

# Inspection report for Southcote Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Reading Borough Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	383721
<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 August 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christine Davies HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Kelly Dadd
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	EY411674 The Lodge

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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**Report published:** August 2012



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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 children centre leaders, managers, staff, parents and representatives of the local authority and partner organisations. They talked to children, parents and staff informally. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including case studies.

## Information about the centre

Southcote was designated in 2006 as a phase one children's centre. Activities to meet the core purpose mainly take place in rooms of a community centre and an adjoining purpose-built annex with safely enclosed gardens. The building was undergoing extensive refurbishment at the time of the inspection. The centre and partner organisations make use of adjoining playgrounds and nearby allotments and recreation parks to provide a range of activities. The children's centre provides 36 daycare places for children in the early years age range at The Lodge on the same site. The centre manager is supported by two early years practitioners, a part-time administrator and eleven staff, including a manager in the nursery. The centre is accountable directly to the local authority, which manages the centre, and an independent advisory board, known locally as the steering group, is in place.

The centre is located in a residential area of Reading in which half of the population is relatively affluent with families living in their own homes, with one or more parent working as a professional. By contrast, one third of families live in high rise dense social and private rented housing in areas that are among the 30% most deprived in the country. One in three adults has no formal qualifications. Nearly one in five adults has a limiting long-term illness. Just over 20% of families are dependent on workless or disability benefits and a further 20% are in part-time or low paid work. The proportion of lone-parent families is high at 40% and one tenth of these are lone fathers.

The ten year old census data show the majority of the population of the area as White British origin (90.5%), although local data show this is rapidly changing. Of families attending the centre, 43% are from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds with no predominant groups, including White European, Asian, Asian and Black British, and Black African; a similar percentage speak English as an additional language. Children’s levels of skills and knowledge on entry to early years provision in the area are usually in line with the expectations for their age, with around a third having skills and knowledge which are below the level expected.

## Inspection judgements

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

<p><b>Overall effectiveness</b>  <b>The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families</b></p>	2
<p><b>Capacity for sustained improvement</b>  <b>The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management</b></p>	2

## Main findings

Southcote Children’s Centre gives good support to families in the area. The provision, which includes recreational family learning and courses with a crèche, baby clinics and childcare run from the centre, has come to be typically described by parents as ‘an oasis of all things positive in our lives’. The overall effectiveness of the centre is good because the centre’s staff forge strong relationships with families who are identified as being most in need of support; the centre successfully reaches 85% of families in the areas of greatest deprivation. The achievements of families in regular contact with the centre improve, particularly for families in which parents have no qualifications and for the sizeable proportion of adults and children who speak English as an additional language. There is still work to do to ensure that adults with few qualifications are helped to gain accreditation from the courses or volunteering work they undertake.

The centre’s programme is richly varied throughout the year to attract as many families as possible. This provides a safety net as staff are able to recognise when individuals are struggling and provide assistance before problems become overwhelming. The centre takes immediate steps to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse through appropriate referrals and effective follow-up work. Parents say that the school holiday stay and play activities that cater for whole families, including older children, are a ‘lifeline’ for their well-being. Staff are well

trained in safeguarding and have played a vital part in helping the community to recover from a traumatic event and ensure that families learn about ways to seek help when family difficulties arise. Although use of the Common Assessment Framework is infrequent in the area, the centre, health, education and early intervention services meet regularly to find early solutions to family difficulties that result in good safeguarding outcomes.

The centre and local authority use data well to help shape services. The steering group is making great strides in gathering and collating information from schools and from the adult training partner, Southcote Information Technology Experience (SITE), and employment support agencies, about the achievements of families as they move on. Staff build detailed records with parents, for example as part of the effective transition project Big School Fun. Where the centre tracks progress systematically, for example in looking at children's language development, target setting is effective and children make very good progress. Until recently, even the most basic information was slow to come through from health partners. This has limited the centre's ability to adjust service delivery or meet families' assessed needs in respect of improving health-related matters. Protocols are now in place for information sharing with health services, and particularly to ensure that midwives alert the centre to any vulnerable families with new babies through the Maternity Pathway initiative.

The quality of care, information giving, guidance and support is a real strength because of the wide range of expertise that families can access through the centre. Parents are inspired by the insight that staff give them into children's development. With guidance, parents recognise their own skills. Many, including the fathers helping at Turbo Tots on Saturdays, have been enthused to become volunteers. A high proportion of parents access relevant courses and some go on to paid work when they are ready. The volunteering programme enables parents to extend their skills although few gain recognition or accreditation for their involvement.

