

Inspection report for Sure Start Dawlsh Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon
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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and other centre staff. They also met with a number of partners and representatives from the local authority and Action for Children as well as families using the centre. The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a wide range of relevant data and documentation.

Information about the centre

Sure Start Dawlish Children's Centre serves the coastal town of Dawlish and the rural area stretching to the east and north of the town. It shares its base with Sure Start Teignmouth Children's Centre and staff work across the two centres. Sure Start Dawlish Children's Centre also has a base in 'The Bungalow' on the site of a primary school in Dawlish and uses a range of other venues in the town, including Dawlish Hospital, and some that are further afield. Some provision is available in Teignmouth.

Dawlish was first designated as a phase two centre in 2007 and, from the outset, has been managed by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. The centre operates within a cluster that includes six other children's centres in the Teignbridge district. It offers a range of services, including child and family health services, advice on parenting and access to specialist services, for example ante-natal and post-natal groups. There are just over 900 children under five in the reach area. The centre is not in an area of deprivation, with the proportion of families on benefit or children in workless households below average, although there are pockets of significant disadvantage. Most families are of White British heritage. When children join early years provision, their skills are below the levels expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Dawlish is a satisfactory children's centre where parents feel welcomed and well supported. The commitment of the staff to the well-being of families is strong and the support and guidance provided are much appreciated. One parent reflected the views of many in stressing the value of 'a shoulder to cry on'. Provision is satisfactory and outcomes are satisfactory overall, with strengths in the ways that children are safe and protected and that parents contribute to the running and development of the centre.

The centre has secured the registration of 75% of children under five living in the reach, meeting the target set by the local authority. However, it has been less successful in securing participation in its activities of families from two areas in the reach that face particular disadvantages. In both, the level of engagement is below the targets set, despite much energy expended in targeted door-to-door calling.

The centre's arrangements for safeguarding children are good and staff are appropriately trained. Parents report feeling safe in the centre's activities and have a good understanding of how to ensure their family's safety. This is because they are well supported in developing their parenting skills by the services provided by the centre, including through home visits and help with safety equipment in the home where necessary. Centre staff support families facing particular challenges well. As a result, confidence and self-esteem improve and these parents and children make good progress in overcoming difficulties. Individualised support addresses personal issues, such as social isolation or being new to the area. Working with other professionals, for example health visitors, has contributed well to the centre's identification of target groups, such as mothers encountering mental health problems and families with children with physical and/or learning disabilities.

Activities observed were of good quality. Staff take considerable trouble to identify and respond to the needs of group members. This helps staff to evaluate the impact of particular sessions and make any adjustments necessary for the next one. New

approaches to planning, currently being adopted, involve linking key outcomes desired with communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. Managers have correctly identified that the impact of provision on the well-being and development of participants is not currently being effectively evaluated at planned points in the months after an event. Parents' views of the impact of individual groups and courses are carefully gathered and discussed by centre staff to inform future planning. However, such views are not gathered systematically so that analysis can be undertaken, for example to compare the impact of particular courses or the success of an event from one year to another.

Parents make a good contribution to the development of the centre and are confident that they are listened to. They have a good range of opportunities to contribute their ideas and suggestions, including through written questionnaires, the 'question of the month' that has been recently introduced and through recording views on the 'tablecloths' at groups and activities. The 'Friends of Sure Start' (FOSS) is well established and run by parents. FOSS organises a wide range of engaging fundraising activities that promote the centre's work and encourage parents to get involved. It also contributes parents' views to the Partnership and Monitoring Group. The centre is successful in attracting volunteers and provides a thorough training programme. As a result, volunteers work alongside centre staff in many activities.

There has been limited success in enabling young parents and those without work to obtain skills and qualifications that could help them to access further training and opportunities for employment. A few have undertaken a recent 'learning through play' course, although there have been no opportunities in basic skills in the last year or so. Managers have rightly identified that more needs to be done to address the needs of target groups, particularly young parents, and discussions have begun with Adult and Community Learning.

