

Inspection report for Okehampton Area Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon
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Centre leader	Chris Parsons
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's management team, members of the advisory board, the local authority, Barnardo's, partnership agencies, members of staff and families using the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services, and data about people who use the centre and about the wider community.

Information about the centre

The Okehampton Area Children's Centre opened in 2007 as a phase two centre. The centre has been managed since April 2010 by a charitable organisation, Barnardo's, on behalf of the local authority. From a central base in Okehampton, the children's centre serves a predominantly rural area containing the villages of Chagford, Meldon, Belstone, South Zeal, South Tawton, Sticklepath, Whiddon Down, Gidleigh, Throwleigh and Drewsteignton. The centre meets its core purpose by offering a range of services which include health services, family sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. Services are offered from the shared premises as well as a range of community venues within outlying towns and villages.

The very large majority of families are White British with a very small minority of other ethnic groups also represented. The most recent data indicate that the number of children under five years living in poverty was 16%, which is in line with local authority and national average. The proportion of families claiming workless benefits rose sharply last year to 16% of the working age population. There are 696 children under five living in the reach area. Typically, children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years education are in line with those expected for their age.

The centre works in a group of two other children’s centres and collaborates with Hatherleigh Children’s Centre. The centre’s advisory board acts as a governance group for both Okehampton and Hatherleigh Children’s Centre. Members include representatives of health and social care partners.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Okehampton Children’s Centre is a good centre that is led and managed well. Leaders, the advisory body and staff demonstrate a good knowledge of the local area and the particular needs and interests of the community it serves. Staff are prepared to work hard to meet the needs of families with young children and provide them with support in whatever way best suits them. The overall quality of activities and parenting programmes provided by the centre is good. This is because regular professional development and training for staff ensures they have developed their skills and expertise over time. Where external partners withdraw, staff have the confidence to run sessions independently. In addition, the non-judgemental and caring approach of staff ensures that sessions are conducted in a friendly and supportive manner. As a consequence, families build up trust and feel that centre staff have their best interests in mind.

Centre leaders and managers are developing their use of information and data to more closely monitor the attendance of families from the more-deprived local areas. They use this information well to target their resources and increase contact with families in these areas. The advisory board is clear about its roles and responsibilities. It is provided with detailed reports and regularly interrogates the data provided to review services and hold the centre to account. This helps to ensure that attendance rates are high, including from the more-deprived parts of the centre’s reach area. The centre is an inclusive establishment, and has developed innovative strategies to successfully encourage a wide range of families to attend by providing specific sessions for young parents, minority ethnic families, parents of children with special educational needs and those who have experienced violence in their homes. However, the centre is not making best use of information it holds to

establish and monitor the attendance of these and other groups across all services and activities.

The centre provides good support to families to help maintain children's safety and well-being. Close working partnerships with social care and Family Intervention Service help to ensure a coordinated approach to supporting families. The centre is particularly effective in making careful assessments of families' needs, using regular checks to monitor progress and provide well-planned support activities to develop their parenting skills and confidence. In a home visit, inspectors observed the good use of an assessment tool, the 'outcomes star', to accurately assess needs, provide positive feedback and involve parents in setting targets for improvements.

Local information shows a fourfold increase in the proportions of children under five living in households dependent on workless benefits to 16% in the last two years. The centre makes appropriate use of financial advice budgeting and benefits provided through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Citizens Advice Bureau to support families to stabilise their financial situation. Although some families are completing appropriate adult education and there are plans to provide an English for Speakers of another Language (ESOL) course, the centre needs to more frequently provide and signpost users to improve their basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills.

The local authority and the advisory board effectively challenge the centre's progress towards achieving its action plans. The centre's capacity to improve is good because staff are thorough in their evaluation of the centre's strengths and very accurately identify areas for development. The centre has reacted well to local issues by adapting services to increase the support for a rising proportion of families experiencing domestic violence and has agreed actions with health partners to address the increase in the proportion of overweight children in the area. However, the centre's planning does not clearly record the actions taken and targets within the plan are not always sufficiently measurable to demonstrate the impact of their initiatives.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve services and provision so that more families, especially those in target groups, improve their economic well-being by;
 - developing clear pathways so that more parents participate in appropriate training and develop their skills and accreditation
 - increasing access to information and support for families who are unemployed or on benefits to increase their financial stability.

