

Inspection report for Southam and District Children's Centre

Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	407027
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2013
Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

Centre leader	Manjit Kaur Evans
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 Southam Church and Community Project Limited board of directors, local authority, centre staff, representatives of the advisory board, partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

Southam and District Children's Centre is a phase two centre which opened in January 2008. It is based within The Graham Adams Centre in the old market town of Southam, Warwickshire.

Areas of relative prosperity are interspersed with pockets of deprivation. There are eight primary schools, 13 nurseries and pre-schools and nine childminders in the reach area. Local services include a library, police station, fire station, leisure centre, and community, volunteer and social groups.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of services for families by working with other partner organisations and by referring parents and children to other specialist providers. The centre's services are delivered from the Graham Adams Centre, two satellite sites in Stockton and Bishop's Itchington, and at local venues.

The centre is managed by the Southam Church and Community Project, a limited company with charitable status, on behalf of the local authority. The charity's board of directors is responsible for overseeing day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic management. An advisory board, comprising representatives from various partner organisations and parents, contributes to the children's centre's strategic

development. The centre has a parents' forum. The centre manager reports directly to the board of directors and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre.

The centre does not provide early years childcare but offers advice and guidance to parents, and signposts to early years providers, including childminders, within the local community. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision, are variable; some children are well below and others are in line with those expected for their age.

Good road links has resulted in Southam and its surrounding villages being ideal locations for commuters to Coventry. Southam and District Children's Centre's reach area population is 608 families in which there are 844 children below five years of age. The children's centre serves Southam and surrounding areas. The percentage of workless households and those dependent on benefits is low. An above-average proportion of adults are employed in managerial and professional occupations. The number of adults educated to degree level or equivalent is above the county average. The number of adults with no qualifications is amongst the lowest in the county. There are 60 lone parents within the reach area. The children's centre serves a mainly White British community, with the remaining population being from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

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

Southam and District Children's Centre's overall effectiveness is good. It is firmly established within the community. Outcomes for families using the centre are good. The centre's success is a result of the strong leadership shown at all levels, combined with the support of a passionate, caring and dedicated team who go that extra mile to help families.

Leaders, partners and parents talk with gratitude about the centre manager and how her whole-hearted passion, energy and enthusiasm to drive the centre forward has raised the profile of the centre and improved the lives of some of the most

vulnerable families.

Governors are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the on-going development of its role in the community. The centre has an effective advisory board, the membership of which includes parents and representatives from the wide range of the services which the centre provides. Members provide invaluable support to the centre and their skills and expertise are routinely used to evaluate the effectiveness of the centre's work. Leaders are reflective and have an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. For example, they are fully aware of the need to reach more families, particularly workless households and are developing strategies to address this.

The local authority provides good support and robust challenge through regular monitoring visits. It provides an accurate appraisal of the centre's work to inform planning. There are clear links between strategic planning, development plans and service provision. Staff target and adapt the provision well to ensure the safety and health of children and families. The effective work of the centre manager and her staff team, the quality of the services provided and the positive impact on those families who attend indicate that the centre has good capacity to further improve.

Partnership working with health professionals and the wider community result in improved outcomes for children and families. Strong links with midwives and health visitors enable staff to intervene at an early stage. They target their work to support children and families who are in most need of support, such as new and young parents. A co-ordinated approach between staff, speech and language therapists results in good promotion of children's communication and language during sessions and the early identification of any speech and language difficulties. Strong partnership working with some schools and early years providers supports children's transition arrangements well. However, partnerships with schools and early years providers are not consistently strong.

