

Inspection report for Somerset Children's Centre

Local authority	Wandsworth Borough Council
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Linked school if applicable	Somerset Nursery School and Children's Centre
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Somerset Nursery School and Children's Centre

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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, family services manager, locality teacher, outreach workers, parents and carers using the service. They met with representatives of the local authority, advisory board, and services offered by the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Somerset Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre located within the building of Somerset Nursery School and Children's Centre, in St Mary's Park Ward, Battersea, London. The centre was designated with the full core offer in November 2009.

The centre has a reception area and one multi-purpose room. Services are delivered by employees or by providers commissioned by the centre or the local authority. On occasions these services take place at other locations nearby. A locality teacher and outreach workers serve several centres. The centre provides education, family support, child and family health, job and benefits advice.

The area is one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. It includes private developments, social housing and flats. The number of lone and workless families on benefits is higher than the national average. Families come from diverse cultures, with the largest groups coming from White British, East European and Black African backgrounds. Most families are referred to the centre by local services. Children's

development when they first start in the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with national expectations.

The local authority has delegated responsibility for the leadership and management of the centre to the governing body of the nursery school. The advisory board is newly constituted. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the school, the centre and the registered provision for children under two whose circumstances may make them vulnerable or who have special educational needs.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of Somerset Children’s Centre is satisfactory. In the two years it has been open the centre has focused on families who have been directed there by a range of local services. The centre has developed a good level of expertise in assisting parents and carers of young children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and who attend the registered early years provision on site. This has led to the perception in the locality that the centre is only for children and families who have been invited to use it. New arrangements for outreach staff to promote the centre’s work, in collaboration with key partners, are at a very early stage of development. Parenting programmes, cookery classes and ‘Stay and Play’ activities commissioned by or run by staff are popular. Anecdotal evidence from parents and carers indicates that these have brought about changes so that families who attend now eat healthily and have confidence in bringing up their young children. Safeguarding is the heart of the centre’s work. Activities to promote safety in the home that help parents and carers understand their child’s behaviour and appreciate their rights and responsibilities in contributing to a safe environment have been successful. The centre is not yet making sufficient use of statistical data to check the impact of its work on outcomes for families in the medium and longer term.

Families attending the centre receive good care, guidance and tailored support. Staff draw on the services commissioned by the local authority to provide parents and carers with the individual help they need, for example, with regard to mental health, obtaining benefits, access to education, getting back to work, and dealing with

domestic violence. Effective collaboration with aspects of the health service support families with concerns about their child's speech and overall development, as well as advice to give up smoking. However, few services provide the centre with an evaluation of their impact on outcomes for children, parents and carers directed to them. Also, these services are not involved sufficiently in contributing to the centre's development plan. Consequently, leaders and managers do not have enough information to measure the centre's overall effectiveness or on which to base further targets for improvement.

Leaders and managers are determined to make the centre a focal point for the community. The local authority services are undergoing review and reorganisation. In the light of this, the centre has made provision for its sustainability, especially by employing staff who can deliver the programmes the community needs. Some staff work successfully across the school, the registered provision, the centre and other centres to strengthen the provision. Plans for the future development of the centre are broad in their range and progress towards their implementation is checked regularly. However, the objectives are not sharply enough defined to demonstrate the intended impact on outcomes for the target groups. The advisory board is very new. Representatives from the community and across the services are currently being recruited to this board to promote higher quality, integrated provision for all target groups. Parents and carers have opportunities to comment on the courses and events they undertake. These resulted in changes to the content of the courses, and brought about the provision of coffee mornings where parents and carers learn about other services. However, systems to involve parents and carers in governance and decision making are not fully established. The centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In conjunction with the local authority and service providers, collect and use statistical data in order to set sharply focused targets for improvement and check the impact of the work of the centre in meeting the needs of the community in the medium and longer term.
- Extend self-evaluation procedures to enable all providers involved with the centre to reflect on their effectiveness and contribute to the centre's development plan.
- Make provision for those on the advisory board, as well as parents, carers and other key partners, to have increased involvement in the governance of the centre, so that they can offer challenge to the leaders and contribute to decision making.
- Develop the roles of outreach workers so they can work together with key partners to raise the profile of the centre and engage with more of the target groups.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Families keep safe while in the centre and children behave well as activities are captivating. A recent 'Safety Week' raised awareness about keeping children safe at home and out in the community. Children identified through the Early Years Multi-Agency Panel make an early start to their education in the registered provision for two-year-olds. Parents and carers, particularly of these children, become more confident as a result of good one-to-one advice and structured parenting programmes that help them understand their child's behaviour. The centre, by working closely with appropriate professionals to support families subject to child protection plans or the common assessment framework, reduces the risk of harm.

