

# Inspection report for Ferndown Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	404443
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 March 2013
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Ferndown First School URN 113667
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	First Class Day Nursery School EY431335

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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**Report published:** March 2013



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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 and staff, a senior leader of the school, representatives from the local authority, and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, such as the health services, parents and other users of the centre.

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

## Information about the centre

Ferndown Children's Centre was established as a phase two centre in 2007 and has been offering the full core purpose since 2009. It is one of a cluster of five centres managed by Action for Children in East Dorset commissioned by the Local Authority. It is located within Ferndown First School and the reach area covers Ferndown, Longham, Tricketts Cross, Parley Cross, Colehill Hayes, Stapehill and part of Westmoors. The population is spread out over a largely rural area with some social housing estates, as well as permanent and temporary Traveller accommodation and sites. While there are areas of affluence, the centre serves a high number of areas with considerable levels of deprivation. The highest population of deprived families lives in Tricketts Cross East and Longham where the rate of worklessness is highest. Overall, 21% of children under five live in workless households.

Since January 2012 Action for Children has managed the centre and is held accountable for the provision of services through a quarterly local authority contract meeting. Governance arrangements include a cluster advisory board. The staff team consists of a cluster manager, centre lead, a number of family support workers and specialist early years professionals and an administrator. Some resources are shared with local children's centres with the cluster, managed by Action for Children.

The ethnic make-up of the area is mainly White British. There are about 848 children below the age of five years in the reach area. Children's skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are below the levels expected for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy.

The centre is open every weekday and services offered include baby and toddler support groups, play and learn sessions, outreach family support and health services. Outreach services are also provided at several community venues.

## 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

Overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. Recent actions and improvement plans have increased the proportion of families in the area being involved. However, the number of families from target groups benefiting from services needs to be increased further. Targets have been set and staff are working hard to increase family involvement, including offering more activities out in the community.

The quality of care and support is good, especially the outreach work by family support workers. The large majority of families are satisfied with the services. Parents and their children feel safe in attending the centre. Children are well supervised and good procedures ensure a strong focus on safeguarding practices. An inclusive, welcoming ethos ensures families and children enjoy the activities and develop self-esteem. Families value the way the service helps them learn and build supportive friendships.

The centre is well organised and provides quality information on health and safety, healthy eating, domestic violence and job opportunities. Many families have developed greater knowledge of parenting, have gained skills in managing their children's behaviour and report they are enjoying their time with their children more. Families trust the staff and know whom to contact in times of crisis. Families value good quality emotional and practical support, including help in accessing funding for

childcare, help with claiming benefits and advice on housing, education, breastfeeding and weaning.

The centre is moving towards the provision of more services to those families most in need. Families who attend activities have their needs met well, but the low attendance rates mean services are not reaching some of the most vulnerable families. Further promotion of the centre is required to ensure families most in need are not missing out. Learning and development are satisfactory but some 'Play and Learn' sessions are not sufficiently individualised and led by the children and some activities are not age appropriate.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff are well qualified and trained. Day-to-day management is effective with regular supervision, accountability and clear action plans. The advisory board has not played a sufficiently strong role in challenging and driving improvements and in providing opportunities for parents to contribute to decision making. Relationships are good but strategic partnerships need to be developed further to ensure services are provided in a more integrated way to optimise outcomes.

Parents' views are used well by the centre to improve services. The self-evaluation report recognises many of the areas for development and many of the grades awarded are in line with the inspector's judgements. Recent action has been more sharply focused on evaluating outcomes and more activities are beginning to reach those in most need. These improvements together with well-motivated, knowledgeable staff provide a satisfactory capacity to improve.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that play and learn sessions are sufficiently child focused and individualised to maximise positive outcomes for children.
- Improve outcomes for children and their families, especially those most in need, through strengthening partnerships, in particular with health and schools so that services are fully integrated and partners are highly engaged with the work of the centre.
- Improve the management and capacity of the advisory board to challenge and drive improvements and provide further opportunities for parents to take part in decision making.
- Promote the work of the centre to increase the number of families and children who benefit from the services and better meet the needs of its most vulnerable families.

## How good are outcomes for families?

3
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Children learn how to respect one another, play safely and enjoy the activities on offer. Parents also enjoy the opportunities to meet socially, find out about different

resources and enjoy playing with their children. Parenting courses develop parents' understanding of how to manage children's behaviour in appropriate ways and children become calmer being more accepting of boundaries.

