

# Southampton South Group of Children's Centres

60-68 Clovelly Road, Southampton, Hampshire, SO14 0AU

## Inspection date

5–6 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a good centre.

- Leaders and managers have led change well to set up services that are relevant to the community. The views of parents are highly influential in shaping an inclusive programme that makes the children's centres the hub of community life for most families with very young children. Staff and volunteers offer language skills that are an excellent match to the range in the community.
- Most families who live locally are registered and have access to good quality advice and guidance at all centres across the cluster. Integrated family learning and health-check services at 'Family Point' sessions have a positive impact on the well-being of families who attend regularly.
- Children with additional needs and families in need of protection, for example when they may be suffering domestic abuse, are helped as soon as needs arise. Staff make sensitive referrals to specialists and children's services so that children's and parents' circumstances improve.
- Children attending children's centre activities regularly progress well from their starting points and are well prepared for starting school. A determined approach by the local authority and the cluster ensures that good numbers of children take up their entitlement to funded early years education.
- The centres provide a range of good quality courses for adults to improve their personal and parenting skills. Parents make good progress in English and other courses that take them on their first steps towards training, qualification and improved job prospects.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The cluster has had less success at helping families in some of the most deprived areas to take part in children's centre activities regularly enough to make a real difference in their lives.
- Although there has been improvement in some children's achievement, tracking is limited and too many children in the area are starting school with skills that are below the expectations for most children in their age group, particularly in communication and language.
- Some parents have to wait a long while to join courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and do not take up opportunities to access qualifications beyond a basic level, or to train for work in specific services such as retail and customer care where there is a need.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Central Sure Start Children's Centre, including Northam Community Centre and Orchard Lane Community Church, Freemantle Sure Start Children's Centre and North Shirley Sure Start Children's Centre.

The inspectors held meetings with leaders and managers of the cluster, members of the cluster advisory board, centre staff, local authority early years staff, social care strategic managers, parents and volunteers, and partners from health, adult learning and Jobcentre Plus.

The inspectors visited Central Children's Centre, Freemantle Children's Centre, North Shirley Children's Centre, Northam Community Centre, Little Clovelly Pre-School, WEA adult education centre and the Jobcentre Plus.

They observed the centre's work and talked with centre staff, parents and children throughout the inspection and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection team

Christine Davies	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Penny Fisher	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Baber	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre/group

The Southampton South group of children's centres, known as the South Cluster, serves residential areas close to the city centre and docklands south of the river Itchen, from the Bevois Valley to the Winchester Road in the west. The cluster consists of three children's centres, which are all provided by Southampton City Council. The group is managed by a children's centre team manager who is assisted by two children's centre coordinators and a team of administrative and children's centre staff who work across the cluster. The cluster provides a wide range of children's centre services at three main centres and in community venues. The centres work with partnership health teams, Jobcentre Plus, Workers Educational Association, schools, private, voluntary and independent providers of childcare, and with other departments of the City Council to provide family support, adult and family learning, stay-and-play, maternity and infant health, information, advice and guidance services to meet the core purpose of children's centres. There is one advisory board for the cluster made up of representatives from partner organisations and parents, representing the parents' forum and the Friends of Sure Start support group.

The area towards the city centre and along the docks is densely populated and is among the 30% most disadvantaged in the country. Half of the children under five in the central area are in households that are among the 10% most deprived. Although the area to the west around the North Shirley centre is more affluent (counted as 70% most deprived), the population here and in the Freemantle area is growing faster than elsewhere in the city. Accommodation ranges from large detached houses to low rise and tower block flats. Most housing is privately rented and a large minority of families live in extended families or within shared multiple occupation housing.

The population in the cluster area is ethnically and linguistically very diverse. The population of the area is highly mobile with 20 to 50% of families moving home in any one year. There are established communities of families of South Asian, Chinese and Afghani origin, although the numbers of families of Polish, Lithuanian and other Eastern European heritage are growing. The proportion of families from White British communities ranges from under 20% in the central area to 70% in North Shirley. The levels of qualifications, particularly those gained in English, and income levels among families are low. Children enter early years provision with levels of skills, knowledge and ability typically below that for their age.

Central Children's Centre shares a site with Little Clovelly Pre-School, which is provided by Southampton City Council. It is inspected under separate arrangements and the report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

### What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- Work with partners to increase contact with families who use services less frequently, particularly those families living in some of the most disadvantaged areas, so that all families recognised as being most in need of support take up services regularly and show improvement in their lives.
- Work with partner organisations to increase access to English classes and to help greater numbers of parents to progress beyond a basic level and train for work in specific services such as retail and customer care where there is a need.
- Work with the local authority and partners to make sure that all children are ready to start school and that gaps in levels of achievement between groups of children when they first start in early years settings close as rapidly as possible:
  - by improving recording of children's achievements
  - by tracking and using this information to plan and target services for specific groups in the community and to improve children's communication and language skills.

