

Inspection report for Southmead children's centre

Local authority	Bristol City Council
Inspection number	361087
Inspection dates	23-24 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Steffi Penny HMI

Centre governance	Bristol City Council
Centre leader	Wendy Mortimer
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Fonthill Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Southmead Day Nursery

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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 additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with expectant parents, parents, staff, partners, members of the advisory board and representatives of the local authority and governing body.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including case-studies and the centres and partners evaluations of the impact of their work.

Information about the centre

Southmead children's centre opened in 2006. It is a phase one centre, providing nursery, health and outreach support, and vulnerable children's services to families and children in the north of Bristol with features of significant deprivation. In partnership with Brentry and Henbury children's centres it also provides phase three services to an adjacent area with identified pockets of deprivation.

The centre has developed from a local authority day nursery and family centre. The nursery offers integrated full day care from 0–5 incorporating sessional care for families in need. The Southmead day nursery was last inspected in February 2008 and the inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk

The local authority, in partnership with the centre manager, parents and linked agencies, provide governance for the centre. A management advisory board comprising statutory and voluntary supports them by overseeing the development of the centre. It contains representatives from all partners in the centre such as health, social services, Jobcentre Plus, community education, disabled children's services, childminders and Barnados.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The passion and drive demonstrated by staff that successfully help improve the life chances for young children and their families is the key to the good effectiveness of this centre. The centre’s own evaluations and past external inspections show that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress. There is an excellent focus on removing potential barriers and promoting the inclusion of all groups. The centre provides good quality activities which engage specific groups, particularly those who are normally hard to reach.

The commitment to the continued professional development of adults and staff within the centre has been pivotal in helping them getting into employment or promotion. It has also extended the expertise within the centre and its partners. Much of this is not easily measurable in the short or medium term. However, this combined with the way that all resources are excellently utilised to provide a vast range of provision ensures that the centre has a good capacity to further improve. The main barriers to improvement are its ability to demonstrate that services are reaching those who need it most within its designated area. This is due to the lack of sufficiently identified need and accurate performance data provided by the governing body. Nevertheless, the centre and other local partners have worked hard together to make sure that the services meet the needs of the local people who they have identified as having the most need or who are deemed vulnerable due to their circumstances.

The centre is good at identifying and meeting the language support needs of users for example, Polish and Malayalam speaking families. Good use is being made of people who can translate documents and discussions at a local level, particularly through volunteers. There are missed opportunities at local authority level to avoid duplication in partnerships services and agencies.

Excellent partnership work with health professionals ensures that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified early. Exemplary provision

is made for them and their families. This is also the case for those families, which the centre and its partners have recognised as having circumstances that make them vulnerable. The need for services for those families that have identified difficulties related to domestic abuse has increased over the last few years and the access to support and guidance from the centre has been greatly appreciated by those who have used them.

The centre's approach to safeguarding, safe recruitment and child protection is robust. They meet statutory requirements and are effectively used in practice. The centre has an appropriate range of other policies. Leaders need to ensure that these other policies are fully understood and followed by all members of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority in its role as the governing body should regularly provide robust, accurate data about the potential users in the locality. This is so that the centre has an accurate picture about the proportions of users from each potential group who are benefiting from its services.

- Senior leaders should regularly have spot checks to measure the impact of the centre's policies on provision.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

All outcomes are at least good and are improving for children and families who use the centre and its services. However, the centre does not yet have enough data provided by the governing body to demonstrate where outcomes are better than good, comparable with national averages, within its designated area.

Local evidence clearly shows that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are extremely well-cared for and their family lives are made less stressful. This is because they can meet with health professionals at the centre, along with their key worker, meaning that they do not need to have separate appointments in the hospital. This also cuts down timescales for the health professionals. They told inspectors it meant that diagnosis was easier and could be more accurate as children could be seen one-to-one and with their peers. Parents said it was very good to have a known member of the centre staff with them as they could not always remember exactly what was said when attending meetings. Staff felt that it also helped them to be in a better position to help families understand future options. The process assists the centre to closely identify and hone further support. Children on the child protection register, those involved with common assessment framework (CAF) processes, and/or looked after children are equally well supported so that levels of independence increase by them developing skills to support their future well-being.

As noted in the Ofsted Early Years inspection of 2008, children are making good progress in their learning. They are confident and curious about the world around them which they explore through carefully planned and evaluated activities to ensure that they develop good personal and social skills. Children's behaviour is good and relationships throughout the centre and associated services are excellent.

Parents speak highly of the breastfeeding support, which is helping them to continue feeding their babies this way for longer. Development of healthy lifestyles is also apparent in the early years settings where children eat healthy foods and get lots of exercise through indoor and outside play.

Partnership work with Jobcentre Plus and Tomorrow's People is effective at getting parents back into work or training. Parents reported that they felt that the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEPs) sessions help them improve the economic well-being of the family too, for example by learning how to save money through recycling in the home. They also said the 'Drop-in' sessions give them fun ideas to help them support their child's personal and social development resulting in happier children who enjoyed sharing their new rhymes and games at home. Inspection evidence and evaluation documentation provided by the centre and its partners concurs.

