

Inspection report for West Moors Children's Centre

Local authority	Dorset
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Inspection dates	21–22 March 2013
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Three Legged Cross First School URN 113678
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the cluster manager, centre lead and staff, a senior leader of the school, representatives from the local authority, and the cluster advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, such as the health services, parents and carers and other users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

West Moors Children's Centre was established as a phase two centre in 2007 and is open every weekday. It meets its core purpose through a range of services offered including baby and toddler support groups, play and learn sessions, outreach family support and health services. Outreach services are also provided at several community venues.

The centre is one of a cluster of five children's centres managed by Action for Children in East Dorset commissioned by the Local Authority. It is located next to West Moors Middle School and the reach area covers Westmoors, St Leonards, Three Legged Cross, Verwood, St Ives and Ashley Heath. The population is spread out over a largely rural area with some social housing estates, as well as permanent and temporary Traveller accommodation. While there are areas of affluence, the centre serves a high number of areas with considerable levels of deprivation. Three Legged Cross has the most social and economic disadvantage and the highest level of workless households. Overall, 16% of children under five years 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 and staff are shared with local children's centres within the cluster, also managed by Action for Children.

The ethnic make-up of families living in the area is mainly White British. There are about 669 children below the age of five years living in the reach area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally below the levels expected for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory in meeting the needs of an increasing number of families, and outcomes are satisfactory overall. However, the number of families from the different target groups benefitting from services is not yet sufficient, despite targets being set and staff working hard to increase family involvement, including offering more activities out in the community. Senior leaders rightly recognise this as a main priority.

Provision is satisfactory overall but the quality of care and support for families using the centre is good, especially the outreach work provided by family support workers. The large majority of families are satisfied with the services they receive. Parents and their children feel safe in attending the centre. Children are well supervised and good procedures ensure a strong focus on safeguarding practices that ensure families are well protected. An inclusive, welcoming ethos results in families and children enjoying the activities and developing their self-esteem. Families value the way the service helps them build supportive friendships.

The centre is well organised and provides a wide range of information on health and

safety, healthy eating, domestic violence and job opportunities that families readily access. Many families have developed greater knowledge of parenting, have gained skills in managing their children's behaviour and report they are enjoying time with their children more as a result of their experiences at the centre. Families trust the staff and know whom to contact in times of crisis. Families value the good-quality emotional and practical support they receive, including help in accessing funding for childcare, help with claiming benefits, and advice on housing, education, breastfeeding and weaning.

The centre is planning to extend its provision to those families most in need not yet accessing services regularly. Families who attend activities have their needs met well, but the relatively low attendance rate means services are not reaching some families across target groups, who are missing out. Learning and development is satisfactorily promoted but some opportunities are missed to enhance parents' understanding of the specific activities which are beneficial for their children's language development.

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 helping the centre build for improvement. However, the cluster advisory board has not played a strong enough role in challenging the centre or in providing opportunities for parents to contribute to decision making. Relationships are good but strategic partnerships have yet to ensure that all services are fully integrated.

Parents' views are increasingly used well by the centre to improve services. The self-evaluation process provides an accurate view of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Recent action has been more sharply focused than in the past on evaluating outcomes and targeting improvement. These features, together with the well-motivated, knowledgeable staff, provide a satisfactory capacity for sustaining improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families and children from all target groups that access centre services, including the most vulnerable families.
- Ensure that activities maximise opportunities for parents and carers to learn about children's development and in particular how to build their communication and language skills.
- Strengthen partnerships, in particular with health, schools and adult education, so that services are further integrated and all partners are highly engaged with the work of the centre.
- Enhance the work of the cluster advisory board in order to challenge and drive improvements and provide further opportunities for parents to take part in the centre's decision making.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

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 their children's behaviour in appropriate ways, and children become calmer and more accepting of boundaries.

Breastfeeding is promoted satisfactorily and effective support is available through the cluster peer support group. However, rates have been static and, in recognition of this, staff have received training in breastfeeding awareness and are now working closer with health staff to target improvement. Parents value a five-week 'Food, Activity and Behaviour' course where they learn about sensible meal portions and active lifestyles. Whilst obesity rates for older children are high, outcomes for young children are showing improvement. Links with health professionals are generally good and early referrals are made to assist children with 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; as a result, a few have stopped smoking.

Children and adults feel safe and children learn how to keep themselves safe, for example they learn about safe boundaries and what is safe to touch in the forest school sessions. 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 two-year-olds' day care and support for a mother who had experienced domestic violence.

Children and parents enjoy playing in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Good use is made of the outdoor play area, where parents learn how to keep their children safe outside. One parent commented, 'It was great getting children used to outdoor activities and learning about trees and plants. It has given me ideas of things to do at home.' The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) results for the area are improving and progress in closing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is good. Learning sessions in the centre are now linked to the EYFS. Some parents gain valuable parenting skills through attending the 'Incredible Years' programme and learn how to support their children during transition to school through a bespoke five-week programme run in partnership with Three Legged Cross First School.