## Inspection judgement

### Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Partners in health, schools, children's services, the Jobcentre Plus and training organisations publicise children's centre services well. Combined stay-and-play and health 'Family Point' sessions give all families across the area good access to health advice and information and guidance on a wide range of early childhood services. Despite the rapid growth and high turnover of families moving into and around the area, 90% are registered, including groups such as those with English as an additional language who have been a priority group for the cluster.
- The cluster successfully sustains regular contact and attendance among the most vulnerable families. Families assessed through the citywide common assessment framework process (Southampton Universal Partnership Plus Assessment Tool, SUPPAT), children in need or who are on child protection plans or looked after attend regularly and most quickly exceed the cluster's target of five or more contacts to gain good outcomes. Managers have identified that staff should now focus on encouraging more families in parts of the most deprived areas to attend more frequently, although no firm plans are in place.
- Family support workers, who are managed in health teams, provide effective targeted support. All families identified as being at risk of domestic abuse or who have children with disabilities get the help they need through direct practical support and sensitive referrals to partner agencies. Families remain engaged in relevant services until their needs are met.
- The uptake of parenting and other personal development courses is good, as effective partnerships with training providers support family needs through the provision of interpreters and crèches. The current spread of provision results in lower attendance at some courses in winter, waiting lists for courses in English for speakers of other languages and limited availability of classes with crèches for parents to progress on into in retail and customer care. These issues of access for some families are known but not effectively tackled across the partnerships in current plans.
- The level of uptake of funded early education across the cluster area is below the level for Southampton as whole, although there is good uptake by children in targeted families in the area. Outreach workers use additional community languages skilfully to contact families and ensure that the majority of vulnerable two-year-olds are taking up funded places in high quality provision. The local authority has made strenuous efforts to extend provision for two-year-olds, for example by setting up Little Clovelly Pre-School, and the numbers are rising, although it is too soon to see the impact on outcomes for children.

### The quality of practice and services

Good

- The assessment of the needs of individual families is comprehensive so that staff support families to take up services and make positive changes in their lives. The SUPPAT process involves parents in all assessments and, as a result, services are tailored well to each family's needs. Although assessment arrangements are set to change to a formal multi-agency assessment hub (MASH) in March 2014, information is already effectively shared locally so that families get the specialist health services they need promptly and are kept safe.
- Good quality advice on family health and well-being matters improves health outcomes for individual families rapidly, and outcomes are generally good across the area. Effective partnership working with health visitors, midwives and family nurse practitioners for young parents targets those who need most support. Skilled centre workers continually reinforce healthy eating messages, which are helping to maintain and improve levels of breastfeeding beyond six to eight weeks and are increasing parents' awareness of healthy lifestyles in areas where both obesity and undernourishment are too high.
- Parenting and personal development course completion rates are good and evaluations show that parents rapidly gain confidence, although long-term impact is not tracked effectively by the cluster. Parents appreciate and benefit from interesting course materials that are adapted for them by their

tutors. The learning of Afghani women is greatly enhanced through the appointment of a community worker who interprets during courses. The comment of one course member, made through the interpreter, represented many. 'I have learned to be more calm with my children and we are all happier.'

- Increasing numbers of parents take up well-organised volunteering opportunities that give them experience in relevant work settings to help realise their career aspirations. Volunteers speaking community languages, such as Polish as well as English, make a good contribution to welcoming and encouraging the participation of the families who are new to attending centres or speak little English.
- Children's achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including in communication and language, is below average for the city and the country as a whole. The cluster's limited tracking shows that children make good progress in their development, including communication and language, from very low starting points when attending children's centre activities regularly. However, recording children's progress in centre activities is at an early stage of development, and data for 2013 has not yet been analysed thoroughly to make an impact on improving outcomes for more children.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

Good

- Leaders and managers have led change well during the formation of the South Cluster to sustain a balanced, inclusive programme and build up the number of families registered. Priorities have been firmly agreed with all partners within the well-established Children's Trust. Information shared at the strategic level enables the centres in the cluster to identify and sustain the participation of families in priority groups, while recognising that they should expand their work to increase regular participation among families in their most deprived areas.
- Local partnership working and representation of parents' views on the advisory board are very strong. Schools, health visitor, midwives, adult training providers and representatives of the active parents' forum and Friends of Sure Start (FOSS) add vital local intelligence to ensure that each centre has a very good understanding of changing social and cultural needs. This influence has resulted in many significant improvements, such as access to courses and services for Afghani and Polish families, although there are too few courses in English for speakers of other languages.
- Supervision and line management arrangements in the complex staffing structures across the cluster effectively support staff in achieving high volumes of work with partners. Supervision helps staff to focus on safeguarding and act promptly when risks to families are identified. Early years practice is monitored and evaluated systematically and is good overall, although quality assurance of crèche children's records of achievement is not developed and records are not purposefully collated or tracked.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are all in place. Premises are safe and secure; staff carry out regular risk assessments at all venues and model good practice to keep families safe. The single central record of staff suitability checks shows that all workers have been checked in order to safeguard children. Managers liaise with the partner organisations that provide services in the cluster to verify that staff are suitably vetted. A named social worker is allocated to the cluster to assist staff in identifying children who may need further assessment or help through the SUPPAT, common assessment process, or where joint working may be needed for children in need or who are on child protection plans or looked after. Volunteers are adequately supervised and suitable background checks are carried out.
- Partnerships and the involvement of families have outstanding impact on every aspect of the cluster's work. Each of the centres is responsive to community needs. Staff and volunteers celebrate and harness diversity by providing a welcome to all groups and individuals, so that the centres become their hub while their children are very young. Resources are used well to deliver services to those most in need, while providing a good balance of universal, specialist and targeted services.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

**Group details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80637
<b>Local authority</b>	Southampton City Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	430122
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	4503
<b>Centre leader</b>	Team Manager: Steve Fish, Coordinators: Julie Powell and Herjinder Chahal
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	02380 917749
<b>Email address</b>	surestart.central@southampton.gov.uk

**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

20003 Central Sure Start Children's Centre

21216 Freemantle Sure Start Children Centre

22187 North Shirley Sure Start Children Centre

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