

Inspection report for Daisy Chains Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	383422
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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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.

Report published: February 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 additional inspector and an early years Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, representatives from the advisory board and steering group, and spoke with parents and family members using the centre during the inspection. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The centre is a phase two centre running a full core offer. It was designated in 2008 to provide services across a rural area including four villages, but there was an extended period of time while staff were appointed and its concept developed before the first services were offered in March 2009. The reach area was extended to eight villages in October 2010. The centre is a virtual centre without a designated building. It has an information hub and administrative officer in Meopham library which is attached to Meopham School, and, with the aid of a centre van, runs activities in a number of locations.

Children's centres in the Gravesend area are based on a locality model of seven centres. Parents are encouraged to attend the activities which meet their needs at whichever centre is convenient. The centre manager manages two centres within the locality and most staff are appointed to work across more than one centre. The centre is governed by the local authority through an advisory board. A steering group, consisting of parents and carers and local community representatives, contributes to the centre's direction and reports to the advisory board. The health visiting teams for the area are mainly based in two general practices on the Meopham School site and in Higham, and are drawn from two primary care trusts. The community involvement worker has office space in Vigo village hall.

The centre serves a mainly affluent area with pockets of disadvantage. Many parents commute to work in London. Almost a tenth of families in the area live in households dependent on workless benefits and 7% are lone parents. There are 890 children aged from birth to five years in the centre’s reach area. The majority of the community, 80%, are of White British heritage. The remaining 20% represent a range of cultural heritages including families from Traveller, Indian and Eastern European backgrounds. A few parents and carers speak English as an additional language. Children’s levels of skills and experiences when they start school are higher than is typical for their age.

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

Daisy Chains Children’s Centre has established itself as an integral part of the community because of the determined effort made by staff to develop links with community leaders and other service providers across its wide, rural area. Because the centre does not have a centre building, publicising activities is challenging but the website and the information hub provide basic information for potential users. However, largely as a result of ‘word of mouth’ recommendation, the centre is popular and its activities are well used by families and children in its reach area. Its overall effectiveness is good because of the effective, well-targeted support for families and children in its reach area. Consequently, outcomes for families from all target groups are good.

Much has been achieved since the centre began to develop its services and it is well placed to continue its improvement. Staff have built trust among families and they feel supported, including when they are experiencing difficulties. Key health and education outcomes are good and improving. The centre’s partnership working is strong, based on a clear rationale about which services are provided directly by the centre and which are more effectively provided by others, including by health services and other centres within the locality. The centre is engaging directly with the majority of children under the age of five in the area. Together with the proportion of families registered with other centres, through its links with nurseries and pre-

schools within the villages, the centre is also having an impact on a wider group than those using services directly. Families play an important part in shaping provision. Leaders, managers and staff are ambitious for the centre and have an accurate understanding of how its work has an impact on the lives of families. Nevertheless, they have introduced a new system to give them a more in-depth analysis of the impact of centre activities. However, there has not yet been time for this information to be used to further shape services. Current plans for developing the centre accurately reflect the most important areas for improvement.

Children and their carers gain a wide range of skills and knowledge. Many parents improve their parenting skills and develop a greater understanding of children's development through parenting programmes or through the focus given during children's activities to discuss issues with staff. Children develop their skills and abilities well as they participate in and thoroughly enjoy the good range of programmes directly meeting their needs. However, staff recognise that more remains to be done to reach and more effectively meet the needs of a wider group of families. This includes provision for working fathers and groups who may become vulnerable such as parents and carers who may feel isolated within the community.