Feedback from parents who attend courses identify that their children are prepared ready for school as a result of specific activities where they learn about cooperation and making relationships. Those that attend also become more knowledgeable about childcare, education and training opportunities. Activities at the centre are improving

the economic stability and independence of families satisfactorily. For example, families receive debt counselling and help in making benefit claims to manage their budgets confidently. Families are gaining timely information to move forward in their lives through good one-to-one support that increases self-esteem and programmes such as the '7 Transformational Steps', where parents report greater confidence and a better sense of direction in their lives. Parents follow up job opportunities displayed on a 'jobs board' where they can usefully see what job opportunities are available in the area. Some parents using the centre have found suitable employment and training and in consequence improved their economic well-being.

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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre is increasingly effective in 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 families from Travelling backgrounds benefitting from services. While the registration rate has increased from 24% to 53% over the past year, there is still a considerable distance to go to reach the targets set for attendance. However, staff are working hard to increase participation rates, including offering activities in locations more convenient to families.

Provision to help children and parents learn and develop is satisfactory. Learning is promoted satisfactorily through 'Sensory Play', 'Chatterbox' and 'Music and Movement' sessions, but some opportunities are missed to enable parents to understand how specific activities help their children build skills for the future, for example why reading and singing with their children is important to encourage language development. Families that use the centre learn well and benefit considerably through improved parenting, but further promotion of the valuable

services on offer is required to ensure that families across target groups do not miss out. Parents are helped well to achieve improved personal and social skills and increase their ability to make friends, and an increasing number move on to education and training. For example, one mum reported that 'I now have more confidence and have made valuable new friendships.'

Consistently good-quality care is given to families by the tailor-made packages of support they receive from the family workers, who are sharply focused on meeting families' identified needs. Good working relationships with the education specialist teachers who work with Traveller families have been developed and joint work is often undertaken that improves families' lives. Traveller and military service families value the good one-to-one support and the play and learn groups. Support in times of crisis, for children with disabilities and for women who have experienced domestic abuse is good. Mothers have reported that the 12-week 'Freedom' programme has provided valuable support in developing ways of behaving to protect themselves and their children. Staff are able to give good-quality information, advice and guidance and signpost parents well to any services they need.

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

Day-to-day arrangements are clear and the centre is well organised. Staff are motivated and well trained and work together as a supportive team. A new management structure, new cluster manager and recent contract management meetings have been effective in setting challenging targets and a strong vision. However, the purpose of the cluster advisory board has not always been clear in analysing data, challenging the centre's performance and driving improvements. The collection and provision of local data from the local authority has been slow but plans are well in hand to improve this. A new system for registrations, with the effective support of health visitors, has contributed to rapid recent increases in registrations, especially for lone parents.

Activity sessions are evaluated by centre users and their feedback helps to improve services. Over the last year the collection and analysis of data has improved significantly and self-evaluation processes give leaders an accurate picture of the centre's strengths and areas for development. The centre provides a stimulating and well-organised environment. Creative use is made of a number of community venues to offer bespoke activities to some target groups. The value for money provided is

satisfactory.

The management team demonstrates a growing awareness of the different target groups who live in the area and has increased steps to engage them. For example, the provision of a play and learn group at Three Legged Cross is engaging more workless families. Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. All are made welcome at the centre, including those with disabilities and with sight and hearing impairment. Transport is provided for those families who have difficulties accessing services, and adult learning is supported with crèche facilities; as a result, the participation rate of vulnerable families is increasing. At 23%, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is much narrower than seen nationally and reflects positively the centre's strong commitment to equalities. The centre is working closely with a local 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 record checks comply with government requirements. Families troubled by domestic violence are helped to keep safe and many attend the 'Freedom' course that increases their aspirations. One participant said, 'I don't know how I would have got on without the coaching and good support.' 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. Comprehensive 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; for example, family support workers are developing strong links with health professionals, pre-schools and nurseries. Partnerships with some agencies, particularly at the strategic level, are not yet fully developed to provide fully integrated services. For example, 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. Partnership working with adult education agencies is at very early stages and partnerships with all schools in the reach area, although satisfactory, are 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 shape 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 that 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 Travelling families' increased participation.

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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the West Moors Children's Centre on 21st and 22nd of March 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

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 'Sensory Play' and 'Music and Movement' 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 you find the staff. 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 benefitted 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 'Chatterbox', play and learn 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 sessions do not always maximise opportunities for you to learn about child development and we have asked the centre to improve this. A growing number of local families attend the centre, but to ensure the services are reaching those most in need we have asked the centre to further promote its services, including for those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable.

Your children's centre is well organised and effectively managed on a daily basis and there are clear plans being acted upon to further develop community links. Many partnerships are already well developed but to fully bring together services to benefit you we have asked that these are further strengthened, especially with health, schools and adult education. The centre evaluates its services well and is keen to continue to ask your views to help them 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 reviewed. 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 play and learn group in an area serving Traveller communities.

The clear commitment that leaders, managers and staff demonstrate and 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.