

Inspection report for Ilfracombe children's centre

Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	361094
Inspection dates	26-27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Diane Pedley
Date of previous inspection	
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Linked early years and childcare.	Oak Tree Nursery Neighbourhood Nursery
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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.

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 and an Additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's management group, the local authority, Action for Children, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of the centre

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

Information about the centre

The Ilfracombe Children’s Centre has developed from the Sure Start Local Programme and now covers the Ilfracombe Learning Community. It is known locally as the ‘My Start Children’s Centre’. The centre is a Phase 1 children’s centre providing the full core offer of services. It serves an area in the sea-side town of Ilfracombe within the top 30% most deprived areas of the country. The centre is run by Action for Children and managed by a core offer monitoring group. The area has few employment opportunities and, when compared with other centres in the county, a higher than average proportion of families are dependant on workless benefits. The vast majority of users are White British.

The centre is based on a campus model with two buildings located on the same site and a satellite centre in Combe Martin Primary School grounds. The centre provides Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the different sites. Oak Tree Nursery is under the management of Pre School Learning and did not form part of this inspection. It operates from within a new build on the Ilfracombe children’s centre site. This provision cares for a maximum of 35 children aged from birth to five years at any one session and was last inspected in October 2005. The centre provides additional childcare facilities in a registered crèche for parents attending activities and training at both sites. It also co-facilitates a nurture group for the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 children who attend Combe Martin Primary School.

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

My Start Children’s Centre meets the needs of users well and is making a good contribution overall to improving outcomes for users and the wider community. There is a strong focus on the importance of helping parents to develop attachment with their children and this helps to improve the well-being of children and adults. The centre has been particularly successful in encouraging fathers to develop close

relationships with their children.

The centre provides a welcoming and purposeful environment where users appreciate the personal greeting they receive whenever they enter the building. This centre is summed up accurately by a parent who describes it as a 'generous, warm and professional set up'. Information is shared well and centre staff work closely to provide outstanding care, guidance and support to users. The centre's approach is evident in the high levels of care and support they provide for more vulnerable families by sensitively helping them to access activities.

The centre provides a comprehensive and effective programme to promote users social and emotional well-being. There is effective emotional support for parents of very young babies because the centre has developed procedures to identify these needs early and respond appropriately. This support is maintained where necessary with good access to professional agencies to support children's and adolescents' mental and emotional health.

Users are provided with good quality advice and guidance regarding child development, and specifically speech and language development. The quality of the care provided to children at the centre is of exceptionally high quality. Parents have developed their understanding of children's early communication by directly observing the approach of staff in the crèche. Good outreach services result in reaching a significant percentage of the local population. Children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities are well supported through a well planned and coordinated approach.

Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures, are well trained and share their concerns well so that the safety of users is good. This strong multi-agency communication is effective in preventing family situations developing into crisis. Senior leaders and managers have mechanisms in place to verify effectiveness, efficiency and quality of recording concerns by completing random checks. However, the centre's implementation of its policy is only satisfactory overall because checks to ensure the suitability of staff from all professional agencies are incomplete.

The centre is an inclusive setting and by providing for a wide range of users, promotes equality well. Services are well attended and users often commit to completing courses which run over a period of time. However, whilst helping to develop younger parents, the range of adult education and courses accessed by users is limited. A high proportion of users are currently out of work and despite support from some professional agencies the current level of careers information, advice and guidance is satisfactory.

The strong and cohesive senior management team set high expectations and are determined to provide a good range of services. They have provided strong support for local schools and settings and overseen improved outcomes for children. Most noticeably in helping to raise the level of children's achievement within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Governance arrangements are clear and understood by a fully representative core offer monitoring group which includes members of all key partners. The centre has a good understanding of its

strengths and has identified accurately areas for improvement. The centre has successfully raised outcomes for users since opening, has strong leadership and an active monitoring group. This provides the centre with a good capacity to build on these successes in the future and further improve outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- ensure that all partnership agencies provide written confirmation that all appropriate checks have been completed and keep a record of the completion of these checks on the centre's register