The enthusiastic and highly motivated staff provide teenage and young parents with specialist, tailored support, including for young fathers. The warm, welcoming environment encourages these parents to access early advice and support, resulting in improved self-esteem and self-confidence. They are developing a good range of skills including in how to stay safe and live healthier lifestyles, manage their children's behaviour and to support their children's learning and development. Courses such as 'Tym 4 U' contribute to building young parents' confidence which helps them move on to further learning and employment. For example, four young parents are attending a local college as a result of attending the group. Consequently, outcomes for these parents and their families are good.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Community cohesion is a strong feature of this centre. Despite the barriers of living in a rural location, some parents have engaged in volunteer work and have made gains in their personal development and achieved qualifications which have helped them develop skills and move on to further training

and employment. Parents speak very positively about how they are encouraged to help out at sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and crèche, and how they are enjoying working as bank staff at local pre-schools and schools. Parents talk positively about how the centre had made a difference to their lives. Comments such as, 'I now feel I have a purpose and a future' and 'it has given me the confidence to move forward', are typical. However, the centre's success in supporting parents to progress onto further training and employment has resulted in the number of parents involved in the parents' forum decreasing.

Staff have high aspirations for all the children in their care. They promote children's learning well and activities and resources are of good quality. Planned activities are designed from the basis of a good knowledge of the children and families and built on what children already understand, know and can do. This approach enables children to take part in activities appropriate to their age and stage of development; consequently, enhancing their progress. Activities are shared well with parents during sessions and they are encouraged to be involved in their children's learning journeys. Consequently, some, but not enough, parents are developing their knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage and how children learn.

Safeguarding is the centre's highest priority and at the heart of what they do. Children who are subject to child protection plans are very well supported across the multi-agency partnerships and through the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework processes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the strategies currently in place to increase the number of families accessing the centre's services, particularly those from workless households.
- Increase the number of parents involved in the Parents Forum.
- Further develop parents' knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage in order that they can support their children well in their learning and development.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The health and well-being of families are improving well. The large majority of families in the area are engaging with appropriate health services. Parents and children are developing a good awareness of healthy lifestyles. Healthy eating, good hygiene and participation in exercise are promoted through all activities. Parents report on how sessions such as 'Twist and Tumble' have increased their confidence to exercise at home with their children. Parents have developed enthusiasm for cooking since attending courses, such as Big Chef, Little Chef where they learn how to cook healthy, nutritional meals on a budget.

Effective partnership working with midwives and health visitors means that families have good access to ante- and post-natal care and advice. All families are contacted when there is a new birth. Parents are well supported in breastfeeding their baby by well-trained staff and through the weekly breastfeeding support group. As a result they have an increased enthusiasm towards breastfeeding and value the support available. As a result, some mothers continue breastfeeding for up to a year and beyond. Consequently, breastfeeding rates are higher than the national and county averages.

Sessions such as baby massage, 'Save a baby's life', and 'Chatter Matters' have successfully contributed towards early attachment and positive relationships between mothers and their babies. Parents report increased confidence in their parenting skills and their ability to make decisions about their family's health.

The centre is helping to raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. For example, outreach support provides parents with information about how to create and maintain a safe environment for young children. Families are provided with home-safety equipment, contributing to a reduction in the number of accidents in the home. Some parents have been subject to domestic violence and abuse. Family support workers provide good support in these circumstances and the centre works very well with agencies to resolve situations and to protect children as well as parents. Parents say that they feel very safe during sessions and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties.

Effective monitoring of every child's progress enables staff to plan and tailor services to need. Staff provide parents with regular updates on their child's progress. They meet with parents individually to discuss their child's learning and development, and listen to their particular interests and worries. The good range of activities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together enables them to develop skills that will help in the future. Evaluations of the success of courses and activities are positive. Parents comment about how much they value 'Stay and Play' and 'Drop-In' sessions. Typical comments include, 'It's a brilliant place to come', 'The staff are so helpful, supportive and friendly'. Children are making good progress in their learning and development. As a result, the gap between the outcomes at the end of Reception for the most vulnerable groups and others is narrowing.