The centre has contributed successfully to reducing the number of children who are obese at the age of five. More families think carefully about what they eat, but they are disappointed that opportunities in the centre to promote physical activity have stopped. Mothers attending the centre continue to breastfeed their children for longer than eight weeks. 'Talk Shop', led by a speech therapist, provides good advice that enhances children's communication skills. Serious concerns about a child's speech and language development are identified early. A programme to support the mental and emotional health of families is too new to judge its impact. 'Stay and Play', Baby and Toddler 'PEEP' (Peer Early Education Partnership) and family friendships encouraged by staff in the community reduce the sense of isolation. Although families receive advice from the local community nursery nurse, links with family health services are limited.

Analysis of data shows that an increasing number of children are achieving well in their personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy at the age of five. Families enjoy sessions where they can play and learn together. One mother said, 'I have learned a great deal about how children learn through play. I am glad I was able to do some research into it and gain accreditation for the work. I want to have a job in a school in future.' Difficulties in engaging Job Centre Plus have led to staff directing families to other services in the locality to gain advice about employment, benefits, training and qualifications. Staff are not sufficiently aware of the impact of these services on families in their reach area.

Regular coffee mornings enable families from all backgrounds to share their views about services on offer in the locality. Parent and carer representation on the advisory board has yet to contribute fully to decision making.

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	3
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 children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal	3

and social development	
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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

Programmes are tailored to meet specific requirements of families assessed by partners as needing to attend the centre. They are designed to promote enjoyment and purposeful learning for all. They are also designed and are successful in improving parents' and carers' mental health and parenting skills and make a positive impact at an early stage of a child's development. Some last 10 weeks so that skills can be taught and applied steadily. Certificates are awarded and achievements celebrated at the end of each course. Space at the centre limits the breadth of activities it can offer at any one time, especially with regard to opportunities for parents and carers to improve their overall educational development.

Staff are selective in their choice of programmes to avoid duplication with other nearby centres. Outreach services are at an early stage of development in extending contact with other key target groups and partners in the community. That said the centre has been successful in engaging some teenage parents and raising their aspirations to go to university. Where services are provided by different contributors at other sites, insufficient data is collected to check attendance, participation rates and outcomes for the families.

Good quality childcare and education provided within the registered provision is improving outcomes especially for children. Families who have met significant challenges in their lives have been well supported. Individuals receive good care, guidance and support while in the centre and from partners with whom the centre has regular contact. For example, one parent of a child with special educational needs and/or disabilities said, 'It has been really great. We have enjoyed attending the courses and we have had really good advice to help our child at home.'

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Good policies and procedures ensure that children and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable are safeguarded. All who work in the centre, including visiting professionals, have been subjected to checks with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure they are suitable to work with children. Training is up to date and staff work within a good multi-agency approach to intervene early where issues of mental health, domestic violence or limited parenting skills place children at risk.

Arrangements for governance and accountability are appropriate but insufficiently developed in order to drive improvement at the faster rate the leaders have identified as necessary. The advisory board does not include enough professional representation to contribute to the strategic development of the centre and ensure constant high quality, integrated, provision. However, it does promote the centre's effective engagement with statutory, private, voluntary and independent providers satisfactorily to meet needs. Partners such as Job Centre Plus are not engaged as fully as they might be.

All involved in the leadership and management of the centre know the area well and the centre's strengths and the aspects that need improvement. Members of the advisory board are aware of the community's perceptions of the centre and that views of families and key partners are not sufficiently reflected in its processes of self-evaluation. One member of the board said, 'We need to raise the profile of the centre in the community.' They are taking steps to address this. Families from all backgrounds and abilities are included in what the centre has to offer. Augmented communication systems enable those with communication difficulties to contribute appropriately.

