

Inspection report for Alcombe Children's Centre

Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	361078
Inspection dates	28-29 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Steffi Penny HMI

Centre governance	John Kirby
Centre leader	Rob Odams
Date of previous inspection	No previous inspection
Centre address	Alcombe Children's centre Stephenson Road Minehead TA24 5EB
Telephone number	01643 700030
Fax number	
Email address	rodams@educ.somerset.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cheeky Cherubs

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2010



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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff, partners and representatives of the local authority linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work. They also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

The centre was purpose built in 2005 sharing the same site as an independently run specialist dentist. Also on-site is Cheeky Cherubs, offering a 52 place private nursery and day care for children aged under 8 years, which is open for 51 weeks of the year. Some children attending the day nursery have skills and levels of development generally below those expected for their age.

Overall the centre serves an averagely disadvantaged area, containing parts that are both highly advantaged and significantly disadvantaged. It is within walking distance of a large 1950's housing estate, which has a mixture of private and social housing. There are also several isolated rural families living within Exmoor Park. Employment figures are relatively average, while much work is seasonal and qualification levels are low. Most families are of White British heritage, although there is an increasing range of ethnic diversity in the locality.

The centre offers a full range of integrated services for children and their families. It has a relatively small geographical reach. Services tend to be delivered from the centre. The centre leader also manages Dulverton Children's Centre, approximately 20 miles away. There is some sharing of resources across both centres in administration and family support.

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 users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Alcombe children's centre provides satisfactory support to children and families and all five of the Every Child Matters outcomes for them are at least satisfactory. Inclusive communication systems and easily accessible rooms means that families who have members with special educational needs and/or disabilities can use the centre with ease. Children in the nursery benefit from this particularly the support from nursery staff enhanced by the speech and language therapists.

Relationships with families are good and the centre rightly prides itself on the warm welcome it extends to all. Users speak very positively about what the centre provides, one said 'You are always welcome and everyone is always in a good mood'. Strengths include the impact of actions taken to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families and actions to improve their physical and emotional health. This is because of the readily available access to health visitors along with good support from outreach workers to help those most in need. Younger parents were overwhelmingly positive about their support from the centre. One typically said 'I wouldn't have been able to cope if I hadn't had the group helping me...the staff go out of their way'. This good support has helped many of them to learn, develop and gain qualifications.

The centre's self-evaluation is mainly accurate. However, it is not yet securely based on sufficient data showing the trends over time. The local authority and centre governance have recognised this and new data systems are being instigated, to offer more useful information. Session leaders and those that participate in them evaluate courses and individual sessions. However, the impact of the intervention programmes on individuals, particularly through the evaluations conducted by partner organisations, does not help the centre clearly demonstrate where outcomes are better than satisfactory. Nevertheless, due to the hard work and close working relationships between staff within the different organisations any further needs of families are swiftly identified and addressed. Services are increasingly integrated. Shared actions taken to support, involve and improve outcomes for younger parents

and families who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are good.

The head of centre and his team maintain a sense of stability and purpose during a protracted period of uncertainty and possible staff and service restructuring. There is a high priority given to safeguarding in the centre. All staff are appropriately vetted and recruitment procedures are robust. The centre plans to have an advisory board, involving a more formal sharing of user's views, to help act as a critical friend for the future development and evaluation of the centre's impact. Until this group and the improved data systems are firmly in place the centre's capacity to improve is somewhat inhibited, although the recent developments clearly show that it is going in the right direction and the overall capacity is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- With the local authority, implement the new data systems and advisory board to better challenge and evaluate the impact of activities and provision.
- Analyse the data and trends to adjust services as necessary to ensure that all groups in the community that require support are reached and that all users needs are met.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Life story evidence and some individual user evaluation feedback sheets from course and programmes attended are overwhelmingly positive. These indicate that services provided by the centre are having a constructive impact on individual children and their families who take advantage of them. However, the centre is aware that there are likely to be some members of the community it still does not reach. As yet the centre has little collated information on the impact of each of its courses on all the Every Child Matters outcomes. The centre is aware that this is an area they need to develop and have advanced plans to do so.