- More closely track and evaluate the proportions of vulnerable families accessing the centre's services and activities to increase the numbers of adults attending.

- Improve the strategic development plan by including precise measures of progress, actions to be completed and clear success criteria to tackle key local issues.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families in the reach area have good access to health services in the form of Healthy Baby clinics. These clinics are well organised and staff from the centre are on hand to provide enjoyable activities, and are alert to identifying families and individuals that require additional support. The centre offers a number of services and activities to promote and support parents to sustain their breastfeeding. Currently, there are 10 volunteers who offer support to their peers, and key staff show good awareness of recognised Breastfeeding Initiative and are 'La Lêche' trained. As a result, despite a low proportion of mothers initiating breastfeeding at birth, the support provided has helped to ensure that the proportion continuing to breastfeed at six–eight weeks is above average. While the proportions of children in Reception Year who are obese is below average, the proportion of children overweight is above average. The centre and advisory board are aware, and together with health partners, have reacted to provide weaning advice, increase the number of sessions encouraging families to be active and agile, and by providing vitamins for families in need. However, these actions have not yet resulted in a reduction of the proportion of overweight children in Reception Year in the area.

Families attend the centre's sessions and activities in a friendly and welcoming environment. Centre staff regularly assess the level of risk in every activity that they undertake to maintain a safe environment. The centre's displays and information are changed regularly and help to develop families' understanding of how to provide a safer home. Staff work closely with a high number of vulnerable families with children subject to the child protection register. They regularly visit families in their homes and offer a good range of purposeful activities and programmes that help to increase children's safety and reduce the risk of harm. The centre's manager has acted effectively to improve procedures so that staff maintain detailed records of discussions and actions to improve the safety and well-being of children.

Planning of sessions for children is based on the new Early Years Foundation Stage framework with a focus on developing communication, language and literacy skills and children's personal, social and emotional development. Staff have adapted Sing, Jump and Jiggle sessions to develop children's speaking and listening skills. Children's interests are taken into account and followed up from week to week; in a crèche session, a child who enjoyed painting was provided with large-scale art materials the following week. Children learn in a calm and purposeful environment encouraging them to develop positive relationships. This good care and attention helps children to enjoy sessions, develop their confidence and improve their social skills.

Regular evaluations and surveys take account of families' views, and help shape services and the timing of activities. Evaluations are provided informally and formally by parents, and they are encouraged to listen to each other and provide their opinions. In 'MiniMe' sessions, teenage parents provide regular evaluations and plan future sessions around their own ideas and interests. Through attending sessions, parents share experiences and develop friendships that are maintained outside the centres. The centre is actively seeking to engage the views of non-users, and has analysed data on attendance and identified areas where a few families are proving hard to reach. A Citizens Advice Bureau adviser regularly attends sessions and is commissioned to provide the equivalent of five hours advice per week. However, too few parents are being helped to improve their financial stability, and few parents access training or adult education to improve their basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills that might improve their suitability for employment.

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	2
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	2
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?

2

The centre provides a good balance of sessions for both small groups of families with specific needs and popular high-quality activities. This helps to ensure that attendance rates are high, including from the more-deprived areas of the centre's reach area. By linking with health sessions and by providing activities that generate a high turnout, staff are able to identify those families in need of greater support. Well-planned support programmes around services for most-vulnerable families are based on careful assessment. Senior staff have used local information to identify high rates of domestic violence and have responded by providing 'Pattern Changing' courses.

The centre is also targeting work with a number of groups. The centre provides specific support for parents of children with additional needs. A dedicated project worker follows up with home visits to provide further support and advice. The centre provides separate sessions for young parents and teenage parents that have

encouraged the vast majority of young families to attend. Teenage parents are provided with the confidence to try new activities such as going swimming with their young child, that in turn encourage them to attend other activities.

The extent to which the centre enables families to improve their educational development and progress to further employment is satisfactory. The centre promotes personal learning well but this is not developed sufficiently to help adults build on their learning achievements.

