with other partner organisations, including both professional bodies and community groups.

Your children learn well and enjoy their learning. Many of you commented on how centre staff have helped you to become better parents, especially how to help develop your child's speech and language. Results from the Early Years Foundation Stage profiles show that your children reach a good level of development and achieve above the national average. We also found that both your own and children's learning is good and promoted purposefully. The Parents As First Teachers programme is very effective in improving your awareness as your child's first educator. As one mother told us, 'It's very useful in helping me to understand my child's development.'

A varied range of activities supports those of you who attend regularly, but outcomes are currently only satisfactory because a significant number of people living in the reach area are still not engaging with the centre's services, especially those from some target groups such as lone parents and workless families. Furthermore, although an appropriate proportion of mothers start breastfeeding their babies, the centre does not know how many of you carry on breastfeeding past six to eight weeks as it does not have the figures to show this. We have therefore asked the health authority and local authority to produce more accurate data so staff can use them to influence future decisions the centre makes about the activities and services it provides.

The centre helps you and your families to keep safe by encouraging you to follow procedures for signing yourself and your children in and out of groups. There is satisfactory support to help those of you who are out of work to return to education, training or employment. Although many of you tell the centre what you think of its services when asked, we have asked the centre to involve you more formally in making decisions about centre activities. Currently, there are limited opportunities for you to contribute to the centre's work. We have recommended that the centre establishes a parents' forum, makes more use of parents as volunteers within the

centre and ensures parents are well represented on the newly formed advisory board.

The new centre manager gives positive and supportive leadership. She is assisted by a skilled staff team who offers appropriate care, guidance and support to help you and your families improve your lives. This is especially so for those of you who experience challenges in your lives from time to time. The welcoming atmosphere within the centre is something you are particularly pleased with. As one mother said, 'Its great here, everyone makes you feel at home.'

Governance of the centre is satisfactory. The centre leader and her staff are generally well supported by senior managers from the local authority who are clear about the issues facing the centre. However, we have recommended that the centre develops the role and responsibilities of the advisory board so that it can challenge and support the centre more effectively.

We understand why so many of you enjoy attending the centre and again wish to thank you for sharing your thoughts with us during our visit.

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