The Common Assessment Framework process is used very effectively to support families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances and for children who are in the care of the local authority. This ensures that all services can help support them where appropriate with the result that their quality of life improves and steps are effectively taken to help ensure their safety. Early identification of needs and close relationships with health services ensures that the centre users have improved outcomes in this area.

Parents said that they really enjoyed 'stay and play' as the session leader makes the activities really fun for children and adults. Many of the parents that spoke with inspectors said they felt very supported at the centre, often lacking in self-confidence at first but that the centre staff and courses enabled them to access services confidently.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The range of the provision offered by the centre is satisfactory. The small number of centre staff is well-supplemented with partners from the health services and voluntary organisations to provide appropriate courses in school-term time. The centre does not offer the same number and type of courses in the holidays. This is because there is an increase in similar activities at this time locally and they have agreed not to duplicate resources that other partners are providing. During the inspection several parents said they would like to attend courses at the centre in the summer holidays. These views matched those of user evaluation feedback questionnaires related to centre courses. The centre is aware that it needs to evaluate the impact of this agreement to determine whether any groups in the community are not being served well enough by the centre.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit well from the joint operation and partnerships of the services provided. For example, through ARCHEY (Action and Review of children in the Early Years) and MAISEY (Multi-agency Identification and Support in the Early Years) meetings all the different agencies are brought together at the centre to look at an individual child's needs and help to ensure that the services and provision are looked at together. Consequently services provide greater value for money whilst enhancing the Every Child Matters outcomes for individuals in a consistent and coherent way. Subsequently children have pre-school entry plans appropriate to their needs.

Family Support workers play an active role in the health clinics offering good support and advice to parents and supporting and identifying needs with families. Younger parents in particular said they felt the centre had made a big difference to them. A relative weakness is the impact that Jobcentre Plus makes to the centre. However, parents have been able to receive advice and support on making career changes, including advice on benefits available on returning to work. This has been primarily

delivered by the Shaw Trust.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. There is good established partnership working with health services leading to early interventions and users have confidence that the services provided by the centre meets their needs. The centre takes the views of users into account in evaluating and adapting courses. It is aware that this process is not formal enough for users to be fully able to help make decisions and act as critical friends. An advisory board is being constructed to enable this to happen. The arrangement with other local centres and voluntary organisations is a very effective approach to overcoming limited resources.

The centre's arrangements for safeguarding children and families meet requirements well. Checks have been made on all adults who work as part of the centre and a single central record is maintained and updated when needed. Health and safety checks and risk assessments are appropriately carried out.

Careful attention has been made to promoting an inclusive environment, including accessibility via ramps, signs and symbols and the celebration of different heritages. For example, during the inspection the centre celebrated through displays, books and leaflets Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history. However, monitoring and evaluation are at the early stages of development as is the collection and analysis of data. Consequently, the centre cannot yet provide sufficiently robust evidence of the positive outcomes of all interventions and show how well they adapt provision to meet all users' needs. In particular the lack of full, relevant evaluation by other partners is one factor that limits the centre's capacity to improve. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
--	---

The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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

The day nursery was last inspected in October 2006. It was not inspected fully as part of this children's centre inspection.

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

Dear Parents

We inspected the Alcombe Children's Centre on 28-29 July. We talked with parents, staff, partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Under the careful guidance of Mr Odams staff provide good levels of care, guidance, and support for all those who use the centre. Parents reported that they felt the centre helped improve their self-confidence and improved their lives, particularly younger parents. We were impressed with how well the centre supports families who

have members with special educational needs and/or disabilities. With its partners the centre uses resources carefully to help those families who are most in need of support.

To develop further the work of the centre we have asked the centre and the local authority to improve the way they monitor and evaluate the work done through the centre. They had already planned to do this. We also agree with them that the centre needs to have an advisory board, with parents on it, to act as a critical friend for Mr Odams.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts and feelings about the centre. We wish you and your families the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

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