

Inspection report for Whipton Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon County Council
Inspection number	366328
Inspection dates	31 March and 1 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Christine Cottle
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Beacon Heath Children's Centre Little Ones Childcare Ltd.

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.

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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 additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's management team, a representative from Action for Children, the local authority, representatives from the partnership board, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre and the wider community.

Information about the centre

Whipton Children's Centre was designated in March 2007 and is run by Action for Children on behalf of Devon County Council. The centre has developed from a Sure Start Local Programme and is in an area which is in the 30% of most deprived in the country. The centre offers the full range of core offer services. Early years provision is commissioned through Little Ones Nursery which is a 65 place privately-run setting, sited close to the children's centre. There is also provision registered onsite for children accessing two-year-old funding. The centre provides crèche facilities for parents and carers attending activities and training.

Whipton Children's Centre operates as part of a cluster alongside Beacon Heath and Heavitree and Polsoe Children's Centres. Its reach area includes Mincinglake, Whipton Barton and parts of Pinhoe. The local population is mostly White British families with much smaller, but growing, percentages of other minority ethnic groups. High levels of families are either dependent on workless benefits or on low incomes. Children's skills and development on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage has typically been low, particularly in regards to their communication and language development.

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

Whipton Children’s Centre is making a good contribution to improving outcomes for users. Staff and management show high levels of commitment and work extremely well together in order to meet the needs of users. They have worked hard to establish an accessible and well-thought-of children’s centre. The centre is placed at the heart of its community. Users’ report that the activities provided bring ‘parents together’ and have ‘raised the community spirit’.

Users receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Staff and users show consideration to each other and there is an atmosphere of mutual respect. Users report that they truly value the fact that all staff take time to listen and support them whenever needed. Staff are very effective at empowering users, the majority of whom report significantly increased levels of confidence due to their contact with the centre. A key strength of this children’s centre is the involvement of users at all levels. Users make a real difference to the quality and suitability of the services they receive. They are well supported to give something back to their community through a very well-orchestrated volunteer programme.

Staff have been very successful in registering a significantly high proportion of families with young children in their reach area. They make good use of the information they gather through registration and staff’s local knowledge, in order to ensure that the services they provide meet the needs of the community overall. Despite an excellent rate of registration, just over half of families are using the services provided by the centre. Centre staff recognise the need to implement strategies which will help to engage those not currently accessing services, including some who are potentially vulnerable.

Children and parents and carers who have additional needs are extremely well supported as staff have a strong commitment to inclusion. The ‘Step-by-Step’ group has successfully accelerated the progress of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who attend. Good support is given to users with impaired vision as publications are produced in large print. The safeguarding of children and vulnerable

users is given good attention and comprehensive procedures are in place to support staff.

Staff implement a range of programmes to improve the health of users and their families. They work well with partners and outside agencies in order to deliver and reinforce positive messages in a fun and enjoyable way. However, despite concerted efforts, concerning health trends remain in the centre's reach area: the uptake of breastfeeding is low and levels of childhood obesity are high and on the increase.

Staff and management have a good understanding of the strengths of the centre and the areas they need to develop through good self-evaluation and service monitoring. Realistic and challenging targets, grounded in detailed and accurate analysis of users' needs, are being used effectively to improve most outcomes. Where impact is less successful, centre staff have developed suitable action plans to overcome this. As a result, they have a good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes for health by implementing strategies aimed at increasing rates of breastfeeding and reducing levels of childhood obesity.
- Develop and implement strategies which encourage increased numbers of families to participate in children's centre services.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The emotional health of users and their children is given good attention and is well supported by staff and outside agencies. Those experiencing crisis in their lives are extremely well supported through the provision of an in-house counselling service which is well used. A recently introduced initiative for parents-to-be, delivered alongside the National Childbirth Trust and midwives, prepares them well for the labour and the experience of parenthood. Staff fully recognise the positive benefits to children when parents are emotionally strong.

Parents and carers and their children develop an understanding of the benefits of physical exercise through creative links between the centre and outside agencies. Staff have worked closely with a 'Dance in Devon' coordinator to deliver a National Health Service sponsored initiative which encourages children and their parents and carers to be more active in their daily lives. This programme provided participants with the opportunity to contribute to the wider community, as it culminated in the recording of an interactive DVD for distribution to families attending local children's centres. Children are developing an understanding of the benefits of healthy eating. For example, they have visited a local farm to see where food grows and have prepared and eaten the vegetables. Centre staff are developing a cohesive approach to encouraging the adoption of healthy lifestyles for the whole family in order to

contribute to reducing increasingly high levels of childhood obesity in their reach area.