Parents comment on improvement in their children's behaviour as a result of the help from family support workers and other professionals. Parents said they feel that they have a voice within the centre and that services meet their specific needs. Parents say that they feel included and not judged, and that the centre has helped them emotionally and socially. They comment on the difference that the centre has made to their aspirations and achievements as well as their children's progress and development. As a result, their economic stability and independence has improved.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Leaders, staff, partners and parents have a good understanding of the community's needs and effectively share what they know. This combined with access to comprehensive and detailed data means that staff can accurately identify, by postcode, where families are and, therefore, target resources where they are most needed. Staff deploy resources well given the restrictions and challenges placed on them by sharing a rural community venue that is a constant hive of activity. All activities are set up and cleared away after each session in preparation for the next community group. Staff make good use of the indoor environment making sure children have a good balance of resources to promote their all-round development.

Good use is made of venues out in the community including the 'Big Red Party Bus' and home visits, to deliver sessions in the most rural areas. These activities enable the most vulnerable families, particularly the most isolated, to access services where previously there was no opportunity. The centre is successfully reaching the large majority of families, including those in workless households, living in the reach area. The majority of these families regularly participate in the centre's services, although the proportion of families from workless households accessing the centre's services is lower than others.

The care, guidance and support families receive are good features of the centre's work. Parents expressed appreciation of the support they receive and the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. Parents reported how staff support them through difficult times and how their lives would be very different without the centre's help. Comments from parents confirm that they value the provision and that, for some, the centre is like their second home, and like having a second family. Comments such as, 'the centre has been a lifeline for me' and 'I would be depressed and isolated, it's a brilliant place to come' are typical. Parents talked warmly about how the manager's passion, encouragement and tireless efforts have helped raise their aspirations, achievement, resilience and confidence, giving them a

purpose to look forward. Parents' comments were echoed by partners who also talked very positively about the manager's drive and commitment to serve the community well.

The centre works well in partnership with the local college and Adult Community Learning to deliver a range of courses that are tailored to need. Adults' prior learning and achievements are used to develop individual learning plans, including their preferred style of learning. Courses, for example in basic literacy and numeracy, information technology, and childcare have resulted in 23 adults gaining qualifications and a high number of adults engaging in other learning activities. The centre effectively supports parents' access to learning by providing crèche facilities; financial support and transport. As a result, attendance rates have been good and outcomes for adults positive. Children's learning and development are supported well. Staff implement different strategies to try to engage parents in their child's learning and acknowledge that provision to improve parents' knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage and how to plan for children's next steps in their learning is not fully developed.

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leaders and managers have established a strong and committed staff team, and good provision. The local authority plays a key strategic role through robust annual conversations and setting challenging targets. Governance and accountability arrangements are good. They provide good levels of challenge and support. Professional supervision of staff and regular one-to-one meetings with managers promote the shared values and high expectations of staff.

Children and vulnerable adults are effectively safeguarded. Care is taken to ensure all activities are well organised and supervised and risks are minimised. All policies and procedures are consistently implemented. Training, vetting and recruitment processes for staff and volunteers are robust. The most vulnerable and hard to reach families are well supported, and partnerships with specialist services contribute to good personalised support for them. Early intervention for vulnerable children and families and use of the Common Assessment Framework processes is reducing the need for higher-level interventions. Parents and children feel safe and protected.

Equality and diversity are actively promoted in all aspects of the centre's work. The centre is very aware of what the barriers to accessing services are and is taking effective steps to reach the most vulnerable groups. The welcoming, inclusive and non-judgmental ethos helps parents feel respected, valued and included. Staff go that extra mile to ensure each child is included and not disadvantaged. They provide well for individuals who are disabled or have special educational needs. Children make good progress in their learning and development, with an increasing percentage gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales. Consequently, the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and the rest is reducing.

Family support workers liaise effectively with social care and health services, Jobcentre Plus and voluntary partners to ensure that families at risk or facing challenging circumstances receive support tailored to their needs.

The centre provides good value for money by working in partnership with agencies and taking the services to the users and achieving good outcomes. The centre invests highly in staff training resulting in a multi-skilled team. Staff feel empowered through training and are well supported in taking significant responsibility for key areas of work. Parents are actively encouraged to become volunteer parent helpers and contribute well in delivering centre services. However, as a result of parents progressing onto further training and employment, the membership of the parents' forum has decreased. Users are influential in shaping services because they are engaged in meaningful consultation and evaluation. The centre meets its community's needs well because staff listen to parents', children's and partners' views and use these effectively to target resources where they are needed.

