

# Inspection report for St Blazey Children's Centre

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Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	361090
Inspection dates	30 June–1 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Robert Pyner HMI

Centre governance	Advisory Board
Centre leader	Eileen McConnell
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Happy Days Nursery, Burrows centre, Lamellyn Road, Par PL24 2DD

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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 an Early Years Inspector.

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They held meetings with senior managers from the centre, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including the main Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare provider, health, education and children's social care professionals. They also spoke with representatives from a range of partners who have links with the centre together with users of the services. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a wide range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection judgements

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

## Information about the centre

St Blazey children's centre is situated in a residential area of the town in mid Cornwall. It was originally designated as a 30% children's centre but in 2009 was re-designated as a 70% centre. Therefore the provision of services is less than at designation. Data shows that the centre serves a reach area with disadvantage indicators such as child tax credits, income support and job seekers allowance which are broadly in line with those for Cornwall overall. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage.

The centre opened in 2005 but two years ago moved to its current accommodation in Fourways Youth Centre. The original accommodation at The Burrows remains the site of the linked early years provision. Services are mostly delivered at the centre or through outreach work. Parenting groups with crèche facilities are run by centre and

youth service staff. There is also community space to deliver other activities, for example family fun days. Support sessions are delivered for all childminders in mid Cornwall. Health visitors are based at Par Health Centre but have links with the centre including a baby and parent group. The local authority Family Information Service support the centre by providing services on site and through referral systems. This includes providing information, advice and assistance to families and specialist advice on childcare for parents with disabled children.

Cornwall council provide a weekly One Stop Shop at the centre which supports local residents with information and advice on a range of services. Local residents' association community wardens and police representatives also attend the sessions to provide advice. Jobcentre Plus representatives offer advice to clients over the telephone from the centre and additionally there is a linked computer and displays relating to services.

The centre has recently set up a single advisory board with representatives from a wide range of staff and partners. This group held its first meeting in June 2010. Previously governance was structured on a cluster basis with the advisory board managing three centres.

Childcare and nursery education is provided by a private provider Happy Days and this provision is located at The Burrows site close to the centre. The latest report for this provision can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The current manager of the centre took up her post in March 2010. She is also the manager of St Austell Children's Centre, which she has led for a year.

## 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

St Blazey Children's Centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families in its reach area. Some outcomes are good and these include support for the development of healthy lifestyles and measures to ensure the safeguarding of children. Throughout the inspection users spoke about their experiences of how the provision has benefited their families. There is a good level of care, guidance and support. Central to the more effective provision offered by the centre are the successful partnerships, notably with health, social care, the community and learning partnership, and the voluntary sector. These partnerships are effectively supported

and brokered by the council's locality structure for services. However, not all users were aware of the full range of provision; some were unclear about the services offered from the different sites and confused about the co-location of the centre with the youth service facilities. Some other aspects are less well represented at the centre and these include support and advice on the opportunities for education, employment and training for adults and some groups, for example fathers.

The manager was appointed in March 2010 and she also leads another nearby children's centre. She has used her leadership and management experience to good effect and in a short time has focused on the audit and development of services in a structured way. In this endeavour she has fully included staff and morale and expectations are high. Central to this development has been effective engagement with a range of partners to ensure services meet need. Together with this there is a clear understanding that effective use of data is required to develop provision, set appropriate outcome targets and monitor performance. However, this use of data is currently at an early stage of development. Integral to the improvement strategy is the establishment of a stand alone advisory board with representatives from a wide range of partners offering services through the centre. So far this group has held one meeting and so is at an early stage but advanced plans are in place to develop sharper, more focused targets for centre service delivery priorities based on data. Similarly, the development of a parents' forum is a priority and a group of parents has already received training from an independent partner on the requirements for this role.

Effective liaison with health professionals means that all expectant mothers are visited both before and after the birth of their children. Vulnerable families are identified and integrated work with the centre's family support worker means that referrals can be made through to the appropriate support agencies. Particularly effective work has been achieved with teenage mothers through the SPACE group to develop parenting skills, including healthy eating, literacy and numeracy skills, and peer support. The location in a youth centre helps this group to feel at home and they enjoy using the facilities available. This group has produced a DVD called 'Teens with Tots' about life as a teenage mother and this is used in three local secondary schools as part of personal and social education programmes for students.

