

Inspection report for First Steps Twerton Children's Centre

Local authority	Bath and Northeast Somerset
Inspection number	383676
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	First Steps

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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the director of the centre, representatives of the centre's management group, the chair of trustees, representatives from partner agencies, members of staff and users of the centre and its annex.

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

Information about the centre

First Steps Twerton Children's Centre is a phase one centre and was the first designated within Bath and North East Somerset. The centre serves the compact geographical area of Twerton. The local population is mostly White British families, with smaller percentages from other minority ethnic minority groups such as those from Eastern European countries and the children from overseas families working at the local hospital.

The centre provides services from two buildings. The main building was purpose-built as a community nursery and is next door to St Michael's Junior School. This houses the day care and has some rooms for other services. The second building is in the centre of Twerton Village and serves both as a base for the family team and accommodation for other services. Some services are also delivered within the community, for example at a youth centre.

The centre and the majority of its services are delivered by First Steps (Bath), which is a registered charity managed by a Board of Trustees and some services are

delivered by other agencies such as the NHS, JobCentre Plus and the community learning service. There is also a formal partnership with Barnardos and Southside Family Project, which delivers the family support service. On-site early childcare and education is an integral part of the children's centre. Services provided directly by the centre include stay and play groups and support for local childminders. Data shows that 30% of families in the reach area are dependent on workless benefits. Teenage parents are also a specific target group, due to their larger than average number. A group of Travellers live on the boundary of the reach but there are very few children in the group although a planned consultation may result in increased numbers at the site in the future. Children's knowledge and skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are typically still quite low in the centre's reach, particularly with regard to communication and language development and their personal and 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

First Steps Twerton Children's Centre is a good centre which is well led and managed. Staff and management show high levels of commitment, work well together and create a warm and welcoming environment. This results in provision which makes a good and sometimes outstanding contribution to improving outcomes for all families who have contact with the centre. The care, guidance and support offered are excellent. Highly professional staff assess families needs sensitively and accurately. They work exceptionally well with partner agencies in order to tailor services to meet local needs. The good quality, highly flexible on-site daycare provision is pivotal in the centre's inclusive philosophy; children with specific needs are fully included and the timings offered fit families' varying needs.

The local authority works effectively with the centre's director to monitor the quality of all aspects of the provision and provide information to support the centre's work. The centre has largely built up a clear picture of the make-up of its community and is effective in reaching most vulnerable families. Centre staff are successful in easing the transition between the centre and schools locally. This includes some of the most potentially vulnerable children. As a result of these close links, the percentage of

children now reaching the expected standard by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved and the gap has begun to narrow slightly between the lowest 20% and the rest. Boys are doing better with their early literacy skills as a result of a concerted focus across the centre on language development and storytelling.

Excellent relationships between staff and families ensure that any concerns are shared and, where necessary, action to support them promptly taken. Staff are very well trained in safeguarding issues, and excellent referral and information sharing procedures mean vulnerable children and adults are identified and referred to appropriate agencies. They provide a secure environment for families undergoing supervised and supported contact.

Processes for staff supervision and professional development are of high quality and result in well-motivated staff. They unstintingly give of their time to support the many volunteers and those obtaining work experiences in the centre. This, together with Jobcentre Plus, who are regularly in the centre, has an excellent impact on the number of families able to begin the process of re-entering work. Staff regularly review and evaluate their work and subsequently adjust the centre's programme. The quality of these evaluations is, however, inconsistent although there are a few examples that are highly sophisticated. Occasionally, the data arriving from partner agencies such as health professionals lack enough specific detail about the centre's local area and this potentially inhibits its ability to make and use a thorough analysis of local needs, for example in relation to strategies to help reduce emergency hospital admissions.

The centre has a good capacity for sustained improvement because the highly professional staff are constantly looking for ways to improve and have a good track record of doing so. They can hone this even further if they sharpen their evaluations and develop a better consistency from which to work. The centre has climbed out of a substantial negative financial position through the diligence of the director and the trustees. There is evidence of good improvement in outcomes such as children and parents' positive contribution. It now offers outstanding value for money.

Parents and carers speak very warmly about the support the centre offers and it is fitting that their words sum up the impact of the centre: 'They have helped a lot and been a pillar of strength' and 'Simply brilliant'.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure all course leaders adopt a more consistent approach to analysing the impact of their work, especially on vulnerable groups, to help the centre further tailor its work to emerging needs.
- Work with health partners to interrogate their data and ensure the centre is fully aware of any emerging trends and how it can assist in any necessary preventative work.

