

# South Molton and Oakmoor

South Molton and Oakmoor Children's Centre, Fore Street, Witheridge, Tiverton, EX16 8AH

**Inspection dates** 27-28 November 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This children's centre group is good.

- Families benefit from a good range of groups and activities that meet their needs well. Parents improve their parenting skills, learn new ways of playing with their children and develop ways of maintaining a healthier lifestyle.
- Good information sharing and a strong emphasis on agencies working together protects children most in need and, in most cases, gives parents the type of support they need, when they require it.
- Highly skilled outreach workers provide very effective one-to-one family support that enables many families to bring about a very positive change in their lives. Parents trust centre staff and know they have their children's best interests at heart.
- Partnerships with voluntary groups and other agencies support the work of the centres giving families good access to practical help, advice and guidance relating to housing, welfare benefits, domestic violence and finance. Partners are flexible and quick to respond to a crisis or when urgent need is identified.
- The local authority works well with the centres to understand the needs of local communities and to improve the lives of families and children in the area and set challenging targets that are carefully monitored ensuring the centres continue to improve.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The use of information to evaluate the effectiveness of services is under-developed. In particular, there is a lack of clear and measurable targets linked to meeting the needs of local priority groups and how services improve the lives of these families.
- Too few opportunities are in place for parents to become formally involved in supporting and evaluating the work of the centre. In a small minority of sessions, staff do not encourage parents to understand fully how they can support their child's learning and development.
- Some written assessments and recording of progress are too descriptive and fail to show clearly the difference the centre staff make to the lives of children and their families.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of this group of children's centres was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, Devon County Council and Action for Children representatives, the children's services manager and children's centre lead, health, education and social work professionals, partner agencies, family support and early years support practitioners, home visitors, community development workers, business support officers, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited South Molton Children's Centre and Oakmoor Children's Centres, Chulmleigh Pavillions, the Amory Centre and South Molton Methodist Church. Centre staff accompanied inspectors on some visits. The children's centre lead and children's services manager attended all inspection team meetings.

Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the self-evaluation, delivery and development plan, a sample of case files, relevant policies and procedures and children's development records.

## Inspection team

Nigel Evans	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Jane Burchall	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Talbot-Stretle	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

South Molton Children's Centre, and Oakmoor Children's Centre make up the group of children's centres covering part of the North Devon area. South Molton is a phase two centre established in 2007 and Oakmoor is a phase three centre. The group is managed by Action for Children on behalf of Devon County Council and there is a shared advisory board. The area covered by the group is predominantly rural with some very isolated villages surrounding the Oakmoor centre. The children's services manager oversees the group with the children's centre lead responsible for day-to-day management.

The group offers a range of activities and services to meet its core purpose, including family support, outreach work, baby massage, stay and play groups, feeding support, child health clinics, outdoor activities, parent support groups and parenting programmes. A wide range of partners provide specialist advice, guidance or services further support the work of the group. These partners include a domestic violence support group, the local food bank, a charity working with families facing hardship or financial exclusion and the community learning provider.

There are 960 children under five years of age living in the area the centres' serve. Almost all of the families from the area are of White British heritage. The majority of the social housing is in the South Molton area, many families across the reach area from the identified priority groups are housed in privately rented accommodation. Although the group has relatively low rates of child poverty there are small pockets of deprivation across the area, particularly amongst the isolated farming community. Employment opportunities in the area are restricted with many parents having to travel to the larger towns to find work.

Children's levels on entry to early years education vary, in the area served by the Oakmoor centre they are above the average expected and in the South Molton area they are slightly below the average.

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

- Improve the use of management information to evaluate the effectiveness of the service by setting clear, measurable targets that managers and relevant staff understand. In particular, the group should clearly specify the needs of local priority groups and how services improve the lives of these families.
- Increase the role of parents in evaluating the work of the group and influencing the direction of the service and the activities offered by widening the methods used to encourage parents to express their views and suggest improvements.
- Improve the consistency and rigour of written assessments and evidence of tracking, ensuring they are accurate, evaluative and clearly identify the progress made by individual parents and families.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- The very large majority of families living in the communities served by South Molton and Oakmoor are registered with the group. The centres know the majority of those from the priority groups including those living in isolated, rural communities. Staff understand the local communities well and provide good, relevant services and activities for families with the greatest needs
- Staff promote the work of centres very effectively. They ensure all relevant partners are aware of the range of activities and support provided. All registered families receive a regular newsletter, and outreach staff visit toddler groups frequently to ensure parents are aware of how the group's services can benefit them.
- The take-up of funded early education across the locality is good. Almost all three- and four-year-olds access early education and the centres have worked well to ensure that a good proportion of eligible two year olds receive their entitlement.
- The close working relationships between health professionals and centre staff ensure that families needing additional support receive quick access to early practical help and guidance. This early intervention contributes to the closing of the achievement gap as children develop. The group is kept well informed about the expected number of new births and new families moving into the area, enabling managers to plan and adapt the service offered.
- Parents attending the child health clinics are encouraged to take advantage of the good range of health and well-being related sessions, including breast and infant feeding support, 'Bumps to Babies', 'Tums to Tots' and the health and nutrition programme 'HENRY'.
- Highly effective outreach workers ensure that families with the highest and most complex needs receive appropriate support, often working with these families intensively to build trust and confidence. The local primary school in Witheridge provides a minibuss and volunteer driver to enable families without access to public or private transport to attend group sessions such as stay and play and the parenting programme.