Safeguarding is good and a priority for the centre. The centre manager has taken into account the aspects relating to shared accommodation and ensured that secure doors and fencing are appropriate for both groups of users. Safeguarding and employment vetting arrangements are robust and meet requirements. The systems for engaging with families, particularly through the work of the family support worker, means that referrals to social services at various levels are handled well through the council's locality structure. The centre's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is equally clear. The work with teenaged mothers is effective and there is evidence in the latest data that the achievement of the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest of the cohort is narrowing in the reach area. In addition to these strong features the centre provides specific Makaton communication training for parents of disabled children and some

have gone on to achieve an accredited qualification.

Taking into account the sound outcomes overall, the centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. This, together with the manager's determined focus on improvement indicates that the centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the roles of the advisory board and parents' forum to shape provision, in particular through the use of more systematic performance management procedures.
- Improve outcomes for families by using data more effectively to evaluate need, set challenging targets, monitor activities and measure performance as part of the annual planning cycle.
- Encourage more effective use of facilities by ensuring a greater understanding of the range of provision available with a particular focus on hard to reach groups such as fathers and the unemployed in order to provide opportunities for education, employment and training.

## How good are outcomes for users?

3
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The area has a high rate of teenage pregnancies and a particularly effective focus for the centre is its work with young mothers. The SPACE group involves a range of integrated provision emphasising parenting skills and educational opportunities, some of which lead to qualifications. Work with a partner agency on cooking skills is particularly popular. One group member said: 'I've learned so much. I really like getting up on a Wednesday to come to the centre.' The mothers attending can leave their babies in the crèche and work on a number of aspects of education, social and life skills. A local authority family learning course called 'Why weight?' on healthy eating and physical exercise aimed at families shows some evidence in the reduction in obesity rates for children in the reach area. Similarly, the course 'Here's looking at you baby' with a focus on parenting, communication and bonding is popular and has led to the development of a follow-up course, 'Here's looking at you little one'.

Children using services at the centre are effectively safeguarded. This is priority for all staff with clear improvements over the last few months. Staff use the common assessment framework effectively to ensure issues are recorded and good links with the locality working structure of the local authority means that vulnerable families can be monitored and supported. There is effective training for staff on safeguarding including vulnerable children. There is good multi agency support for families at times of crisis, for example the council's housing department and the Real Choices Project which can provide practical support if a clear need is demonstrated. The police ensure that officers are available for the One Stop Shop sessions at the centre to offer advice and guidance.

Data from the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage for children in the reach area

show that they are making satisfactory progress by the time they enter Year 1. The latest data show an improvement in attainment by the lowest achieving 20% in the reach area. There are examples of effective work by the children's centre teacher on the transition to school for vulnerable groups using a range of approaches. Outreach work with childminders is effective.

The centre is aware of the need to develop a greater understanding of the views of users and has organised an independent survey undertaken by Cornwall Neighbourhoods 4 Change. This showed some 84% satisfaction for the services offered although this reflected a very small sample (13). The centre is aware that the lack of comprehensive information about the population it serves means that it may not be engaging as fully with all groups as it would wish. A good example of this was seen when the parents attending a baby session with a health visitor. They enjoyed the opportunity to meet together with other mothers, discuss issues with the health visitor, who also visits them at home, and engage in purposeful play with their children. However, they did not know about all the services offered by the centre and would like further opportunities to attend with their children. One felt that as it was based in a youth centre, most of the provision was for teenagers. Similarly the centre recognises that there remains scope to increase adult involvement in training and education.

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

Overall provision is satisfactory. A strength is the medical screening for expectant mothers before and after the birth of their babies and the links with the family support work which leads to effective referrals to a range of services. However, although the action plan has priorities for 2010/11 including improvement of outcomes, early years provision, breastfeeding, teenage parents, adult learning and increasing centre based activities, none of these have quantifiable outcome targets. Furthermore, although there is data available from the council and a range of partners, this has to be requested piecemeal by the centre. Therefore, overall the

centre does not currently have a fully comprehensive view of the profile of need within the reach area. The centre is aware of this shortcoming and a priority action is to develop the use of data to shape services at the advisory board level. This lack of information on the reach area means that the centre cannot consistently judge the effectiveness of provision for children and their families. Programmes offered show good examples of individuals having opportunities to improve their educational and personal development. An example of this is the SPACE programme for teenage mothers. Less effective is the support for adults who want support and advice on employment or training. Jobcentre Plus has links with the centre but some capacity issues mean that this support is variable.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The family support worker and health professionals provide good referral pathways for families in need. Effective partnerships mean that there are systems in place for specific material support or the funding of training, such as learning to drive, needed for employment. These are provided through the Real Choices project or, for cases of real crisis for example involving domestic violence, support from the Choices agency.