How good are outcomes for families?

Families' understanding of how to promote their own health develops well through programmes such as Healthy Living Week and the area has obesity rates that are average for the local authority. Parents and their children become more active, for example by the good work done showing them how to enjoy and use the forest. Children's emotional well-being was especially well supported by this programme. Young parents in particular have benefited from working in a group on cooking healthy budget food for their children. Breastfeeding rates are significantly improved and there is a strong link with the other support group in the locality. Broad campaigns to reduce smoking have had an impact on family members, including some fathers, although details of the exact numbers involved are unclear. Individual support through musical intervention makes a very significant contribution to the emotional health and well-being of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Children and families are kept exceptionally safe as a result of the good range of preventative work undertaken by the centre. Parents are encouraged to learn first aid and volunteers in the centre also obtain these skills. Staff's modelling of a calm and consistent approach to dealing with potential risks has a good impact on children, parents and carers. The centre's Healthy Living Award ensured a very high level of awareness regarding issues about road safety, with 34 children participating in the safety training. Children have now been heard to remind parents about issues such as wearing a seat belt. Parents subject to domestic violence are very well supported and appropriately referred. Excellent support is also given to families who are subject to child protection plans in order to safeguard vulnerable children.

Parents and children enjoy playing together when they visit 'stay and play' and 'babies and bumps' sessions. Parents said they have learnt a good deal about how to extend play and have a happy time with their children. Beautiful diaries show the exceptional progress made in parenting skills and the very effective support given by staff. This has had a profound impact on many families. Considerable work is done to assist families with school admissions and the transition to the next stage of learning. Boys in particular have improved their communication skills. Parents are also well supported in their own learning, with large numbers becoming volunteers in the day care centre. Young parents are effectively encouraged to form support networks amongst themselves and to learn many new skills.

Parents are assisted to make considered decisions for their children through the work of the family support workers who adapt their approach to meet the needs of individuals, including parents who themselves have learning difficulties. Users were very complimentary about the degree of support given and explained how this helped them gain higher levels of self-confidence. They feel their ideas are listened to and that the centre is responsive. Where a few parents have had difficulty being part of the community due to a potential language barrier, the centre has provided excellent support to make sure they feel welcome and part of the centre. There are opportunities to give feedback and to participate in the parent's forum. Parents and

carers reported they could often see the way ahead better as a result of their discussions with centre staff and their partner agencies.

The economic position of families is greatly improved by the work the centre does with its learning partner and the Jobcentre Plus link. The number on workless benefits has fallen slightly. Families are encouraged to think ahead and plan in small but effective steps to re-enter the job market, first through the vibrant volunteer programme and then via work experience. Problems with debt are dealt with well by family advice and support including the good work of the Citizens Advice Bureau. This is an example where 'joined up' thinking and partnership work builds an effective team to support individuals and their families to get over crisis points. They are supported to overcome challenges they face by, for example, the flexible, and sometimes subsidised, use of the on-site day care.

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	2
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	2
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?

2

Excellent attention is given to developing an understanding through effective assessment procedures of families' specific needs. Staff make exceptionally good use of the Comprehensive Assessment Framework (CAF) process and work well with a variety of partners, including the midwives and health visitors to ensure a rounded approach is adopted. The range of services offered meets the needs of those currently accessing the centre, although staff acknowledge that there might be one or two groups who have yet to fully engage with what is on offer. They have had good training to make them aware of the needs of the Traveller community in preparation for possible changes in the level of need should more families arrive at the local site. Most groups in the centre are well attended and those that are for everyone (universal) have been very effective in encouraging initial contact with some otherwise reticent families. Relationships are carefully fostered so parents and carers feel confidence in staff. Outreach is taken to the annex and another site in the

reach area in order to encourage families to engage who rarely leave their immediate vicinity.

There are good opportunities for personal development and staff are effective in signposting users to other local training providers, for example when extensive use of information and communication technology is required. The centre's newsletter celebrates and shares the achievement of users and is a colourful resource, telling the locality about events and courses.

Many children with extra needs are already catered for within the day care provision. Users speak highly of the opportunities and advice given and cited some very moving examples of the level of support they had encountered. Parents value the exceptional support provided by the children's centre and, although there is not currently a specific group for children with disabilities, it is in the planning stage. The centre enjoys a good reputation locally and is strongly rooted in its community.