The centre makes good use of resources and has planned carefully to increase the space available through refurbishment so that services can be expanded. The centre has accurate self-evaluation, a clear view of its overall progress and knows what it must do to improve. With highly effective partnerships in place with other organisations and the full respect of the community, the centre has good capacity to further improve its effectiveness, outcomes and services.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Track and evaluate data about children's and adults' achievements in all the centre's activities and use the information to set precise targets at every stage of planning to support improvement in outcomes for families, particularly in being healthy.
- Work with the local authority to extend the provision for helping families to be

more healthy and to enable adults to gain recognition and accreditation for their personal and academic achievements.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2

Although there are gaps in the data available, the centre demonstrates that the health outcomes of those using its services regularly are satisfactory and improving. The emphasis on being outside as much as possible, even for singing sessions in the Teddies Tunes group, improves families sense of well-being. Healthy snacks are shared and children in daycare help themselves to healthy portions of food so that obesity among users is low. Regular Teeny Tinies groups for new parent and baby clinics help most families to keep healthy. Although the centre and volunteers promote breastfeeding, the persistence of negative attitudes among some parents in the community means that the take-up rate in the area is low. Satisfactory numbers of families attend two-year-old health checks. There is good access to speech and language services at the centre in term time. Although specialist services are not fully integrated, there are good links with midwives and health visitors and prompt referrals are made to specialist adult and child mental health services and to services to assist those with disabilities.

Children and adults greatly enjoy the recreational learning sessions. The centre ensures that families develop personal and educational skills at every opportunity, including going out and about to local parks. Parents grow in self-confidence through involvement in planning special events, such as the Jubilee picnic on the green and trips to the seaside. The centre's assessment data show that a third of children start attending the centre with skills and knowledge which are below the expectations for their age. They make good progress, especially in communication and language, so that they transfer into school in line with expectations or above. Taken as a whole, children's achievement by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in the area has improved in the last three years. However, the centre and local authority recognise that the attainment gap is not yet closing consistently in all of the schools that children most commonly attend and are focusing their assistance on children most at risk of making slow progress. Transition support is effective as settling-in times for recent cohorts in the nearest schools reduced from six weeks to two weeks due to the children's good level of confidence.

Parents and children feel safe and secure at the centre. Children help to reduce hazards as they sweep up sand and tidy away equipment. Parents gain confidence in assessing risks and encourage their children to play safely. They cooperate with staff to reduce hazards in the centre and on outings so that there are few serious accidents or incidents. Staff know the regular families very well. Intensive outreach support and advice are targeted to the most vulnerable families, for instance, to help understand and manage children's behaviour positively. Outcomes are improving so that the formal Common Assessment Framework procedures and referrals to child protection services are needed infrequently.

An enterprising spirit among fathers organising Tumbletots on Saturdays and in the Garden Gang community gardening group draws isolated and lone parents into positive relationships with other families and staff. Parents gain self-confidence as 'first teachers of their children'; for example, passing on skills as they harvest the vegetables and eat them together. As one parent put it, 'The staff help me to give more teaching than I knew I had to my child.' Parents treat each other with respect and enjoy meeting with others from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The centre encourages participants to express their views through the interactive feedback displays, suggestion boxes and group discussions. Parents are well represented and give regular input to the steering committee. A high proportion of adults, including those speaking English as an additional language, take up learning with good completion rates in basic literacy and numeracy courses. Case studies show good outcomes for those who secure better financial stability as a result of the support and guidance they receive. However, the centre is not yet ensuring that all adults receive full accreditation from the courses or volunteering work they undertake.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for families*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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The quality of care for target groups and support for children's and adults' learning and development is good. The centre's staff and tutors from SITE are well qualified for their roles and they plan their work thoroughly. For example, stay and play sessions with imaginatively set out beach-sand play equipment build on the previous shared experience of a day trip to the seaside to enrich learning in communication and language. Assessment of needs and user feedback is used very well by staff to help shape provision. The skilled practitioners vary the style and tone of their sessions to suit the individual needs of families attending.

The initial registration process enables staff to gather basic information about families attending. Staff have improved their practice in recording the ethnicity of

new families and this information is now consistently recorded so that the centre has a good understanding of the profile of groups and individuals. The centre builds up good relationships to get to know families. Networking with other agencies and referral information ensure that assessments are robust for children with special needs and/or disabilities and that their needs are known.

