

Inspection report for Central Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Southampton City Council
Inspection number	362416
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY229821 Play Away Day Nursery

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 early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, project coordinator, centre staff, partner professionals from other agencies and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were held with parents, in groups and informally, including members of the parents' forum and advisory board. Inspectors observed the centre's work, including activities at the centre's other bases, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Central Sure Start Children's Centre was designated in March 2006 as a phase one centre providing a range of services to meet its core purpose. It runs from a main centre and two further sites at Orchard Lane and Northam. Governance is provided through the city council advisory boards. The area served by the centre mostly falls into one of the 30% most deprived areas of the country. It is located in the central part of the city, bordered by the docks to the south and the River Itchen to the east. Child poverty measures are high. Many children live in workless households with around 35% of families claiming working tax credits. The population of the area is culturally diverse, with significant proportions of families from India, Pakistan and Africa (mainly Somalia). A small minority come from Eastern Europe (mostly Polish). Over 80% of families speak English as an additional language. The population is also transient, with around 20% mobility, which means children under five years of age arrive in, or leave, the area on a frequent basis.

There are 1,722 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area. The linked early years setting is located about a mile away from the main centre. Children's skill levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage provision are well below those expected for their age, particularly in aspects of communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional 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 families

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

The centre provides outstanding services for children and their families in its area. It is a busy and welcoming centre where families place their trust. Centre leaders and staff have positive and well-established relationships with the families, including the minority ethnic and faith groups. All groups are well represented in the centre’s work. The centre plays a significant role in the community in supporting children and parents and makes an outstanding contribution to improving their outcomes. Its work has contributed to marked improvement in outcomes in many areas, illustrating its excellent capacity to improve further.

A key factor in the centre’s success is the excellent partnership-working across agencies. Through being co-located, colleagues from early years, health, outreach, training and employment work in a highly integrated way to ensure children and families receive the right services and support. The close partnership with health is a distinct strength and has led to strongly improving health outcomes for local families. All staff are highly alert to families’ differing needs. There is constant informal communication, alongside the formal, leading to rigorous initial assessment and prompt early intervention. Parents who find themselves in particularly vulnerable situations and experience times of crisis feel very comfortable approaching the centre and are exceptionally well supported.

The centre is highly effective in overcoming any language barriers. The centre project coordinator speaks six languages and a further 16 are spoken by other staff. This expertise provides a powerful in-house service when translation is needed. Several health workers reported how beneficial this was in supporting their work and ensuring prompt support.

Leaders, staff and partners share a clear vision for the centre’s work. They are dedicated to providing the best possible support for children and their families and to identifying where provision and outcomes can be improved even further. The successful work over recent years to increase the engagement of families from Afghanistan is a good example. Great care was taken to establish the needs of this

group and understand any cultural barriers that might impede success. Through setting up focus groups and workshops, for example, take-up increased substantially. Consequently, outcomes for children from Afghan backgrounds have shown marked improvement over three years, with a well above average proportion reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2011. Fewer children from Polish families reach a similarly good level of development and the centre leadership is now, rightly, working with focus groups to establish the most appropriate and effective ways of improving outcomes for this target group.

Evaluation is used effectively to review services and target resources at areas of most need. The centre leadership team draws on a wide range of evidence to judge the success of its work, including parents' views, case studies and feedback from partner organisations. These also inform the annual reviews by the local authority. A wide range of valuable data is readily available to the centre, including health data. This is not always used as effectively to demonstrate the impact of the centre's work at times of review.

Parents' views are proactively sought and used effectively to shape services. There is a strong representation of parents on the forum and advisory board. The centre's case studies show parents' appreciation of how the centre has helped them and changed their lives for the better.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with Polish families to increase their engagement in the centre's work and increase the proportion of Polish children who reach a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Draw on the wide range of data available to the centre to put alongside other evidence when analysing and demonstrating the success and impact of the centre's work.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Sessions and activities observed during the inspection showed a very good take-up by all minority ethnic groups represented in the area. Enjoyment was highly evident, from both children and parents. The centre has been highly successful in engaging increasing numbers of children and families over time. The proportions of children under one and under five years of age with a registered contact have shown a marked increase over the last three years. For example, for under fives, the figure has increased by 200 in this period. The number of parents, including fathers, with a registered contact has shown a similarly strong increase. The number of fathers with contacts has more than doubled in three years, to 550 in the last year. These measures compare extremely favourably with other centres across the city, with the

centre being ranked first in all cases. Analysis of data shows that the centre is reaching the families who live in the 10% most deprived parts of the centre's designated area, and 90% of registered contacts involve children under five who live in the 30% most deprived areas.