- ensure the centre can demonstrate their success in improving outcomes for users seeking suitable employment by
 - providing better access to careers information, advice and guidance
 - providing a wider range of accredited adult training and education courses.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Parents show good understanding of healthy lifestyles and have a high regard for the quality of support provided. Parents are developing an understanding of healthy eating and staff frequently provide healthier food options for vulnerable families. Children's understanding of how to adopt a healthy lifestyle is effectively promoted within the crèche. Children freely access outdoor play, eat healthy snacks, and have healthy attachments to their key workers. However the centre has had limited impact on reducing rates of obesity in younger children.

The centre has a good understanding and appropriate levels of involvement with vulnerable children and families, including looked after children. Staff frequently initiate assessment procedures and work closely with other agencies to share concerns and contribute to a common recording process. They act proactively by finding adults places on courses to develop their parenting skills and maintaining regular contact with families. This makes an effective contribution to improving the safety of children.

A good range of structured parenting programmes improves outcomes for those users who have difficulties in managing children's behaviour. Highly skilled staff, working within the crèche, effectively promote children's personal learning and development by planning and delivering a curriculum that meets individual children's needs. The well qualified children's centre Early Years Foundation Stage teacher has helped to ensure that young children are well prepared to attend school. She has provided good support in developing a consistent approach to the exchange of information about children's progress across all local settings and in helping to raise children's achievement. Children's achievement has risen across the local settings but the gap in achievement between the more vulnerable children and the rest still remains too broad.

A high proportion of users make an outstandingly positive contribution to the life and work of the centre. Users make a strong contribution to decision-making through the parents' forum. They are well represented on the centre's monitoring group and are an integral part of governance. Parents and carers were quick to describe how those users who originally lacked confidence had been encouraged to give their views. The centre makes users feel valued and many volunteer and support the life of the centre in return. Staff are well respected in their local communities and parents are full of appreciation for their work in bringing the community together.

Several young parents benefit from training in food hygiene and preparation, guidance on nutrition and safeguarding courses. However relatively few users engage in training and adult education programmes other than in these areas. Staff work hard to reach users who face challenges, such as teenage parents and families living in poverty, and support them to improve their well being and housing. Despite the centre's often innovative approach and the commitment of local Jobcentre plus staff, access to career guidance and employment has been affected by recent changes in staffing levels and office location. Services are less accessible and

consequently, outcomes for users are satisfactory.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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	1
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?

2

Good levels of communication and referral across the children's centre ensure that assessments are completed soon after registration and that staff develop a clear understanding of users' needs. Close working partnerships, joint training sessions and flexible deployment ensure that staff provide a good range of activities to develop individual users' confidence and self-esteem. Users' personal development and achievements are celebrated. However opportunities to study a broader range of courses and achieve qualifications leading to employment, beyond the good activities provided by the centre for young parents, are less well established.

Provision for children with special educational needs and/ or disabilities is based on their interests. Sessions are planned by Portage staff and the centre and include topics that engage children in exciting creative activities. Parents report that these sessions 'are the highlight of our week'.

The centre provides a good introduction for new and prospective parents on supporting children's learning and development. Users are supported to access training and development opportunities to develop their parenting skills and their relationships with their children. Equality of access is supported by a range of initiatives such as the provision of an on site crèche, weekend services, services targeted at fathers and those who speak English as a second language. Staff have worked very hard with the local community and have supported integration and acceptance by encouraging other professionals to use the building.

The quality of care provided by the centre for young children, parents and other users is excellent. In times of crisis families feel confident that the centre will do all it can to support them or provide them with access to other agencies. Individual

counselling sessions provide good support for users in developing their self esteem and parenting skills. Outreach services engage a range of families and work well with young, vulnerable parents to improve outcomes for them and their children. The quality of care provided to children within the children's centre is excellent. Good levels of information are readily accessible to educate parents about healthy lifestyles such as sexual health information, smoking cessation, healthy eating and dealing with domestic violence.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leaders have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Self evaluation is supported by evidence of impact for users especially for those courses which run for a set period. There are links between the centre's evaluation of its services and actions recorded in strategic service plans. However these actions are numerous and wide ranging and do not consistently and clearly state how they will reduce the inequalities in outcomes for the most disadvantaged families.

