

Inspection report for Sure Start Weymouth & Portland Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Dorset |
| Inspection number | 362594 |
| Inspection dates | 13-14 October |
| Reporting inspector | Steffi Penny HMI |

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| Centre governance | Action for Children on behalf of the local authority |
| Centre leader | Rachel Whatmough |
| Date of previous inspection | N/A |
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| Linked school if applicable | N/A |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | N/A |

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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 parents, childminders, staff, partners and representatives from the local authority.

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

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

The local authority commissions Action for Children to run the centre, offering the full range of children's centre core services. It is one of four children's centres run by Action for Children in the Weymouth and Portland area who all share an advisory board. It serves one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Families are mostly of White British heritage. The area has some significant pockets of deprivation with high levels of families claiming benefits. Local opportunities for work are mainly seasonal and/or in the catering trade.

The local authority has recently changed the arrangements for the main off-site day-care provider. These are now Little Firs Day Nursery and Scallywags Childcare Centre. A crèche takes place on the premises. Children attending the crèche have skills and levels of development generally below those expected for their age. Governance arrangements are through the area's Locality Team.

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

The Mulberry Centre provides satisfactory support to children and families and all five of the Every Child Matters outcomes for them are at least satisfactory. Strengths include the impact of actions taken to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families, and activities to improve emotional health and reduce obesity. Satisfaction surveys show that families and other agencies believe the centre continues to be a safe place to come. Parents say that if they have any issues they know that someone at the centre will help them sort them out.

Children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are appropriately supported. The needs of families who speak English as an additional language are effectively met. However, for some the ability to learn English is hindered by having to wait too long for group numbers for courses to be viable. This is partly because they are not publicised more widely.

The centre works hard to keep users engaged and signposts them to employment opportunities and courses in literacy and numeracy at a local college. Records of attendance and success on these courses are kept. However, the centre does not monitor parents' progress in sufficient detail to measure the longer-term impact of completing these courses to ensure that they all progress against their own targets to achieve their desired goals. Parents told inspectors that they would like to attend accredited courses in information and communication technology (ICT) and first aid.

The centre is aware of the quality and amount of other services that make up the core offer. Nevertheless, the evaluation of the impact of this work is far less developed. This is because it is not yet securely based on sufficient data showing the impact of the intervention programmes on individuals and trends over time. Some of the evaluations conducted by partner organisations do not help the centre to clearly demonstrate where outcomes are better than satisfactory. This is an area of development identified by the local authority and which it judges to be applicable to its other children's centres as well. For example, the authority has noticed that sometimes there is repetition of assessment by individual services with a consequence that the services then duplicate provision. It is keen to rectify this area for improvement and has rapidly instigated better strategic planning and assessment mechanisms based on individual data for each children's centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that access courses to learn English are timely.
- Improve the tracking of users to ensure that they all achieve their desired goals.
- Work with the local authority to improve the measures used to evaluate the impact of provision and signposting on outcomes.

How good are outcomes for users?

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Good systems are in place to enable families to learn about healthy lifestyles. In the 'Incredible Edibles' course participants make good quality meals following simple recipes in the training kitchen. Consequently, families have a good awareness of nutritional requirements and this has had a positive impact on obesity levels in the locality. However, overall health outcomes are not better than satisfactory as there are very limited opportunities for children to engage with large physical play activities and more attention needs to be given to reduce smoking.

Outreach services, working alongside health workers, show a demonstrable impact in children's safety and well-being as well as in parents' mental and emotional health, especially where mothers have post-natal depression. This is based on improved assessments of individual needs. Children and their families are kept safe through vigorous vetting and on-site security systems. 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. Families gain good knowledge about improving their own safety. One of the ways they do this is through home assessments carried out in partnership with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) that supports parents to provide a safe environment in the home. Occasional outings to the beach with members of the centre's staff also provide parents and carers with the opportunity to risk assess their own outings. Involvement of children in their own risk assessments is in the planning stages.