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	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The leadership team set high expectations and have put in place many of the necessary steps to achieve their eventual goal of overall excellence. The management team are well supported by the trustees who have an in-depth knowledge of the centre's work and provide valuable challenge and support. Their good understanding of the needs of the local community ensures that the centre is well placed to identify local priorities and to begin tackling them. The team also respond promptly to the regular monitoring by the local authority. Their subsequent action plans, for example after the safeguarding audit, demonstrate that they swiftly and rigorously deal with any identified issues, thus ensuring the provision constantly develops. Cross-working with their second children's centre, Moorlands, also ensures that senior staff have a keen eye on issues in the wider locality. Staff have worked hard to grasp the key implications from the available data and are beginning to develop a more sophisticated use of the information to ensure no vulnerable groups remain unidentified. The local authority has helped develop data analysis and is aware that the centre may require further help to obtain and decipher some health authority data.

Morale is high and despite previous difficulties with finances, the centre now has a sustainable position. It uses its resources exceptionally well. Good value is achieved

by sharing resources such as the school playing fields and making the most of volunteers. Staff make creative use of limited space in the centre and work hard to involve the community in the centre's events while also encouraging families to use local facilities, such as the city farm.

Young parents receive good support through activities designed specifically with them in mind. Centre staff actively encourage the wider family to engage with services on offer. Grandparents are welcomed and the centre has contact with more fathers than is usually the case; although this is an area they are keen to develop further. The partnerships with agencies to support some of the most vulnerable children are exceptionally strong and there is considerable evidence of multiagency teams working well together around each vulnerable child. All safeguarding procedures are comprehensive and well recorded.

Centre staff are a diverse group and children are all well supported, including new migrants and those from a wide variety of cultures. Recent work has included festivals of light and more traditional events such as harvest. Inclusion for children and families of all backgrounds is good. The centre is keen to reach some under-represented groups, such as same-sex couples.

Self-evaluation is accurate and the centre is aware of what it does well and where minor improvements are required. They acknowledge that although their data is now better understood and used, there is more to do to complete a really sophisticated analysis and cross-checks to ensure all groups are reached. Targets, such as that to raise the number of teenage parents seen, have helped them to investigate where the local teenagers accessed services and to re-assign their worker appropriately. The provision of a suitable place to encourage the young parents to attend is a good example of the centre identifying the need and listening to what parents want from the provision. The centre also leads the way in some excellent innovative programmes, such as their work with younger teenagers to give them a thorough understanding of exactly what is involved in caring for a baby. This involved a link with the local secondary school. Overall, the centre listens to parents' and carers' views well but the link between the parents' forum and the trustees is not sufficiently formalised.

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	2
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	2

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	2

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected First Steps Twerton Children’s Centre on 23 and 24 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre guides and supports you exceptionally well and many of those who spoke to us confirmed that the centre staff ‘go the extra mile’ and assist in a wide variety of ways, especially if a family is in a crisis.

They keep you and your children very safe and if you need help, they know which services to access to help the most. There are good opportunities for you and your children to learn and to think about any skills you will need for future employment. The Jobcentre Plus staff visit the site and make access easy for families. The good quality day-care has a very flexible programme which is subsidised if necessary.

Parents and carers are able to give their opinions and it was clear that these were heeded. We did not, however, think that the link between the forum and the trustees was quite formal enough. All the activities on offer are of good quality and help you and your families to learn about healthy food and living. It was good to see some families had, for example, stopped smoking but the use the centre makes of its health (data) information can still be improved further to ensure you are all helped effectively.

The centre gives good value for money and helps support families to communicate better so that by the time the children go to school, they are better prepared to mix with others and have their voices heard. They are also good at helping with the process of applying for school and making the transition. There is strong support for

children who have special educational needs. The music therapy is a great help for some, and other families have enjoyed the good 'Flying Start' programme. The group for younger parents has been very helpful in getting parents together and looking at issues like safety and healthy eating. Childminders also find the centre's support helpful in their work. The centre is inclusive and all are welcome.

Overall, the centre is doing well and the leadership and management are good and they are constantly striving to make it better, although not all their evaluations are as detailed as the best. Also, some of the data from health partners needs to be explored further to see if any other preventative courses are needed.

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