

Inspection report for Dymchurch Children's Centre

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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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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 representatives from a range of partner agencies and the local authority, the chair of the district advisory board, and frontline staff. They spoke to families formally and informally around the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation and visited groups run at the centre and an outreach group at St Mary's Bay.

Information about the centre

Dymchurch Children's Centre is one of eight centres in the Shepway district of Kent. It is a phase two centre which was designated in 2008 and serves a rural area including the villages of Dymchurch, Etchinghill, Lympne, Postling, Saltwood, Sellindge Stanford and St Mary's Bay. The centre serves an area which is mixed in terms of deprivation with nearly half of the reach area within the top third ranked for deprivation in the country. Around 10% of families are claiming out-of-work benefits. Homes consist of social housing, rented accommodation and privately-owned homes. Services operate from within the centre's building, located on the site of Dymchurch Primary School, and within some community buildings. A registered crèche also operates from the centre. Shepway is less ethnically diverse than other parts of Kent with the majority of families of White British heritage. Children's levels of skills and understanding on entry to school are lower than those expected for their age, although higher than the Kent average. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage around 62% of children achieve at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage, with writing identified as a weaker area.

The centre provides the full core offer services and has other professionals such as a community health nurse, health visitor and midwives running services from the centre.

Governance arrangements are provided by the local authority. A district advisory board oversees the work of the eight centres in Shepway and there is a steering group at centre level.

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

Dymchurch Children's Centre is making an overall satisfactory contribution to improving outcomes for families, with some good features. The majority of the families who access the centre benefit from the groups which are provided. All staff show high levels of commitment and work effectively as a team. As a result the centre is well respected by families and is seen as part of the community. One parent echoed the views of many by telling inspectors that she found the centre 'a happy, friendly environment, I really love it and I have brought more friends with me'.

Safeguarding is a high priority and as a result families report that they feel the centre is a safe place for them. A range of effective safeguarding policies and procedures have been put in place. Safer recruitment procedures for staff and volunteers are good and include ongoing safeguarding training. Some families identified as most in need of support benefit from outreach work. Good communication between partner agencies ensures that families are well supported by a wide range of services. Families have opportunities to contribute to the centre's work through the parent voice group, the steering group, and membership of the district advisory board. The centre is proactive in seeking the views of families and these contribute to service evaluations. However, this is not systematic and evaluations are not sufficiently analysed in order to bring about improvement to services or measure the impact of the centre on improving outcomes for families.

Key strengths are the care, guidance and support given to families and partnership working arrangements. The centre has worked hard to build relationships with families and partner agencies and as a result families feel able to approach staff, who are knowledgeable about other services and can signpost parents and carers to relevant agencies. Case studies demonstrate that the centre is having a positive

impact on improving outcomes for some of its users. The centre cannot yet effectively target services at those who would most benefit from support available at the centre as only about half of the families within its reach area are registered and therefore they lack essential basic information.

The centre produces an annual action plan and this is closely linked to the centre's self-evaluation. Data are available at national and local level and this is used to assess the centre's work. Due to the design of the reach area families often attend the most accessible centre to them. The centre is not yet rigorously monitoring attendance data to ensure that families from target groups and those most in need of intervention and support are accessing the services of centres within the district.

The centre is welcoming to all parts of the community. Resources available to children are good at promoting cultural diversity. However, not all displays and literature are fully reflective of all aspects of the community and do not always promote differences positively. Although the centre is able to provide information in a number of languages this is not actively promoted.