Breastfeeding is promoted satisfactorily and effective support is available through the cluster peer support group. However, rates have not been increasing and, in recognition of this, staff have received training in breastfeeding awareness. Obesity rates for older children are high, but parents value a six week 'Food and Budget' course where they learn about portion control and how to make healthy food economically. Links with health professionals are generally good and early referrals are often made for speech and hearing difficulties. Families have increased awareness of the consequences of smoking and staff effectively signpost parents to a locally run 'Smoke Stop' course.

Children and adults feel safe and children learn how to keep themselves safe. Safety is central to the work of the centre and there is a reducing trend in the number of children admitted to hospital. Children are kept safe through the home safety assessment visits and arrangements are made for safety equipment to be installed. Children are safeguarded well when subject to child protection plans and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process has led to increased sharing and recording of information between agencies. In one family, completion of the CAF resulted in access to funding for day care for a two year old and support for a mum suffering with depression.

Children and parents enjoy playing in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Good use is made of the well-planned outside play area where parents learn how to keep their children safe outside. The Early Years Foundation Stage results for the area are on a slightly downward trend. Although the achievement at the school where the centre is based is on an upward trend, progress in closing the gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is slow. Parents are supported well to help their children learn and develop and sessions are now linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children listen intently when read stories and parents gain valuable parenting skills through attending the 'Incredible Years' programme. One parent said, 'I feel more confident when my baby cries; I don't panic straight away, but think about what I have learned at baby massage.'

All parents who attended courses in the last quarter reported that they felt their children were ready for school as a result of learning about cooperation and making relationships. A 'Celebrating Language' session involving playing and learning has been welcomed by families where English is a second language. Activities at the centre are improving the economic stability and independence of families in a satisfactory way. Families are gaining timely information to move forward in their lives through good one-to-one support and programmes such as the '7 Transformational Steps' where parents report greater confidence and a better sense of direction in their lives. They also become more knowledgeable about childcare, education and training opportunities.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**3**

The centre is increasingly effective at assessing the needs of children and families in its area. Activities are mostly planned well to meet the needs of families and build on the evaluation of previous activities. The centre is becoming more focused on improving outcomes and targeting outreach at those most in need, for example there is now an increased proportion of lone parents and Travellers benefiting from services. While the registration rate has increase from 38% to 55%, there is still a considerable distance to go to reach targets set. However, staff are working hard to increase participation rates, including offering more activities in locations convenient to families.

Provision to help children and parents learn and develop is satisfactory. Learning is promoted but it is not always individualised sufficiently. For example, in some 'Play and Learn' sessions the activities were not tailored to the needs of individual children and the activities were too adult led. Families learn well and benefit considerably through improved parenting but further promotion of the valuable services on offer is required to ensure vulnerable families do not miss out. Parents are helped well to achieve improved personal and social skills, increase their ability to make friends and an increasing number move on to education and training. For example, one mum reported, 'I now have more confidence and found a job as a lunchtime supervisor.'

Consistently good care and support are provided by the one-to-one work of the family support workers and are becoming more sharply focused on identified need. Good working relationships with the education specialist teachers who work with Travellers has been developed and joint work is often undertaken. Traveller families value the baby massage and the parent and toddler group. Support in times of crisis for disabled children and for women who have experienced domestic abuse is good. One woman reported the 12 week 'Freedom' programme had given her valuable

support in protecting herself and her children. Staff are able to give good quality information, advice and guidance and signpost parents well to services they need.

These are the grades for the quality of provision.

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

Day-to-day arrangements are clear and the centre is well organised. Staff are motivated and well trained. A new management structure and recent contract management meetings have been effective in setting challenging targets. However, the purpose of the advisory board has been unclear; attendance of agency representatives has been poor and it has been weak in analysing data, challenging practice and driving improvements. Plans are now much improved and a new system for registrations, through health visitors, has led to a rapid recent increase in registrations, especially for lone parents.

Activity sessions are evaluated and used effectively to improve services. Thorough quarterly evaluation summaries of all activities incorporate parents' views well. The self-evaluation report is reflective in parts and many grades awarded are the same as the inspector's judgements. Over the last year the collection and analysis of data have improved. Value for money is satisfactory. The centre provides a bright, stimulating and well-organised environment. Creative use is made of a number of community venues to offer bespoke activities to some target groups.