Leadership and management are good. Leaders use resources well, including the use of venues across the area and the services of other providers to avoid any duplication. Centre staff ensure that activities take place within safe and welcoming environments, located at the many venues within the reach area to make them readily accessible to parents and carers. Positive steps are taken to ensure families, including those who speak English as an additional language, have equality of opportunity to access the range of services available. Governance arrangements support the development of the centre well, setting increasingly challenging performance targets based on a thorough understanding of the centre's work.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement the plans to broaden the range of provision to ensure that the needs of all targeted groups are more fully met.
- Ensure that more potential families have access to the work of the centre by developing publicity to further raise awareness of centre activities within the area.
- Strengthen the understanding of the impact of centre activities by analysing the outcomes of the recently introduced systems for evaluation.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Healthy lifestyles are promoted well through the centre's activities and help parents

and carers to gain a good understanding of how to promote family well-being. Health professionals provide most services directly and are supported in this by centre staff who complement advice and run crèches to enable parents to attend health sessions. As a result, families are appropriately engaged with universal and specialist services. For example, the take-up of immunisation is high and staff support parents in referrals for specialist support such as speech and language therapists. Breast-feeding is promoted well, although overall rates are broadly average as many mothers return to work following short periods of maternity leave. Physical development is given a high priority in many of the activities offered, such as 'music maker' sessions and toddler football. Finer motor skills are promoted well in 'messy mayhem'. Recent joint work with community wardens to develop allotments is effectively designed to encourage activities for families groups, including fathers, to grow fruit and vegetables together.

Children and families feel safe at all times, and children behave very well. Parents say that centre activities effectively help them to understand their children's development and behaviour. Many parents and carers have benefited from parenting programmes, often developing their confidence to manage their children's behaviour. This is reflected in a decline in the number of children on child protection plans. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework effectively to broker support and ensure that families facing difficulties are given the help they need at the earliest possible stage. Often, this includes extended one-to-one help by the centre to make sure that families have continuity of support while they develop independence and confidence to manage issues for themselves.

Many of the play and music sessions run by the centre effectively support children's early communication and social skills, for example developing an understanding of sharing and taking turns. A transition project developed by centre staff has now been taken forward by schools and preschools, contributing to a steady improvement in the already above-average level of children's skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Because the centre's information desk is located in a library and the effective joint work with centre staff, children's early reading skills are promoted well. The training project run for staff and volunteers to gain further qualifications has had a positive impact for those involved in improving their economic well-being. Case studies show how centre staff have effectively supported individuals in accessing the information they needed to help them to gain employment.

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	2
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	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides good care, guidance and support for families because staff know local communities and families well. There is a sufficient range of services to meet the needs of families currently attending the centre activities. Services have been developed carefully, initially by meeting with local communities and listening to their views to build confidence across the widespread area. This led to similar activities being run in each village to ensure equality of provision while the centre was establishing its reputation as initially many villagers were unclear about the need for the facility. Now the centre's work is greatly valued by parents and carers, shown in a high take-up and positive evaluations of each activity currently on offer. Parents comment on how much their children learn by attending activities, for example, wanting to play out the singing and actions learned at 'music maker' sessions.

Centre staff act as effective advocates for parents, and liaise with professionals from other agencies to ensure that those requiring the most intensive support are identified and supported. Now that usage of centre activities has been established and numbers of families growing overall, the centre is rationalising provision to ensure a better balance between universal and targeted services. The centre already has the experience of developing new services to target need, such as the well-researched initiative to provide services on a Traveller site, using the flexibility provided by the centre's van. Although at an early stage, this development has been well received and is effectively broadening the centre's impact. All teenage parents have contact with a children's centre within the locality.

The locality initiative promoted by Jobcentre Plus in establishing a training and employment forum ensures a strategic approach to help jobseekers into employment, but information for potential customers within the area is currently too limited. The centre provides information about all activities centrally at the information hub and through a selection displayed at each activity across the area. Otherwise, the website is the main means of accessing information. While this is presented in an attractive and accessible way, it requires updating about future developments and events. The current focus on increasing participation for parents and carers who may be isolated within the community is being undertaken sensitively. For example, those who may lack confidence to join a large group are supported through their early visits. Other members of the community, such as community wardens, support the centre well in identifying potential users and promoting the centre.