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	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
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	2
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Southam and District Children's Centre on 12–13 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

The Children's Centre is firmly established within the community. Outcomes for you and your children who use the centre are good. The centre's success is a result of the strong leadership shown at all levels, combined with the support of a passionate, caring and dedicated team who go that extra mile to help you.

Leaders, partners and those of who spoke to us talked with gratitude about the centre manager and how her whole-hearted passion, energy and enthusiasm to drive the centre forward had raised the profile of the centre and improved many of your lives.

Leaders are very supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the on-going development of its role in the community. The centre has an effective advisory board, of which the centre is very pleased to have some of you as members. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. For example, they are fully aware that they are not reaching enough families, particularly workless households and therefore we have asked them to continue to try to engage with these families.

Partnership working with health professionals and the wider community result in improved outcomes for you and your families. Strong links with midwives and health visitors enable staff to intervene at an early stage and support you well, for example in breastfeeding your baby. Links with the speech and language therapists' result in good promotion of communication and language during sessions and the early identification of any speech and language difficulties. Strong partnership working with some schools and early years providers supports your children's transition arrangements well. However, partnerships with schools and early years providers are not consistently strong.

The enthusiastic and highly motivated staff provide those of you most in need, such as teenage and young parents, including young fathers, with specialist, tailored support. The warm, welcoming environment encourages you to access early advice and support, resulting in improved self-esteem and self-confidence. You are developing a good range of skills including in how to stay safe and live healthier lifestyles, manage your children's behaviour and to support your children's learning and development. Courses such as 'Tym 4 U' contribute to building your confidence which helps you move on to further learning and employment. For example, four young parents are attending a local college as a result of attending the group. Consequently, outcomes for you and your families are good.

You and your children are developing a good awareness of healthy lifestyles. Healthy eating, good hygiene and participation in exercise are promoted through all activities. You told us how sessions such as 'Twist and Tumble' have increased your confidence to exercise at home with your children. You have developed enthusiasm for cooking since attending courses, such as Big Chef, Little Chef where you learn how to cook healthy, nutritional meals on a budget.

You told us that you and your children feel safe at the centre and that you are confident to share information with staff. The staff ensure you are informed about safeguarding. You are helped to learn how to keep your children safe in the home. For example, outreach support provides you with information about how to create and maintain a safe environment and some of you are provided with home-safety equipment. Families with child protection plans are known to the centre and receive effective, integrated support to keep children safe.

Staff have high aspirations for all the children in their care. They promote children's learning well and activities and resources are of good quality. Planned activities are designed from the basis of a good knowledge of you and your children and built on what children already understand, know and can do. This approach enables your children to take part in activities appropriate to their age and stage of development; consequently, enhancing their progress. Activities are shared well with you during sessions and you are encouraged to be involved in your children's learning journeys. Consequently, some, but not enough, of you are developing your knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage and how children learn. As a result, we have asked the centre to continue to develop your knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage so that you can support your children well in their learning and development. You told us how much you value 'Stay and Play' and 'Drop-In' sessions. Typical comments include, 'It's a brilliant place to come', 'The staff are so helpful, supportive and friendly'.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Community cohesion is a strong feature of this centre. Despite the barriers of living in a rural location, some of you have engaged in volunteer work and have made gains in your personal development and achieved qualifications which have helped you develop skills and move on to further training and employment. You speak very positively about how you are encouraged to help

out at sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and crèche, and how you are enjoying working as bank staff at local pre-schools and schools. You talk positively about how the centre had made a difference to your lives. Comments such as, 'I now feel I have a purpose and a future' and 'it has given me the confidence to move forward', are typical. However, the centre's success in supporting parents to progress onto further training and employment has resulted in the number of parents involved in the parents' forum decreasing. Therefore we have asked the centre to encourage more parents to become involved in the parents' forum.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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