### The quality of practice and services **Good**

- The highly effective partnership working and links with statutory, voluntary, charitable and community organisations contributes to the positive impact the group has on the lives of many children and families. Families experiencing crisis, hardship or poverty benefit from the good joint working with specialist organisations such as 'Encompass', 'Northern Devon Foodbank' and the local credit union. The Oakmoor centre acts as a distributor for the foodbank when parents are unable to travel to South Molton.
- The group maintains thorough and detailed records of the work it undertakes with families. Staff engage families well in identifying the changes needed in their lives and effectively empower them to bring about these changes. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is used particularly well to assess the complex needs of families and to ensure an integrated approach is taken to provide early help and intervention. The quality of assessment and action planning through the family 'Outcome Star' is less effective at helping families to identify the actions they need to take.
- Children make a good start at school because of high quality early years provision. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the large majority of children reach a good level of development. The centre uses information available to them well to identify where children may benefit from extra support and help. Together with the local learning communities, they implement plans aimed at better transition support into school.
- The centres provide a good range of opportunities for parents to participate in activities to support their social, personal and employability skills. Community learning provision successfully supports literacy, numeracy and GCSE achievements with a range of appropriate accredited provision. Most parents accessing courses make good progress and improve their confidence and

employability. Several parents reported feeling more confident when helping their children with homework.

- The strong promotion of volunteering opportunities leads to employment both in the centres and externally for a number of parents. Volunteers are well trained and supported to undertake a range of roles in their own communities and within the centre group.
- Highly relevant, effective, one-to-one family support, successfully enables many families to bring about very positive changes to their lives. Families truly value the support they receive, particularly at times of crisis. The good quality support in place for maternal mental health resulted in parents growing in confidence significantly and in some cases accessing adult education or paid employment. Many of these parents make good and in some cases outstanding progress as a result of the support provided by home visitors and their effective coordination of other services.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

**Good**

- The local authority, Action for Children and the children's services manager work well together to agree the priorities for the group and set a clear strategic direction. The accurate analysis of local needs effectively informs the commissioning and availability of services and resources, which meets local needs.
- The advisory board includes a good range of expertise and experience. Board members are very active in scrutinising the work of the centres and provide a good level of challenge and support. The recently introduced 'Workshop approach' appears to be effective in identifying what is working well and where improvements are needed. Board members and centre staff work hard to improve the involvement of parents in assessing and influencing the work of the centres. They also recognise the need to increase parental representation on the board from the current low level.
- The monitoring of the performance of the group by using data and management information is adequate. However, the recording of the impact of specific interventions and the resulting progress made is less clear, making it difficult for managers to measure the overall impact of the service provided on the priority groups. The development plan sets clear aspirations for an improving service but the targets for improvement are not easily measurable nor do all relevant staff understand their contribution to the achievement of the targets.
- Suitable policies and procedures strengthen the clear safeguarding arrangements in place. Staff benefit from suitable training according to their role, they have a good understanding of what to do should they have a concern about a child or another staff member. Appropriate recruitment procedures ensure the suitability of staff appointed and clear records identify previous employment and the take up of references. Staff receive regular supervision, which guides them in their work with families, including the completion of CAFs for children subject to a child protection plan, children in need and those who are looked after.
- The well-qualified staff have good professional experience. The very effective professional development improves staff practice and develops their understanding of specialist areas such as mental health.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and, as a result, inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

## Group details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80313
<b>Local authority</b>	Devon County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	424750
<b>Managed by</b>	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	960
<b>Centre leader</b>	Rhona Molyneux
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01884860247
<b>Email address</b>	Rhona.Molyneux@actionforchildren.org.uk

## This group consists of the following children's centres:

- South Molton Children's Centre
- Oakmoor Children's Centre

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