Provision in crèche sessions to help children to learn and develop is good. The centre provides a range of parenting courses that play a valuable role in helping parents to develop their parenting skills and help their children to learn and develop. The centre is developing the use of learning diaries to share the personal milestones that children are making and to regularly identify their next steps, but this approach is not used to encourage adults in their learning and development.

The quality of care for children and families is good. Staff help families to develop trust and build on their warm and caring professional relationships. The centre works well with families at times of crisis to provide services that help to improve their lives. Families are encouraged by the clear process of setting targets, providing support and reviewing progress. Several parents spoke highly of the care and attention shown by staff across the centre.

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The quality of leadership and management is good. Senior staff share enthusiasm and commitment to doing the best for children and their families. Leaders use data and local knowledge well to develop an accurate and realistic understanding of the needs of local families. Partnerships with key agencies health, social care and special educational needs have a good impact on improving the lives of local families and ensure that overall the centre provides good value for money.

Governance arrangements are clearly understood and, through their analysis of available information, provide leaders at the centre with the support and challenge to tackle local issues. Currently, representation on the advisory board is restricted and lacks members of local education settings and greater parental representation. Arrangements to monitor the performance of staff provide them with regular

opportunities to discuss issues, to review their work and to organise good access to professional development to develop their roles and responsibilities. All hold high expectations for the centre and for users.

Good systems are in place to monitor provision with detailed information and data interrogated to review the effectiveness of the centre's work and to plan future services. The local authority provides detailed information and data, and appropriately challenges the centre to improve. Targets are set by the local authority and these are incorporated by senior leaders into an improvement plan. Although senior leaders have devised actions for the targets set by the local authority, the action plan does not include specific actions taken by the centre to address local issues or provide measures of the impact of those actions. The centre is intent on developing systems to track the progress of more-vulnerable groups of children and families over time and to evaluate the effectiveness of the centre's support.

All staff are clear about the centre's child protection procedures and policies, and place a high priority on safeguarding. Staff are quick to recognise children and adults who are potentially vulnerable and maintain appropriate records of their concerns. Case files show that individual families have regular contact and are provided with access to specific activities designed to improve the family situation. Staff from Barnardo's human resource department complete checks to ensure the suitability of staff prior to their appointment.

Staff promote equality and diversity well and work hard to ensure that families are welcomed and feel included. They use targeted sessions, like those for minority ethnic families, young and teenage parents, children with disabilities or learning difficulties, and for families who have experienced domestic violence, to ensure that a very diverse range of families are well supported and part of the daily life of the centre.

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	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2

<p>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</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>2</p>

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 Okehampton Area Centre on 13 and 14 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre is led and managed well by staff who have a good knowledge of the local area and community. Staff are hard-working and are prepared to provide families with the support that they need when they need it. They are well trained and this gives them the confidence to lead a wide range of good-quality sessions. You were also quick to tell us that you value and appreciate the friendly and caring approach of all staff. Staff in crèche sessions pay close attention to children’s interests and regularly assess their progress. As a result, you feel that the centre has your best interests in mind.

Senior members of staff are developing their use of data to check that they are helping to support a high number of families in the local area. With the advisory board, they meet regularly to check which activities are popular and which are meeting the needs of different groups. The centre provides helpful support for a wide range of families, young and teenage parents, minority ethnic groups, and parents of children with special educational needs, and those who have experienced violence in their relationships are provided with separate support. However, the centre does not monitor the attendance of these families so that they know what other activities and sessions they find helpful to increase the numbers of adults from target groups that are attending sessions.

Families have good opportunities to visit health professionals through the baby and health clinics. Staff provide good help and advice to families to help them keep their children safe and free from harm. They regularly check with these families how they

are doing, and set targets and provide good-quality support to help keep families safe and to help them in times of crisis. There are a rising proportion of adults in the local area who are on workless benefits. The centre helps some of you to take part in training courses and gain qualifications. We have asked the centre to work with other professionals and volunteers to make sure that they increase their help and support to those of you looking to get back into employment. We have also asked the centre to provide more financial information and advice.

The centre is responding well to local issues and has put in place a number of initiatives to tackle these areas. We have asked senior leaders to improve their plans so that they record the actions that will take place and include how they will measure the success of these actions.

Thank you to all of those who met with us and told us your views. We heard from many of you how much the centre helps you to change the lives of your children and families.

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