Leaders have a clear view of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement, although some self-evaluation judgements are a little generous. The service plan for the centre's development is detailed and sets out appropriate priorities, although actions to be taken to address these are sometimes not clear enough. Criteria to evaluate success are not always precise enough and linked to measurable outcomes, particularly for local priorities. Important areas for improvement have been identified correctly and action to address these is to be implemented shortly. Consequently, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Redouble efforts to engage families in the more disadvantaged areas of the reach so that they benefit fully from the activities of the centre.
- Improve the support provided for those currently not in work in engaging with education and training prior to moving into the world of employment.
- Evaluate the impact of the centre's activities on the well-being and development

- of families more effectively in order to inform future development by:
 - collating and analysing evaluation data from particular events and activities
 - establishing the impact of activities on target groups at suitable points in the medium and longer term.
- Improve the planning for service improvement through setting out actions more clearly and specifying ways of judging success more precisely so that the plan supports checking progress and evaluating success more effectively.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Families benefit from a range of activities to promote a healthy lifestyle. 'Bosom Buddies' provides support for breastfeeding and the centre has a number of trained peer supporters who offer additional help. As a result, although the rate of breastfeeding at birth is broadly average, the proportion of mothers breastfeeding six to eight weeks after birth is above average. Although the level of obesity among children of Reception age has been below average, there has been a sharp increase and it is now above average. The centre's activities to counter this include promoting healthy eating through other events, for example 'Active Tots', and home visits. Specific activities are planned for the near future. The centre has been successful in helping young mothers to address emotional health issues they have encountered through the highly regarded art therapy course and 'Mum's the Word'. Counselling is also available to promote mental health.

Families trust staff and are confident in sharing problems and seeking help which is often provided on an individual basis. For example, one parent in need of help in stressful times benefited from being supported in attending groups and from being able to confide in staff about her complex challenges. The centre has developed its staff's understanding of the benefits of use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). When CAFs are used, they are used well to establish levels of need and the centre works closely with a range of agencies to ensure appropriate provision is made. The most vulnerable families, including those where children are subject to the child protection register, are well supported by the centre through home visits and one-to-one help, as well as through partnerships with other agencies. For example, one family new to the area benefited from the centre as a 'safe place' that provided emotional support as well as practical advice on finances and benefits.

Families enjoy the varied opportunities provided by the centre. Groups are often popular, for example, 'Little Explorers', 'Growing Together' and 'Incredible Years'. Parents' confidence in their parenting skills has improved, particularly their understanding of how children learn and develop and of how best to support this. The centre has trained its staff in promoting approaches to supporting children's development that will help parents prepare them for joining Reception classes. Such approaches permeate many of the activities provided and help to explain why the Early Years Foundation Stage data in the reach show an improving trend, although achievement remains below average. The gap between the lowest performing 20%

of children and the rest had been narrowing but it widened again in 2012 and is currently wider than that found nationally. The local authority is ensuring that targeted intervention is supporting particular schools in the reach in improving their provision to address this.

The 'Work Club' provides a useful forum for parents to seek advice, for example on benefits, and signposts parents to further help, such as through Jobcentre Plus. The Citizens Advice Bureau provides sessions from time to time, for example for the Young Parents group. Volunteering at the centre makes a valuable contribution to parents' confidence and has assisted some in securing employment. However, the centre's work to encourage parents to engage in basic skills training, for example in literacy and numeracy, is at an early stage.

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	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	3
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?

3

The centre is based in the same building as key health professionals, including midwives, health visitors and speech and language therapists. Families benefit from the easy, informal communication with centre staff that this supports and this complements more formal meetings well. Although the centre building is located in Teignmouth, most activities are provided at 'The Bungalow' and other venues in Dawlish and beyond and are thus conveniently located for most in the reach. The centre is currently expanding provision in the more distant areas towards Exeter.

Centre staff take trouble to build a good knowledge of the needs of families from target groups engaged with the centre. This is supported by information from partner agencies and knowledge gleaned from home visits as well as data supplied by the county council. These needs are often met through targeted provision, for example 'Step by Step' and 'Growing Together' for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the centre has been less successful in engaging

the more vulnerable families in the most disadvantaged parts of the reach, particularly where the holiday trade results in changes in the population in the summer months.