The 'Learning Journey' records demonstrate the progress young children make while in the setting, but they do not always identify the next steps to really challenge their learning or provide a full picture of their progress. For example, staff miss opportunities to record evidence from parents and carers of progress made at home. Staff are very good role models and parents, carers and childminders told inspectors that they felt relationships were very good throughout the centre. They said they felt fully involved in being able to give feedback to the centre to make improvements and that they are listened to. They fully recognised that the centre has adapted courses and activities based on their feedback. Nevertheless, they would like greater ability to have an impact on strategic decision making with regard to the timings and type of courses on offer.

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| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, and 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 | 3 |

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| their personal and social development | |
| 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 and employment. | 3 |

How good is the provision?

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In general the services provided by the centre match the needs of families, particularly for young parents and those mothers with post-natal depression. However, users would like more access to the centre at evenings and weekends to reduce isolation and provide better access to services for those in work during the day.

The care and support for families in times of extreme crisis are timely and extremely good. The targeting of tailored support and coordination of guidance is steadily improving. More detailed evidence is needed from other services on the outcomes of their work for the centre to be in a better position to demonstrate the quality of its impact on families and the effectiveness of its target planning. The wider community is successfully involved through the cluster work with other local children's centres and childminders. However, there are missed opportunities to publicise what this particular centre offers.

An on-site crèche is used as respite for parents or for those attending courses. There are also drop-in sessions, which are greatly appreciated by centre users. Parents and carers of children in need are signposted to two daycare settings and childminders with whom it keeps in close contact. These providers were chosen because they were judged by Ofsted as at least good in their last inspections and that they were willing and able to support families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances.

The 'Parents with Prospects' sessions provide information about entitlements and 'First Point You' effectively supports those with housing needs. The very new provision from the Citizens Advice Bureau to support families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has successfully supported two families and has good potential to support others effectively.

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| 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 | 3 |

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| meet the needs of users and the wider community | |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community | 3 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

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A high priority is given to safeguarding families in the centre. Child protection processes and recruitment checks are thorough and robust. Health and safety checks and risk assessments are appropriately carried out. Outreach work with children on the child protection register is highly effective in improving the safety net for children.

Centre leaders are not complacent and are highly motivated to seek improvement based on good knowledge of the locality and needs of users. A good example of this is the new programme currently being introduced around domestic violence. Targets have rightly been reset based on significantly improved data from the local authority giving centre leaders better knowledge of the locality, rather than as a cluster or for the whole of Dorset.

Staff receive regular, good quality training through 'practice development' slots in the timetable. These are provided for all staff to ensure consistency within the cluster group, to improve individual practice and cascade training.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. Easily accessible rooms mean that families who have members with special educational needs and/or disabilities can use the centre with ease. While in the centre families from different cultures and heritages are equality supported and involved, there are few notices in dual languages and the waiting time for access to courses to learn English is too long.

Governance is being improved. There is a new advisory board that has met twice. With training and support from the highly experienced Chair, the board will be in a better position to act as critical friends to the centre leaders and managers. One of their first challenges is to ensure that the building is more fully utilised.

Users are encouraged to take an active part in evaluation of the centre's work. 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.

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| 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 | 3 |

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| community | |
| 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 | 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 | 3 |
| 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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Mulberry children's centre on 13 and 14 October 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with you. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how well you thought the staff at the centre helped you and your families. Those of you who spoke to us said that your children's centre is a friendly and welcoming place and that staff were very caring and supportive when you needed it most.

You and your children are safe at the centre due to the good risk assessments and robust policies and procedures. You also told us that you feel able to share any concerns with staff. Because of this you felt the centre helped to improve your children's self-confidence and family life generally, particularly for younger parents and mothers who had experienced post-natal depression.

Records show that the centre makes a positive difference to families. However, some of the partners with whom it works should find better ways of sharing how well they help you too. To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked the centre and the local authority to continue to improve the way they monitor and evaluate all the work done through the centre. We have also asked them to make sure that families who need to learn English do not have to wait too long for courses to be available.

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 can see why the staff enjoy working with you every day. We wish all of you and your families the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector

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