There has been a marked reduction in the percentage of babies born with a low birth weight, decreasing from 10% in 2006 to 4.9% in 2012. Breastfeeding rates are improving strongly, with initial breastfeeding rates for this year at 86%. The number of families benefiting from home-safety checks has increased. Admissions to accident and emergency are consistently lower than those for the city as a whole. Teenage parents are extremely well supported, particularly those who may find themselves in particularly complex and vulnerable situations. Parents are confident that they are safe and secure in the centre and its other bases. Assiduous attention is given to guarding against risks and all users are very aware of the safety routines. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and pre-CAF processes are used very effectively to identify quickly where children's safety may be at risk. Assessment procedures are rigorous and carefully planned so that intervention and support are precisely tailored to individual needs. Looked after children and those on child protection plans are therefore exceptionally well supported and the number with child protection plans is reducing. The vast majority of children identified as being in need are registered with the centre.

Parents attending parenting programmes have doubled in three years and specific courses have been run for fathers, where take-up has also been good. Case studies show many of the parents who benefit from targeted parenting support also access other opportunities through the centre. First-hand reports clearly point to parents overcoming significant mental health issues and feelings of isolation and powerlessness. Excellent partnerships with Jobcentre services have led to an increasing number of parents accessing training, courses, volunteering placements and employment. A training day in 2011, for example, led on to 16 parents gaining numeracy qualifications, with half achieving Entry Level 3. Contacts for parents, following training in English for speakers of other languages, have increased, with 289 contacts in the last three years, compared to 159 in the previous period. Such opportunities provide a lifeline for many of the most vulnerable parents, equipping them with basic literacy and numeracy skills and boosting their economic well-being.

Parents report they feel empowered by the centre's services and activities and many contribute to the centre's work through making suggestions and requests, joining focus groups, and participating in the informal and formal parents' forum. Many case studies show how parents from different cultural backgrounds, and often very new to the area, have been helped to understand important aspects of life in Britain. This has promoted social cohesion and helped families to settle, gain important skills and knowledge, and make a valuable contribution to community life. Parents described the staff as a 'source of encouragement and inspiration' and one wrote that the centre was 'a kind of guiding star for me in the night of strangeness and uncertainty, when I didn't know where to make a start'.

Children’s language needs are identified early and a wide range of support put into place. The wealth of expertise in languages and the rigorous attention to supporting speech and language skills mean children who do not speak English at home are immersed in learning English and make good progress. City-wide initiatives to promote children’s early talk have had a highly positive impact on children’s language and communication. Outcomes are improving for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage with a marked increase in the overall proportion of children reaching a good level of development. While still below average overall, the percentage has increased from 17% in 2006 to 44% in 2011. Outcomes for White British and African children are broadly average and 75% of children from Bangladeshi families, a well above average proportion, reached a good level of development in 2011. The impact of the centre’s work has not been as marked for the very small minority of Polish families in its area compared with these other major groups. This has been identified as a priority and the centre has started to consider ways of engaging Polish families more successfully in order to support their children’s learning and development.

Parents of children with disabilities or special educational needs receive well-targeted and prompt support. The strong links with health partners are a key factor in supporting these children and making every effort to ensure they do not miss out. Many parents spoke of the ease with which they were able to access specialist and personalised support through the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families.

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

Provision for children’s learning and development is outstanding. It is promoted very effectively, for example, in crèche and play activities. All activities observed, for example Tots and Tunes, were having an excellent impact on children’s personal, social and emotional development. Children are familiar with routines and

expectations. Staff are excellent role models, promoting strong and cohesive relationships. Children's talk is constantly encouraged. Parents receive very helpful ideas and information on how to promote their children's learning and development. Learning stories are used effectively to plan and assess children's progress across all areas of development. These provide a helpful and valued record of children's learning for parents. Play workers are fully involved in supporting transition arrangements, and communication with nursery staff in schools is very effective. The centre's monitoring of nurseries in the area shows that provision is good and improving. This is because regular setting-reviews, carried out by the early years support team, identify clearly any weaker aspects in provision.

The quality and impact of the outreach and community work are outstanding. Relationships with key partners are excellent and embedded, ensuring the needs of the local area are met very well. The multi-agency and multi-disciplinary setting supports excellent communication in order to support children and families. Family support workers know immediately when a new birth is registered with health and these families are followed up so that they can be registered promptly with the centre. In this way, many parents are soon accessing a wide range of universal services, as well as any necessary more targeted, specific support. Services are very closely tailored to individual needs, including those from the target groups. There is overwhelming evidence that parents and children who find themselves in particularly vulnerable circumstances are exceptionally well supported. The highly targeted support and intervention for any especially vulnerable teenage parents are a good example.

Many parents spoke of feeling 'empowered' by the centre's services and learning opportunities. Those who speak little English feel they can approach the centre and know that every effort will be made to find an interpreter. This is routinely provided through the centre's own staffing but, in the case of some languages, such as Pashto and Dari, additional staff are recruited from the local community so that parents speaking these languages can benefit as equally as others.

Links with Jobcentre services are excellent. Opportunities for parents to pursue training, often leading to qualifications at levels 1, 2, or 3, are very effectively promoted. The centre's work in partnership with the Jobcentre family advisors and other organisations and agencies, including the voluntary sector, has led to good and increasingly strong outcomes. The aspirations of many parents, from different cultural backgrounds, show a clear commitment to learning and development. Staff capture every opportunity to respond to these values and aspirations, resulting in a high demand and a positive impact for parents and children. One parent commented, 'The more courses I do, the more confident I feel and the happier I feel. I feel worthy.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision.