Much attention is given to evaluating the impact of activities, session by session and at the end of a course. This is used well as a basis for regular discussions among centre staff in order to improve future events. The approach is useful but it does not readily support the analysis of key strengths and areas for development of particular courses and events, and comparisons between different activities and between the success of similar courses in different years. The centre celebrates the achievements of children and families through its newsletters but these are not up to date on the centre's website and this, and other forms of electronic communications, could be more widely used to inform or remind families about opportunities.

The centre builds opportunities to meet outside agencies into activities provided, for example the Citizens Advice Bureau, so that those in need of particular help, such as young parents, have easy access. Families receive coordinated support and guidance on particular concerns, such as difficulties in family relationships, through links established with other agencies, for example Family Intervention Services, and one-to-one support, including home visits from centre staff.

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre manager and the staff are enthusiastic and committed to developing the centre to meet the needs of families in the reach. Staff are well trained and their knowledge and expertise are recognised and valued by families using the centre. The centre benefits from working in partnership with the Sure Start Teignmouth Children's Centre through sharing staff who often take the lead on activities in both reaches. The centre runs smoothly and day-to-day management is effective.

The action plan for the centre's development sets out clear priorities that contain some set by the local authority and some additional targets identified locally. Local targets result from suitable consultations that include opportunities for families and partner agencies to contribute. Actions identified to address priorities are sometimes not clear enough and what is set out to evaluate the expected impact sometimes lacks enough precision and reference to relevant data. These features make the plan more difficult to access, especially for those checking progress, for example members

of the Partnership and Monitoring Group. This body has clear terms of reference with a wide-ranging and appropriate membership. However, there have been problems in securing attendance, particularly from parents who have sometimes stated that vocabulary used in meeting is not readily understandable by parents. Arrangements for the centre to account for its work to Action for Children are clear and the local authority maintains suitable oversight of its work through a new arrangement of six-monthly reviews, with a further review at nine months where needed.

Safeguarding arrangements are good, with all necessary policies and procedures in place. Staff work well with other agencies to protect children's welfare, and levels of care are high. Activities are carefully risk-assessed for any possible dangers to users. The centre strives to include all families and to treat all with respect. Families from minority ethnic backgrounds have received individual assistance. One parent praised the support of a project worker in seeking professional advice, saying she 'couldn't have done it without her'. The centre also helps with transport to groups and events for those who would otherwise find these hard to access and this supports target groups in engaging with the work of the centre.

Outcomes for families are satisfactory. Although the centre has met its overall target for registrations, it has been less successful in ensuring a high level of engagement from the most disadvantaged areas in the reach. Sure Start Dawlish Children's Centre thus provides satisfactory value for money.

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	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	3
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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sure Start Dawlish Children's Centre on 13–14 March 2013 and judged the centre as satisfactory overall with some aspects that are good. The centre has met its targets in registering families but it has been less successful in getting those who live in the more disadvantaged parts of its area involved in activities.

The centre is welcoming and its partnerships with other agencies help you in many ways, for example with advice on benefits. You have good opportunities to contribute to the running of the centre through volunteering and through the 'Friends of Sure Start'. You are well supported in keeping your children safe. Arrangements for protecting their welfare are good and staff work successfully to ensure that groups and activities run in safe and secure places. In the sessions we visited, we saw that activities were planned well and there was much enjoyment. You are provided with helpful guidance, often through home visits and one-to-one support.

There have been few opportunities for you to improve your basic skills to help you move into training and to enter, or re-enter, the world of work. We have asked the centre to press ahead with its efforts to improve these. The centre is planning to gather views on how the courses provided have helped you after some months have gone by and to gather more systematically information on what you think of groups and activities. We have asked staff to press ahead with this work.

The centre manager and the staff have a clear idea of the centre's strengths and areas where improvement is needed. The plan to guide improvement could be improved with clearer actions and ways of judging how much difference those actions have made. However, all the staff are keen to make the centre even better and we are confident that they have the right priorities.

We would like to thank those of you who were available to talk to us about the ways Sure Start Dawlish Children's Centre has helped you. It is clear that you value the opportunities and care that the centre provides. We would like to wish you every success in the future.

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