All children and families, regardless of their situation or background, are welcome at the centre. Plans for development of the centre are rightly linked closely to the overall priorities within the local authority's plan to improve outcomes for families and young children. They do not, however, include sufficient contributions from partners to underpin further coherent provision. The lack of sharply focused targets and effective use of data makes it difficult for staff to measure the centre's overall success. Action taken towards developments is monitored regularly by the local authority, but feedback offers appreciative support rather than challenge for improvement.

The centre offers satisfactory value for money. The environment, accommodation and resources for children to play with are high quality. Staff skills are deployed effectively. Most activities take place during the school terms. There are fewer opportunities to access the services of the centre in the holidays.

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

3

The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
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	3

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

Information from the inspection of Somerset Nursery School that was inspected at the same time as the centre. The report following the inspection of the early years childcare provision in November 2010. Both provisions were found to be 'good'.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Somerset Children's Centre on 22– 23 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

I am sure you will remember that I visited Somerset Children's Centre with a colleague recently. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about the help you have been given by the centre. Your time and the views you expressed made an important contribution to the inspection. You mentioned you feel safe in the centre and are growing in confidence in looking after your children. You said you particularly enjoyed the cookery course you attended and that you would like more such courses where you can share your recipes. You mentioned that you have changed the way you cook for your family so that you eat healthily. You also told us you enjoy the 'Stay and Play' and Baby and Toddler 'PEEP' sessions as your children have fun and you learn how to play with them too. You appreciate the way that staff

ask your views about the activities you attend. You say they listen to you and change activities, incorporating your ideas. However, at the moment not many of you or professional experts are officially involved in making decisions about the centre.

The centre provides you with good individual care, guidance and support designed to help you make the difference you want to make to your lives. The safety of your families is important to the staff. Families have been directed to the centre by professionals working in the locality. You told us, and others have mentioned to the leaders of the centre, that you believe you can only go there by invitation and that the services are only for the children. This is not the case, but it means fewer members of the community attend as they are unaware of the full range of the services the centre can offer. Some, such as cookery, are provided in locations nearby. Sessions in the centre help you to learn how to cope well with your children, keep them safe, and gain certificates that will help you when looking for work. Staff know where to direct you to get help, for example, to make sure you receive all the benefits to which you are entitled. They put you in touch with advisers to help you with worries about your health, to get back into work, to stop smoking, and to help you overcome difficulties that make you unhappy at home.

All children and families, regardless of their situation or background, are welcome at the centre. Arrangements for staff operating in the community to work in greater collaboration with local services and encourage more people to attend the centre are new. There are signs that families who are feeling isolated are introduced to new friends, but it is important that more people seek out the centre to improve their lives too.

Leaders and managers are determined to make the centre a focal point in your community. They have plans to improve the centre, but these do not say enough about how leaders will measure their impact on the lives of more families in the locality. This is because few services check how successful they are in working with you and the centre or contribute their ideas to its improvement. A data system to collect numerical information that enables leaders to check how successful the centre is over time was introduced into the centre by the local authority in May last year. This is not yet being used sufficiently to identify the centre's strengths or set targets for improvement. The advisory board that oversees the work of the centre and helps to guide its improvement is new. It is actively recruiting more representatives from parents, carers and the services the centre uses to increase their contribution to the decisions about its development.

We have asked the leaders and managers to make the following changes.

- Work with the local authority and professionals to collect and use numerical information to set very clear targets for improvement and to check the success of the work of the centre in meeting the needs of families over time.
- Build on the procedures the centre has to identify its strengths and areas for development by asking all who contribute to what the centre provides to reflect on their effectiveness and contribute to the centre's development plan.

- Make provision for those on the advisory board, as well as parents, carers and other contributors, to have more involvement in the decision making at the centre.
- Develop the roles of those working within the community so they can work together with professionals to raise the profile of the centre and enable more people to obtain the help they need.

We wish you success in the future.

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