Staff are encouraged to build on their individual strengths and develop expertise in specific areas. Individual and group supervision, regular meetings and relevant training ensure that staff are fully equipped to undertake their roles. Outreach work has improved registrations of families overall at centres in the district; however, this is not targeted sufficiently at families within the Dymchurch reach area. The manager provides clear leadership, and there is an effective steering group and district advisory board. This means that the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that all areas of the wider community are positively promoted and reflected through every aspect of the centre in order to improve access for all groups.
- Obtain a clearer picture of the reach area in order to accurately identify target groups and those most in need of intervention and support.
- Develop systems to effectively evaluate the work of the centre by:
 - identifying the specific needs of families within the reach area, including those from target groups and most in need of intervention and support
 - demonstrating the impact on improving outcomes
 - ensuring that services continue to meet the needs of families within the reach area.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Families enthusiastically engage with and enjoy activities provided. An extensive range of information is available for parents and carers about their children's learning and development and this supports them in their interaction with their children. As one parent commented 'I learnt about development stages. Now I know I don't ask my child to do things they don't understand.' Parents and carers are encouraged to contribute to learning journeys which are completed when their children attend the centre crèche. Staff act as good role models and educators. The centre has worked with the primary school in providing opportunities for children to develop areas of learning which previously had been identified as weaker areas. Parents and carers have good opportunities for learning and development such as courses relating literacy and mathematics. The centre provides a popular volunteer programme. Some volunteers have been successful in gaining paid employment or going on to further training.

Families who access the centre show improvements in their health outcomes; however, too few access the centre. Those who attend show an understanding of healthy eating and this is promoted through displays at the centre and through the provision of healthy snacks. Obesity rates are low and decreasing. The centre promotes breastfeeding both at the centre and within the community and as a result parents feel more confident to breastfeed. Breastfeeding rates increased significantly in 2011 and are now slightly above the national average. Parents with mental health issues are well supported. Baby massage sessions allow families to build an emotional bond. Ante-natal and child health clinics are provided and a range of health-related information is available.

Promoting the safety of families is a priority and as a result families report that they feel safe at the centre. Families who need additional help are well supported including through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process. In times of crisis families gain excellent support. Families also benefit from effective outreach work in the home.

The centre has worked hard to become part of the local community; however, its reach area covers a considerable distance and this means that the centre is not easily accessible to all families within the reach area. Those who use the centre are encouraged to share their views and evaluate the services available. Some parents and carers are actively involved in different levels of the centre's governance and increasing parental involvement has been identified as an area for development. Strategies to obtain the views of families in the wider reach area are not yet in place.

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	2

concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	
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	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

Space is used effectively with a range of services matched to the needs of families. The centre runs monthly groups in four different villages in the reach area. The centre is used by a number of partner agencies for meetings and access/contact visits.

Parents and carers attend the centre most accessible to them. However, the centre does not analyse data sufficiently to identify whether families are from target groups or those most in need of intervention and support or to track their progress in terms of improved outcomes.

Effective partnership working and clear communication ensure that tailored support can be offered to identified families. Details of families who do not meet the threshold for children's social care intervention are passed on to the children's centre for support. Outreach services are good and are reaching families known by the centre as those in need. Case studies demonstrate the positive impact of the outreach work on improving outcomes for families. Information, advice and effective signposting ensure that families are well supported, including in times of crisis. Structured parenting programmes are improving the skills of those who attend. Families who experience difficulty accessing the centre initially are well supported and are made to feel welcome.

The centre's volunteer programme is effective at involving people in the work of the centre. They receive a comprehensive induction, access to training and ongoing support. Personal development portfolios are created for all volunteers that can be used with employers. Some families benefit from the training courses offered at the centre and this builds their confidence and aspiration. The provision of a crèche allows them to focus on their learning. Parents and carers do not have clear progression routes to improve their employability skills. A few parents and carers have gone on to access paid employment and training; however, the numbers are low.

Very strong links have been built between the primary school, private nursery and children's centre and this is helped by them all being based on the same site. Gaps in learning identified by the school have resulted in a sharper focus on writing skills in

the centre. The 'Step up to School' programme is effective in helping children and parents and carers to plan for the transition to school and involves a range of partner agencies.

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

The day-to-day management of the centre is well organised. Line management arrangements are clear and understood. Governance arrangements are in place through the centre steering group and the district advisory board with clear lines of accountability. The staff team are committed to providing quality services in order to improve outcomes for families. Priorities to improve outcomes are included in the centre action plan; however, these are not always measurable.

Safeguarding procedures are effective and there are rigorous and robust recruitment and vetting procedures. These procedures are consistently applied to staff and volunteers and there are opportunities for joint training. Staff have built very good links with health and social care professionals and there are good procedures for identifying some of the families most in need of intervention and support. The centre is proactive in using the CAF process and supporting other local early years settings in becoming familiar and instigating the process for families.