Effective partnerships with key agencies add greatly to the range of activities provided and ensure that all areas are covered and result in overall good outcomes. The Garden Gang exemplifies the holistic approach of the centre and partners by supporting healthy activity and eating, promoting well-being and passing on plant knowledge and gardening skills in the community. Participation rates by the target groups of families are high. Partners are flexible and, for example, make 'cook for health' sessions informal to suit the learning styles of vulnerable families who are most in need of the service. Cooperation with private and voluntary settings improves outcomes all round. For example, outreach to promote the oral health scheme in partner early years settings gained 25 new registrations of families to the centre. The opportunities for guiding and advising families are integral to all activities and promoted well in displays at the centre. Specialists in housing and debt advice are frequent visitors and their work has a positive impact on families' good economic well-being.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Governance and accountability arrangements are clearly in place. Line management and performance review arrangements work effectively. Professional supervision is consistently good with strong connections to early years support and advice assisting the good learning and development of the children who attend the centre's activities. This influences the style of work to good effect as positive relationships and enabling environments are central to the work of the centre and participation rates of families, especially from the most deprived areas, are increasing. Coherent links between strategic planning and service provision ensure outcomes for families are good overall. Protocols for information sharing are in place at the strategic level, although work is in progress to strengthen the data provided by health partners in order to adjust service delivery and meet families' assessed needs in respect of improving health-related outcomes.

Effective actions, guided by policy and principles, result in the full inclusion of all families using the centre. All legal requirements concerning equality are met and the centre promotes good relationships between different ethnic groups and individuals in the community as a matter of course. The centre and partners have been highly successful in securing good access to basic qualification courses in adult literacy for speakers of English as an additional language. Children who are at an early stage of speaking English catch up rapidly with their peers in communication skills.

Value for money is in part the driver for the refurbishment of the centre. Staff are deployed appropriately to utilise their skills. Resources are used well and result in good outcomes. Value for money is good.

Including and encouraging all families to use the centre is part of the centre's effective safeguarding strategy. Families show trust in the centre and services respond promptly to safeguarding needs. Staff are fully vetted and trained thoroughly in child protection matters. With the help and feedback of parents, safety and security in the centre are maintained well.

Partnerships are strong. Valuable work, for example with Play Rangers who provide specialist play equipment and arrange events, takes place through the local authority structures. The steering group has a broad composition of partners and parent representatives who work effectively together to provide good governance. Additionally, local and wider interests are represented so that there is a firm basis of expertise at the right level to support and develop fully integrated provision. Leaders and managers are strongly focused on making sure the needs of target groups are well met and that the centre continues to improve. Data are used comprehensively to get to grips with changing local needs and to identify priorities, for example, to improve children's communication and language skills.

Monitoring of quality and outcomes is routinely embedded into management of the centre so that provision is good and works coherently. The centre keeps increasingly sophisticated records and is beginning to use the records evaluatively to good effect, for example, in targeting improvement on the educational outcomes for children. Partners and parents regularly give feedback which contributes to the centre's accurate self-evaluation.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision, The Lodge, was carried out in December 2010 under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Southcote Children's Centre on 16 and 17 August. We judged the centre as good overall.

Southcote Children's Centre gives you good support through constantly adjusting the activities to meet your needs and interests.

The centre managers and staff know families in the area well and focus their efforts on helping the families that face the greatest challenges. The centre's activities, from baby clinics and childcare to adult literacy classes, are well planned and make a significant difference to your well-being. As one parent put it, 'The centre is an oasis of all things positive in our lives.' You rightly appreciate the expertise that is on hand to give advice and support, especially in times of personal crisis.

Your achievements improve rapidly when you attend the centre regularly and the centre is working hard to encourage more families to get involved in activities.

You give feedback on the services provided and many of you told us how much you value the range of courses, recreational groups and one-to-one advice that the centre organises. You told us that you would like more healthy cookery and keep-fit

courses and because we agree that this will help improve family health we have asked the centre to work with partners to focus more learning time on being healthy issues.

Your children make good progress in their learning and development and are really well prepared for school – as some of you are seeing this year in Big School Fun. Children's passport sticker books show that the children are really ready to settle well and make the most of school.

You told us that you benefit from the centre's activities for helping children to communicate well, such as Teddies Tunes. We like the way that many activities take place outdoors, which helps you and your children to relax and enjoy your learning.

We were pleased to see that many parents take up formal learning and most do complete their courses. We have asked the centre to improve how it tracks all your achievements, and your children's, to support you to progress as far as possible.

Many of you told us that you are inspired to become volunteers at the centre. When we visited, we were very impressed with the part you play in the Garden Gang, passing on skills in growing healthy food to your children, and with the way fathers have stepped in to organise Tumbletots on Saturdays. We have asked the centre and its partner organisations to find ways of giving you formal credit, or certification, for your volunteering.

We saw kindness and respect for each other throughout the centre. You told us how much you enjoy meeting with families from different backgrounds. You are not afraid to give your views and ideas, which is really helpful to the centre to know how well it is doing for you.

The centre is well managed and always makes safeguarding, whether in the centre or in your wider lives, a top priority. The centre works well through the steering group with all partner organisations in health, education and with you to plan wisely. The centre uses all resources sensibly and gives good value for money. We think that the centre has good capacity to go on improving. We wish you every success in the new building and to continuing enjoyment in all activities.

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