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Outstanding leadership and exemplary working with relevant partners are leading to excellent outcomes for families. The centre leaders have a clear vision for the centre and lead by example. The commitment to engaging parents from all minority ethnic groups in the community and to supporting the most vulnerable families pervades everyone's work. Work is underpinned by a clear development plan with well-targeted priorities. Resources are regularly reviewed so that they can be directed to raising outcomes for the most disadvantaged groups. The centre provides excellent value for money.

Governance and accountability arrangements are very effective and include parents and partner agencies at local and city-wide levels. Representatives from partner agencies rightly hold the centre in high regard based on its successful work in improving outcomes in the area. Wide ranging data are provided for the centre through the local authority, including comprehensive and helpful information on health. These are used well by the centre leader to guide and shape services, but is not as well used as an integral part of the centre's evaluation, for example at the time of the annual conversation with the local authority, to show the impact of its work.

Arrangements for ensuring safeguarding requirements are met and adhered to are of high quality. Rigorous procedures are in place for monitoring and promoting children's and parents' safety. Recruitment procedures for all adults working at the centre and its bases, including volunteers, are extremely rigorous. Safeguarding is a prominent and regular part of supervision arrangements. This is embedded and consistent so that safeguarding is always covered first and foremost. Staff receive regular training, some over and beyond the legal requirements, to ensure they are very well equipped to support children and families and to identify any potential situations where children may be at risk. Recent training courses on safeguarding have been highly relevant to the local context and specific identified needs. Any referrals are fully recorded and followed up. The relevant centre staff are fully involved in core group meetings and child protection conferences. The alertness of all staff to potentially vulnerable cases and the speed with which information is shared are key factors in the high quality support for keeping children safeguarded.

The centre's work in promoting equality and promoting cohesion among the groups who use the centre and live in the area is outstanding. Strong links have been established with faith groups. The centre's work in breaking down any barriers that can arise through families not speaking English is outstanding. Centre staff provide highly valued support for other agencies, such as the police and social services, who may need an interpreter urgently. Parents of disabled children are fully included and effectively supported.

Staff at the centre have a deep understanding of the cultural values, traditions and aspirations of the diverse minority ethnic groups in the area. They go out of their way to accommodate and respect cultural differences and family values while not shirking from challenging these when they may put children at a disadvantage, or at risk. The centre project coordinator plays a key role in raising awareness of the expectations associated with living in this country which may differ from families' experiences in their home countries. She also provides valuable training for centre staff and other partners in raising awareness of cultural differences.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

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

The Play Away Nursery, linked to the centre, was inspected in April 2009. The inspection judged the overall quality of provision to be good. 'The nursery was well

organised with a strong management structure and effective procedures to promote children's safety and welfare.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Central Sure Start Children's Centre on 11 and 12 July 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you for helping us with our work when we inspected your centre recently. We were very pleased to be able to talk to so many of you and to watch a lot of the activities and sessions that were taking place, such as the crèches, Tots and Tunes and Baby Play. Many parents told us how much they valued the centre and how much it had helped in their lives and in their children's learning, health, safety and overall development.

The centre provides an outstanding range of services under one roof. This is because so many people from different agencies and organisations work with the centre staff. This makes it easy for you to receive any help you need. The centre is particularly good at stepping in when people are in most need of help. Many parents told us how the centre had been a 'life-saver' for them. Safe in the knowledge that their child were being very well looked after in the crèche, they felt confident to take up other opportunities, such as further courses, training or volunteering.

All parents we spoke to were full of praise for the centre staff and professional partners, and the way they support them in so many ways. The fact that 22 languages are spoken by staff at the centre says everything. We could see how parents who arrive in the area from other countries, often speaking little or no English, soon feel able to walk into the centre and ask for help. This is a distinct strength of the centre because staff do everything to make sure that language does not become a barrier for anyone. Cultural differences are celebrated and respected while at the same time every effort is made to enable families to learn and benefit from the wide range of services on offer.

The excellent services and high quality support parents receive are making a positive difference to family lives. Health is improving, children are living in safer conditions and their educational outcomes are getting better with each year that passes. There are excellent opportunities for children to learn, explore and develop, and those who need extra, more-specialist help receive it at an early stage in their lives. This makes all the difference. The outcomes for children from Bangladeshi, African and White British families have taken huge strides forward over the last three years. The children from Polish families have not achieved as well and we have asked the centre to do all it can to improve these children's outcomes so that they get a good start when they join school.

The centre's success comes from the excellent leadership by the centre leader, project coordinator and other key leaders from partner organisations. The leadership team is constantly reviewing its work, and its effect, and seeking to find ways of improving family lives even further. It takes very good account of your views in adapting services and targeting them where they will have the most impact. The local authority provides a lot of data for all children's centres in the city, including figures that relate to health for each area. We have asked the centre to use this data more, alongside the other information it gathers, when the leadership team is analysing and demonstrating how effective its services have been in improving families' lives and well-being.

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