Mothers who choose to breastfeed are very well supported by staff, through a breastfeeding support group and by peer breastfeeding mentors. Many report that the support they have received was vital in enabling them to successfully breastfeed their children. Positive messages regarding the benefits of breastfeeding babies are included within ante-natal groups and in a range of literature available. However, levels of breastfeeding remain low in the reach area. Plans are in place to reinforce messages about breastfeeding and its long-term potential positive impact upon children's health.

Children are kept safer in their homes as parents and carers are supported to assess risks and are provided with a range of equipment to prevent accidents, such as stair gates and fire guards. They learn how to keep themselves safe and develop confidence in taking risks as staff guide them well. Staff are well trained to identify concerns regarding the safety of both children and adults, and good procedures to monitor those who are vulnerable are in place.

Parents, carers and children clearly enjoy their activities and experiences at the centre and have fun learning together. Parents' and carers' understanding of how their child develops is greatly enhanced by the advice, support and guidance given by centre staff. For example, those attending heuristic play sessions reflect that the session 'reassures me in my understanding of child development'. Creative use is made of video material of parents and carers playing with their children. Parents and carers report how powerful this approach has been in helping them understand how to interact with their child to support their progress. An appropriate focus is placed on developing children's language and communication skills; parents and carers and very young children have great fun participating in 'Rhyme Time', where they are provided with well-planned and effectively delivered opportunities to explore language. Parents' and carers' understanding of how to promote effective language and communication is further enhanced through the 'Here's Looking at You' and 'Speech and Sounds' programmes. Children are well prepared for entry into school due to well-coordinated transition arrangements.

Children are learning to interact, share and take turns with their peers. They understand the expectations of the group and are supported well to meet these. Effective strategies mean that parents and carers are well supported to modify challenging behaviour. Users have a very strong voice in the life of the centre. They are actively involved in all levels and take responsibility for initiating projects such as fund-raising. Aspirations are raised as many achieve well on literacy and numeracy courses. Others undertake recognised qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications, supported by centre management who provide them with relevant work placements. A visit to meet their local MP at the House of Commons developed users' understanding of how the country is run and increased their interest in local politics.

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 and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff have a good understanding of the needs of the community they serve. They make good use of data regarding the make-up of the local area, together with information received from the families registered and staff's local knowledge, to develop a good range of services which meet the needs of those who currently access the centre. Parents and carers have access to a wide range of groups and provision is made for every stage of being a parent. Outreach services are effective in engaging some harder-to-reach members of the community, resulting in some of the most vulnerable families accessing relevant services. Good use of the Common Assessment Framework means that those who require targeted support are provided with coordinated services. Supported by the local authority, centre management has a picture of where it now needs to target its efforts in order to increase the number of families it reaches.

Centre staff have rightly prioritised the development of users' confidence and self-esteem as stepping stones to engaging them in more formal learning and development experiences. When ready, effective signposting by staff means that users can engage in more formal learning. A very strong and successful volunteer programme has resulted in many users developing confidence and the skills needed to return to work; they are well trained and supported by the coordinator. Staff recognise the achievements of users and celebrate their success, for example, by sharing their achievements within the centre's newsletter.

Staff and management regularly review their services in order to ensure they meet the needs of the users. Parents and carers are fully involved in this process and good account is taken of feedback. Centre management is creative in the ways in which it develops its services. It engages well with outside agencies in order to provide comprehensive and relevant programmes, which overall are well attended. Users have easy access to a very good range of information, guidance and advice on a range of topics which are relevant to them. Staff are sensitive to the fact that users may wish to access information privately and enable this to happen, for example by

displaying information about domestic violence and sexually transmitted diseases within the toilet cubicles so users can access this without being observed by others. Many users report that they have found the support, advice and guidance given by children’s centre staff to have been invaluable.