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	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a broad range of good quality activities that cover all of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. Health services are well integrated in the centre. Paediatricians and speech and language therapists regularly attend to make diagnosis, monitor the progress that children are making, help staff with further training and meet with parents. Information about breastfeeding and access to health visitors is also easily and regularly available.

Services and activities are developed in close partnership with other agencies, partners and service users so that they are enjoyable and that users achieve well. The outcomes of these are generally effectively shared. Sometimes the informality of this sharing does not facilitate the centre and its partners to be able to celebrate fully the success of the programmes and life stories between each other and with service users. The centre is also acutely aware that gaps in data about the area it serves may mean that, despite the good efforts to publicise its services, some families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances may be missing out on provision that could improve their lives. Centre leaders and partners are doing all that they can to notice and support such families. A key element in them being able to do so is through the effectiveness of outreach workers and health visitors.

The 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' programme is an example of where the centre has successfully secured funding to provide a high quality resource. It is highly effective in raising self-esteem through participation on a weekly basis with adults sharing life experiences with their peers in a safe and friendly environment. Over half of the attendees continue into further learning with almost half gaining employment or entering into voluntary work.

Parents say they notice the difference that activities provide for their children, for example one said that the 'drop-in session' helped their child's learning by being able to interact with other children with good quality and very-well guided activities. This

and 'stay and play' were also reported by parents as reducing their feelings of isolation. It also provided parents with methods to increase their child's communication skills. Good use is made of the expertise of volunteers, for example a secondary school student helped children with producing Chinese characters to celebrate Chinese New Year.

CAF meetings are held within the centre and senior staff attend those for children under eight whose circumstances make them vulnerable. This helps staff to ensure that provision and services can be provided, or adapted, to meet their specific individual needs.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
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?

2

Governance, leadership and management at the local level are very strong. Accountability structures are clear and followed within the centre and day-to-day management is highly effective. The promotion of equal opportunities is the foundation stone that secures all the work that the centre does for developing happy, healthy children and families. It regularly seeks, listens and acts upon the views of parents, children and partners. A restrictive weakness is the challenge and support provided at other governance and leadership levels. The main limiting factor for the future development of the centre is the lack of robust data provided to the local team from the local authority.

All staff and partners work as a highly coordinated team. 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. The commitment to continued professional development is a major strength. It increases staff and partners awareness and helps them to identify where early interventions are needed.

The advisory board represents a vast array of the partners that the centre works with helping them to be in a position to support and challenge the work that the centre does. They have worked hard to know and understand the needs of their target

communities and have helped to adapt provision as they have noticed the demographics and needs changing over time. Currently there is no parental representative on the advisory board, although the centre is investigating ways to be more successful at encouraging a volunteer.

Because of the excellent relationships that are formed, children and parents say that they have the confidence to speak out if anything is concerning them. For example, all parents seen during the inspection were very enthusiastic about the centre. They praised its efforts to ensure that users from all ethnic and social backgrounds, as well as different genders, have an equal opportunity to access services and improve their own lives and those of their children. This is clearly evident in the way the centre uses images and resources that reflect all members of the community.

Health related partnerships are strong and have a good impact on improving outcomes for families, particularly for those who are most vulnerable due to their circumstances and those with special education needs and/or disabilities. Partnerships and integrated working between the agencies based in the centre are excellent at providing value for money for all parties. The direct budget to the centre has been reduced by half from its inception as a centre three years ago. However, the centre has consistently maintained good quality provision. It builds on successes and with partnership and user input continues to improve provision and outcomes for families that it has found are most in need of support.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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	2
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	2

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

The inspection of registered early years provision carried out in February 2008 judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to be good with outstanding elements. Actions taken to address the recommendations from the early years inspection have contributed to the judgement on capacity to improve in this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Southmead Children's Centre on June 2010. As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, talked with a range children and adults including: parents, staff, volunteers and partnership workers. We judged the centre as good overall with outstanding features in the way resources are used, the range of services and opportunities available, and the way it promotes equality.

Children and families benefit from well-integrated health and education provision. The promotion of health and enjoyment for those children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is exceptional. Specialist oversight and support makes a significant difference to these children's family lives. The use of and links with partners also helps to improve the quality of life and future opportunities for those families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. The centre is aware, however, that the lack of information from the local authority about the population it serves means that it cannot determine exactly what proportion of families in vulnerable circumstances it is reaching. We have asked the local authority in its role as part of the governing body to make sure that more accurate and regular information is made available to the centre's leaders.

A lot of positive re-enforcement by expert adults clearly reassures parents, raises their confidence, and extends their well-being. Parents told us that the centre is child-friendly and has a family welcoming ethos. Parents and children said they felt safe and that the centre staff and partners worked hard to make their lives better. Inspection evidence supports these views. As well as having good safety policies and procedures there is a range of other documents and policies that the centre has produced. We have asked the centre's leaders to make sure, by doing spot checks, that everyone involved in centre knows about them and where appropriate applies them.

Parents who use the centre are effectively supported to continue their education, training or get employment. Parenting skills and children's development are enhanced through services provided in the centres buildings and in the home. These are shaped with parents and centre partnerships to make them enjoyable and as well as increasing the learning of those who access them.

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