Services are carefully integrated and as a consequence outcomes for users are generally good. As a result the centre provides good value for money and manages its resources appropriately. The centre is considering how to make the most effective use of the café area. Much thought has been given to ensuring that the centre is a welcoming environment with attractive displays. These provide a wealth of information for parents about the way young children learn and stimulate discussions for children and adults. Displays also have a good focus on services for fathers.

Governance of the centre is good and they play an active role in making decisions. They are kept well informed and are familiar with using data to evaluate whether services are reaching the most deprived areas. Supervision of staff has been reorganised recently to spread responsibility across the senior management team and to ensure staff are regularly supervised. These meetings are used to identify training requirements and develop staff's expertise and as a result staff feel well supported.

Good integrated working between the centre's staff and other professionals means that staff work together to identify and support families. The centre is inclusive and works well with other agencies to assess children with special educational needs and their families and develop effective provision for them. The centre is increasingly effective in reaching out to engage those members of the community who are not accessing services. Outreach services effectively engage a high proportion of families with young children, many of the more vulnerable groups of users and the hard to reach.

The safeguarding arrangements to share concerns and record information are well developed. These procedures are used by a range of professional agencies to monitor children's welfare and to provide appropriate support where necessary. All checks on the suitability of staff directly employed by the centre prior to their appointment are handled by Action for Children and are in place. The centre maintains a central register which records these checks. This register does not currently show that all other agencies have completed these checks on their own staff. The centre has completed appropriate risk assessments to ensure children's welfare is satisfactory.

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	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	2
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	3
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ilfracombe children's centre on 26 and 27 May 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that the health and children's centre staff share information with each other well. Staff are quick to find out about you and your children and to provide you with help and support if necessary. Because of this they help you to develop as parents and to learn how best to support and nurture your children. We agree with many of you who told us that staff are welcoming and friendly. Many of them are highly qualified and skilled in what they do and say but you told us that are not disapproving or critical of you and listen carefully to you.

We noticed that you make a very strong contribution to the running of the centre. You help to make decisions through parents' forums and the Core Offer Monitoring Group and many of you are willing to help out at the centre in any way you can. The centre listens to people well and makes it easy for people who are shy and nervous to have their say. We think that the centre works exceptionally hard to establish relationships with all the local communities in the area.

The crèche facilities at the children's centre are second to none and they provide you with really good examples of how to play and speak with your children. Many of the centre's activities and courses help you to feel more confident in your role as parents. Several families are going through very challenging times but we feel strongly that the centre is quick to support you and offer you helpful information and advice. When staff have concerns for you or your children they talk to other professionals in confidence. At the same time they make sure that share these concerns with you and keep you fully involved in deciding what help and support will be most helpful.

Together with local schools, nurseries and childminders the centre has helped to raise children's achievement in the area and has helped to prepare your children for their next school. Staff at the centre work well with speech and language therapists to provide good support for those children who are finding it hard to talk and communicate. Professionals from other areas provide good counselling services for young adults, adults and children.

The centre helps to provide you with financial advice but given the fact that many adults in the area are out of work we would like them to do more to help you in finding suitable employment and providing good career advice. The centre provides good training and courses in some areas and these are especially helpful to young

parents. We would like the centre to help you access a wider range of courses that lead to qualifications and on to employment.

The centre has good leaders and managers and they are determined to help you to make your lives the best they can. They are a close and friendly team and they work well together. They clearly make a difference to the lives of many of you and your children. They have completed all of the necessary clearance checks on all of the staff that are directly employed by the centre. However a number of other professional groups have not yet confirmed that these checks have been completed for visiting staff. The centre is aware of this and has taken appropriate steps to obtain confirmation from other agencies and to ensure that the situation is monitored and risks minimised.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your positive thoughts about the centre.

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