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	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre's manager gives clear direction to its work, and has worked closely with the locality manager to develop a service model which closely matches the needs of its rural community. The centre has been successful in fulfilling its aim to provide a limited range of good-quality activities in good-quality community facilities while helping families to access services already provided elsewhere. As a result, available resources are used to good effect, securing good value for money. The key to the centre's success lies in partnership working. Partnerships are well established, for example with primary care trusts, although staff changes in the Medway Primary Care Trust have led to a slower start in developing good liaison for the villages most newly incorporated into the reach area. Day-to-day management is effective. Staff are experienced in their roles and gain from working in other centres and shared training and development across the locality. Teamwork is a strength of this centre.

There are clear lines of accountability for staff and the centre's work is scrutinised effectively by the steering group and advisory board. The roles of each group are clearly understood and serve well to support and challenge centre staff. A range of partners, including parents and carers, are well represented. Parents' and carers' views are sought regularly. Where it is not possible to incorporate their views about developments, this is reported back so that they understand the reasons and know that their views are taken seriously by centre staff. Recent changes introduced by the leadership team by setting more challenging targets for each activity are improving further the already good use of data in measuring the impact of the centre's service. This ensures that managers have a strong understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the centre so that self-evaluation is accurate and used effectively to plan for improvement.

Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding. All relevant policies are in place and are reviewed regularly. Staff training is up to date and helps to ensure that procedures are followed consistently. Good liaison with other agencies means that concerns are followed up quickly and families are confident that centre staff will deal effectively with any concerns they raise. Comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken on all activities and for all venues, and staff are vigilant during activities. Equality and diversity are promoted well. Care is taken to ensure that the venues chosen are accessible to those with physical disabilities. All families are made to feel welcome, for example because information is available in a range of languages. Parents and

children of different age ranges and from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds mix well with each other during activities.

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	2
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	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	2

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Daisy Chains Children's Centre on 2–3 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank you those of you who gave time to speak to us during the inspection. You were all very positive about what the centre does for you and how the activities give your children good experiences and help them to develop. During our visit, we looked at and discussed the centre's plans for development and numerous other documents and records with staff. We spoke with a range of partner

agencies, including health and local authority representatives, together with representatives from the advisory board and steering group. We also visited most of the activities taking place during the inspection.

The centre has established itself as an integral part of the community since it opened in 2009 because of the determined effort made by staff to develop links with community leaders and other service providers across the area. Their dedication has ensured that the centre has a firm foundation to continue its development and engage with a wider group of adults and children in the locality, such as those who may feel isolated. The centre manager and staff have rightly concentrated on ensuring that the services offered directly are of good quality and that families are helped to join in other activities already offered within the wider area.

Children, parents and carers gain a wide range of skills and knowledge through their engagement with the centre. Parents are helped to improve their parenting skills and develop a greater understanding of children's development. Children develop their skills and abilities well as they participate in and thoroughly enjoy the good range of programmes directly meeting their needs. However, staff recognise that more remains to be done to reach and more effectively meet the needs of a wider group of families. This includes provision for working fathers and groups who may become vulnerable, such as parents and carers who may feel isolated within the community.

Families play an important part in shaping provision. Staff listen carefully to parents' and carers' ideas, through programme evaluations and the views of the steering group. Leaders and staff are ambitious for the centre and have an accurate understanding of how its work has an impact on the lives of families. Nevertheless, they have introduced a new system to give them a more in-depth analysis of the impact of centre activities, but there has not yet been time for this information to be used to further shape services. The current plans for developing the centre accurately reflect the most important areas for improvement.

Leadership and management are good. Leaders use resources well, including the use of venues across the area and the services of other providers to avoid unnecessary duplication. Activities take place within safe and welcoming environments, located at many venues to make them readily accessible to parents and carers. Because the centre does not have a centre building, publicising activities is challenging, but the inspection judges that more needs to be done to ensure easier flow of information for potential users.

Thank you once again for your time and we hope that in future more parents and carers will benefit from the services that the centre provides.

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