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	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

The centre is well led by committed and passionate senior managers who form a cohesive management team. They undertake responsibilities which make best use of their individual skills and areas of expertise; they complement each other well. Leaders and managers communicate high expectations at all levels and clear line management arrangements result in the centre being well run and organised. This includes clear governance arrangements, provided by Action for Children. Managers, staff, the core offer monitoring group and the parents’ forum all contribute to a regular cycle of self-evaluation in order that clear priorities for improvement are identified. The local authority challenges leaders and managers to improve. They set relevant, challenging targets in respect of local authority priorities and have appropriate expectations that the centre will refine these further to reflect local need. Good systems are in place for progress towards these targets to be monitored by Action for Children and the local authority.

Leaders and managers inspire all who they come in contact with. This includes staff, partners and users, who all work together to improve outcomes. All staff show a very strong commitment to improving the life chances of service users. They demonstrate a ‘can do’ attitude and, together with partner agencies, are successful in removing most barriers to achievement. Staff are well supervised and supported in order that they can be as effective as possible. They are well deployed across the cluster of centres so that best use is made of individual skills and areas of interest and expertise. The welcoming, safe environment is well used to accommodate a good range of services and is equipped with a range of high quality resources.

Leaders and staff have a good understanding of the centre’s strengths and the areas that require further improvement. Strong partnerships with other agencies enable the centre to work towards improving outcomes, particularly related to health. For example, the centre is working closely with local schools in order to deliver the ‘Health, Exercise, Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY)’ programme aimed at

improving the health of children and their families.

Parents, carers and children who speak English as an additional language who access the centre are supported well. The provision of translation services and documentation in a range of languages means that they are fully included in the provision. This good support has increased users' knowledge and understanding of what opportunities are available to them and has resulted in some attending English courses and then enrolling onto additional adult education. Development of children's understanding of English is also well supported through a collaborative music project with the local school. The centre works to involve fathers in the lives of their children through access to universal services and the provision of a father's group at weekends.

Safeguarding is high on the centre's agenda. Good site security means that children and their parents and carers are kept safe while at the centre. Staff are very well trained in child protection. They have a good understanding of their responsibility to protect children and are clear on the procedure to take should they have a concern about a child. Robust recruitment procedures and the monitoring of staff's suitability ensure that those working with children and their families are suitable.

Comprehensive, structured evaluations are conducted on all of the services delivered directly by staff at the centre. These consistently seek users' views and lessons learnt are taken full account of when planning future sessions. Staff are encouraged to reflect upon and evaluate their own practice. While many outside agencies also undertake to evaluate and improve the services they deliver, this is not consistently undertaken by all providers. Plans are in place in order to evaluate the long-term impact of services; together with a local school, the centre is to track the performance of children who have accessed funded early education through the '2gether project' through primary school.

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	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

None

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

We inspected Whipton Children’s Centre on 30 March and 1 April 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Whipton Children’s Centre is making a good contribution to improving outcomes for you and your families. Staff and management are very committed to improving the lives of you all and they work extremely well together. In particular, we found that they provide you with outstanding care, guidance and support. We fully agree with you that all staff take time to listen and support you whenever you need them to. They have developed some very strong partnerships with other professionals and organisations so that they can offer you the correct support, advice and guidance. They offer good support to parents, carers and children who have specific needs to ensure they are fully included in all activities.

We noticed that you make a strong contribution to the running of the centre. You are well represented on the core offer monitoring group and through the parents’ forum. Staff regularly seek your views about the quality of the services they offer. Staff and management listen to and value your ideas. Many of you are actively involved in volunteering within the centre and beyond. These experiences and the other activities provided by the centre help you to develop confidence and give you skills to help you find work.

Centre staff work hard to make sure you and your children remain safe. For example, staff are well trained in how to safeguard children and managers have taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children

is suitable. Centre staff also work closely with you to help you ensure that your homes are safe places for your young children. They work hard to support you and your families improve your health. Some of you have already taken positive steps and have been actively involved in developing a DVD to encourage other parents and carers to enjoy dancing with their children. However, we have asked staff to support more families to adopt healthier lifestyles and to support more new mums to breastfeed their babies.

Leaders and managers of the centre have a good understanding of what steps they need to take to improve their services even further and they are determined to make your lives the best they can be. We have asked staff and managers to increase the number of families who access services at the centre in order that as many families as possible can benefit from the good services offered at Whipton Children's Centre.

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

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