The centre provides good value for money. The centre is well utilised by families and partner agencies. It is proactive in seeking funding from external sources. Staff are effectively deployed at activities which best suit their skills and knowledge. Families who are provided with outreach services are well supported. The centre has focused resources on increasing the families registered at the centre and there is a steady increase.

Overall the centre promotes equality and diversity appropriately. Information about the centre is displayed in English, although information can be supplied in different languages. Displays and publicity are not reflective of the wider community and do not include representation of excluded groups. The centre has been successful in engaging disabled children. The centre's action plan includes a target to increase the numbers of disabled parents and carers who access the centre. Celebrations such as those for Chinese new year include activities for children and displays and as a result children learn about different cultures. The centre has worked with the local school

on identifying gaps in achievement and has promoted these. As a result the achievement gap is closing. The building is fully wheelchair accessible.

Families have a range of formal and informal ways to feed in their views and opinions about the work of the centre and as a result some changes have been made. Evaluations are completed for all activities and groups; however, these are not systematically analysed nor are objectives sufficiently clear to fully assess the impact of the work on improving outcomes. Although the centre effectively supports some families who are most in need, services are not sufficiently targeted nor does the centre track the progress of families who are from within their reach area but access other centres. Low registration numbers mean that the centre does not have a comprehensive picture of families within its reach area. This hinders its ability to obtain the views of the wider community.

Centre staff have built good links with a range of partner agencies, many of whom sit on the advisory board and/or steering group. There are particularly good links with health professionals, including the link health visitor. Centre staff have built excellent links with local early years providers and community groups and are continuing to strengthen these. Many partner agencies and local businesses are now involved in promoting the centre and increasing public awareness of the centre and its services.

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	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	2
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Dymchurch Children's Centre on 25–26 January 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall, with some good features. We would like to thank those of you who took the time to talk to us about the centre and your experiences. It was a pleasure to meet you and hear about how the centre has made a difference to your lives.

Your children's centre provides you and your child with a suitable range of services. We found that the care, guidance and support that staff offer you are good. You enjoy attending the centre and many of you told us how friendly and approachable you find the staff. One comment which captured the views of many was from a parent who told inspectors that 'The centre is brilliant, really helpful.' You told us that you value the safe environment and different activities the centre provides and we could see how your children enjoy themselves. We agree that the centre staff are warm and welcoming.

Safeguarding procedures are in place and are good. Staff work hard to provide you and your children with a safe environment in which to play and learn, for example by undertaking risk assessments. Checking procedures ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children. Outcomes for families overall are satisfactory. The centre has worked hard to improve health outcomes, for example through increasing those of you who breastfeed, and as a result rates are slightly higher than the national average. Some of you contribute to the work of the centre through attending the parent voice meeting, steering group and/or district advisory board. Many more of you contribute to the work of the centre through evaluating the services offered both formally and informally. These evaluations are not always sufficiently analysed and the information used to improve services and bring about improved outcomes. We have asked the centre to further develop the way it evaluates its work to ensure that it improves outcomes in all areas of its work.

The centre is welcoming to all areas of the community and this is particularly evident in the multi-use room where children's activities take place. It is not as evident throughout the rest of the centre and we asked the centre to look at how it promotes all areas of equality and diversity throughout the whole centre.

Those of you who access the centre benefit from the services that are offered, particularly in times of crisis or when you need additional support. Families who receive support from outreach workers benefit from the advice and guidance offered. Those of you who are anxious about accessing the centre are supported by staff when initially visiting groups. We have asked the centre to look at how more families can benefit from the services offered.

The centre runs a range of groups for you and your children such as 'Messy play' and 'Wriggle and Giggle'. These are well attended and you and your children enjoy the activities. Many of you benefit from the crèche facilities which are provided so that you can attend meetings and training sessions. Your children benefit from the learning journeys and this helps staff to plan activities to develop your children. You enjoy looking at these and seeing how your children have progressed. Some of you benefit from volunteering at the centre. You receive good support from centre staff. Centre staff also help you to create 'personal development portfolios' which demonstrate the activities which you have been involved in and can be shown to prospective employers. Information about jobs and training opportunities is displayed at the centre and this is useful in helping to find employment opportunities.

We wish you and your families every success for the future.

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