The management team demonstrates a growing awareness of the vulnerable groups and has increased steps to engage them, for example the service level agreement for the provision of a parent and toddler group in Tricketts Cross. Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. All are made welcome at the centre, including those with disabilities, sight and hearing impairment. Transport can be provided and adult learning is supported with crèche facilities and as a result the participation rate of vulnerable families is increasing. As the gap in the Early Years Foundation Stage between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is at 32%, the centre is working closely with the school to improve transitional arrangements and school attendance through an integrated induction for parents and children before the September school intake.

Good safeguarding arrangements are in place and staff have a clear awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities. Safeguarding is reinforced well during training,



meetings and supervision. Staff value the robust implementation of the clear 'lone working' policy and feel safe in their roles. Recruitment procedures and Criminal Records Bureau checks comply with government requirements. Families troubled by domestic violence are helped to keep safe and many attend the 'Freedom' course which increases their aspirations. One mum who attended said, 'Without the help, I would not be where I am today.' Outreach workers are quick to pick up on safeguarding issues and they work well with the locality teams and social workers to intervene early and safeguard children. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and parents receive good guidance to keep their children safe.

Operational relationships with other agencies are effective at meeting the needs of individual families, and family support workers are developing strong links with health professionals and the nursery. Partnerships with some agencies, particularly at the strategic level, are not yet fully developed. Although health visitors are increasingly involved in promoting registrations, there is not a clearly understood plan for how they will work with the centre to promote breastfeeding. The partnership with the school, although satisfactory, is not yet fully developed to ensure close integrated working on common objectives including attendance and educational achievements.

Parents feel the centre listens to their views, which are used effectively to plan sessions and inform future plans. The centre is increasing the involvement of parents in each part of its work and reaching out to engage those who have not previously been involved, for example, the cluster uses a Facebook page to advertise its services and joint work with specialist education workers is engaging Travellers more.

These are the grades for leadership and management.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

<p><b>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</b></p>	<p><b>3</b></p>
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## 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 Ferndown Children's Centre on 14 and 15 March 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall with some good aspects.

Staff are working well to ensure services are provided that meet your needs. There is a strong commitment to improving the centre and providing good quality support for those who most need it, especially in times of crisis.

During our visit, we inspected your centre's plans for the future and many documents, including your evaluations of activities. We spoke to a wide range of agencies that work with the centre, as well as staff, members of the advisory board, school staff and representatives from the local authority and health service. We visited activities, including 'Play and Learn' and 'Chatterbox', and spoke to many families using the centre.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. It was really helpful to have your views and hear how positive you feel about the quality of the services offered and how supportive and friendly the staff are. You have told us that you feel safe at the centre and how the strong promotion of safety, both at the centre and in your homes, helps you to keep your children safe. Good support is provided, especially for those experiencing domestic violence.

You have told us the centre is welcoming and friendly and that you enjoy your involvement and see the benefits. For example, many of you have developed greater confidence in parenting and extended your knowledge of health eating. You trust the staff and know who to go to for help. A number of you have benefited from help with budgeting, and practical support with housing and claiming benefits. You also value the support with breastfeeding, weaning and advice about managing children's behaviour.

A good range of activities is provided, such as baby massage, parent and toddler groups and short courses giving parenting advice. Families are well signposted to other activities within the cluster of children's centres. Staff are well trained and they use the accommodation well, keeping it bright and welcoming for you. Activities are generally well planned but some 'Play and Learn' sessions are not always tailored to the needs of individual children and we have asked the centre to improve the quality of these sessions. A good number of local families do attend the centre, but to ensure the services are reaching those most in need we have asked the centre to further promote its services and ensure the most vulnerable families know it is a welcoming centre for them.

Your children's centre is well organised and led on a daily basis and there are clear plans being acted upon to develop community links. Many partnerships are already good but to fully bring together services to benefit you we have asked that local partnerships be further strengthened. The centre evaluates its services well and is keen to continue to ask your views to help it improve further. An advisory board is responsible for challenging practice and driving improvements but it has not been as effective as it could be and we have asked for this to be strengthened. Staff are increasing their understanding of the local community well and are determined to provide services to those most in need. Services are increasingly being taken out into the community, for example the providing of a valuable parent and toddler group in an area serving Traveller communities.

The clear commitment that leaders, managers and staff demonstrate, the impact they have already had on many families, together with good plans for the future mean the centre is in a satisfactory position to continue to improve. We hope that in the future even more parents and children will attend and benefit from the services.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).