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

Governance arrangements are developing satisfactorily. The centre manager has focused on the development of a single advisory board for the centre in the time since her appointment. In this she has shown the highest expectations and considerable drive with the result that the advisory board has representatives from most partners and is committed to improvement. An event planned for July will consider the outcome data for the area with a view to developing sharp and focused targets for the centre and systems for monitoring progress and performance management. This will enable a more cohesive approach to the work of the wide range of partners. It will to build on the good relationships and enable a sharper focus on a realistic number of priorities.

The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the work of the centre. Positive images, resources and tailored programmes highlight the centre's determination to reach out to the groups who may be subject to discrimination. Examples of this are the programmes for teenage mothers, parents of disabled children and the narrowing of the achievement gap between the lowest achieving



20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest of the cohort.

Safeguarding is of the highest priority for the centre. The centre's location in accommodation designed for the youth service has provided its own particular challenges, but users are in a very safe environment displaying imaginative adaptations. Safeguarding, vetting and recruiting procedures are robust and well managed.

The centre works hard to publicise its services and those who use the centre generally say the provision meets their needs often adding that they would like more opportunities to undertake the same type of activities in the centre. However, some users do not fully understand the role of the centre and remain a little confused about its location in a youth centre. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive data about the needs of the reach area means that the centre is less confident about its ability to make effective and targeted provision, especially for hard to reach groups. This, together with the generally sound outcomes overall, means that 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	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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 outcomes for children who attend the Happy Days private nursery provision linked with the centre were not inspected. However, the latest Ofsted report for this provider was used as background information.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the St Blazey Children's Centre on 30 June and 1 July. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The children's centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are helping children, young people and families in St Blazey. Throughout the inspection, parents, carers and young people told us how they had benefited from the support provided by the centre. An example of this effective work is the programme for young mothers which enables the development of parenting, social and learning skills. Particularly effective are the links with health workers who can encourage the mothers they visit to take part in centre activities and these can be followed up by the centre family support worker. This way services can be explained to families. The One Stop Shop is also helpful in providing help and advice to residents of all ages in the area. The wide range of partners involved with the centre means that it is in a good position to help families to gain advice and help. The work of the council in its locality base means that the centre can help people gain access to local services.

The centre works effectively to ensure the safety of children and there are clear links with social services. The centre itself is a very safe environment for users and there are clear benefits for some in the shared accommodation in a youth centre. When families find themselves in difficulty or even in crisis, the centre is able to support them effectively by providing information and resources to help.

The manager has only been in post for a short time but she has had a clear impact on the direction of the centre. Some of this work has involved working with partner organisations linked with the centre to develop an advisory board to oversee its work. Linked to this is the plan to collect more information and data about the needs of families in the area. Once this has been completed the advisory board and centre staff can more effectively develop the provision and services for families. The centre is also developing a parents' forum so that this very important group can provide a view about the work of the centre and develop the provision offered. You can play a part in this by considering whether you would like to join this group.

In discussion with users, they expressed appreciation for the courses and programmes available saying that they would like more of the same. Some did not really understand the purpose of the children's centre and were a little confused about the nature of the separate sites at Fourways and The Burrows for the nursery,

thinking the centre was only part of the youth service. The centre does publicise its services but this is not reaching all that would benefit from its provision. Gaining further information and data on the needs of the families in the area will enable sharper targeting of resources to support families more effectively.

As part of the report inspectors have made the following recommendations to help improve provision at the centre.

- Develop the roles of advisory board and parents' forum to shape the work of the centre.
- Use data effectively to evaluate need, set challenging targets, monitor activities and measure performance as part of an annual planning cycle.
- Encourage more effective use of facilities by ensuring a greater understanding of the range of provision available particularly for fathers and those seeking employment.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).