

# Inspection report for Cranbrook Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	365666
<b>Inspection dates</b>	29–30 March 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joanne Caswell HMI

<b>Children's Centre Network Manager</b>	Pam Holmes
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Cranbrook Church of England Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Not applicable

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre management team, the local authority, health professionals, the chairperson of the district advisory board, two local headteachers, front-line staff, parents and partner agencies.

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

## Information about the centre

Cranbrook Children's Centre is one of two centres within the Cranbrook and Paddock Wood area which serve the local community and are managed by the same network manager. Governance arrangements are provided by a district advisory board on behalf of the local authority. Cranbrook Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2008. It is located on the same site as Cranbrook Church of England Primary School and serves a very rural area.

The centre is situated in the small market town of Cranbrook, Kent. It has a wide geographical reach area of 417 square miles, covering Cranbrook, Benenden, Sissinghurst, Sandhurst, Hawkhurst, Colliers Green and Frittenden. There are 765 children aged from birth to four years living within the area. The centre serves two of the 70% most deprived wards in the country. There is a high proportion of families living on workless benefits and a large majority of lone parents. Families face issues of rural isolation with limited transport links. Many families are unemployed or on very low incomes. Children's levels of skills and understanding on entry to school are often lower than those expected for their age.

The large majority of families in the centre's reach area are of White British heritage with a small percentage of families from minority ethnic groups. The most significant

cultural minority consists of Roma Traveller families who live mainly within permanent housing. Cranbrook reach area is a mixture of privately-owned homes, privately rented, social housing and a small Traveller site.

## 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
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2
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## Main findings

Cranbrook Children’s Centre offers a friendly, welcoming and safe environment. Parents describe the centre as their ‘lifeline’. The centre’s overall effectiveness is good despite the centre currently only reaching 45% of all families living in the area. This is because the centre has concentrated on engaging with families who are identified as being in greatest need. The centre has successfully supported families from the main key target groups living in the two most deprived areas in the community, where registration levels are up to 82% and regular engagement with services is at least 60%. Continuous work and consultation with the most vulnerable families have led to staff consistently maintaining contact and engagement with these key target groups. The centre’s services have led to significant improvements in outcomes for these families, particularly those who tend to be harder to engage. This has led to significantly improved health and education outcomes for vulnerable children and improved employability for some parents.

Concerted action is being taken to ensure more families use the centre. However, the reach of the centre is low because the use of data and target setting had previously not been sufficiently consolidated and used fully to inform service delivery. This is partly due to the restricted data provided from health partners. Consequently, the centre has not always been sufficiently well informed, at an early stage, of the health needs of the local community. Stronger links are developing to address this and this is leading to improvements. For example, health partners are fully engaged in the governance arrangements and are now becoming more closely involved in strategic planning. Procedures for monitoring the long-term impact of the centre’s services are being developed. However, the limited use of data has sometimes inhibited how the centre demonstrates its impact on a greater number of families.

The district advisory board clearly understand its role in acting as the centre's critical friend. The chairperson has been in post for 12 months and demonstrates a very clear, strategic view of how to drive the centre's improvement. This has included reviewing the range of board members to include improved representation from major key partners. The performance of the centre is monitored closely by the board and the local authority. However, this has been slightly impeded due to the numerous systems in place for action planning which are not sufficiently linked, making it harder to measure performance. A full review of data analysis and strategic planning of service delivery has been undertaken. This has enabled senior management to thoroughly review priorities and identify a clearer, more measurable improvement programme.

Significant progress has already been seen as the centre has made strategic links with many partner agencies. This is particularly effective in extending the services to support the needs of the many lone parents and families in workless households living in the area. Strong partnerships have been formed with all local headteachers and this has a significantly positive impact on improving children's readiness for school and the good progress children make within the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Staff have a good understanding of the local area and have been highly effective in successfully engaging the most vulnerable families. The centre has a clear view of its strengths and areas for development and priority setting is now clearer as improvements to action planning have been implemented. Challenging targets are set as data are being used more efficiently and performance is more closely measured. Continuous improvements have been seen in children's progress within the Early Years Foundation Stage and the gap between the most disadvantaged children and the rest continues to close. Concerted action has been taken to target services at families who are hardest to engage and the take-up rates of the most vulnerable families are high. This has led to significantly improved outcomes for the families using the centre. As a result, the centre demonstrates good capacity to improve.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase the reach of the centre by:
  - improving the use of data to enable staff to more effectively monitor, and target, the centre's reach to all areas of the community.
- The local authority, health partners, leaders and managers should work jointly to:
  - measure and track the progress of families being supported by the centre to demonstrate the long-term impact of the centre's services
  - use locality health data to ensure services are consistently matched to local need
  - consolidate action planning and target setting to ensure services continue to meet the needs of a greater number of families within the reach area

## How good are outcomes for families?

2
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The centre has an exceptionally positive impact on the families using the centre. Parents confirm how much they benefit from accessing the services. One parent described the centre as 'a God-send'. Another parent described it as her 'second home'. The health outcomes of the families using the centre are improving. A satisfactory number of parents are engaging with health services. Levels of childhood obesity are monitored and the centre actively supports the promotion of healthy development. Fruit is readily available for parents and children within the centre and cookery courses and physical activities help families understand the importance of being healthy. Breastfeeding is actively promoted and a weekly support group is well attended. This has resulted in the numbers of mothers breastfeeding beyond eight weeks exceeding national averages. Health professionals deliver clinics from the centre and support parenting skills. The new parents group helps prevent isolation and supports parents' emotional well-being. The very small numbers of teenage parents are supported through specialist groups.

Families feel safe at the centre. There is a very friendly, welcoming atmosphere and this helps parents feel confident to ask for advice. Children who need additional help are well supported through the Common Assessment Framework process. Good strategies help parents understand safety issues within the home. Themed safety weeks highlight potential dangers and parents receive comprehensive support in keeping children safe. Some parents have completed paediatric first-aid courses and this helps them feel more confident about managing accidents.

Parents using the centre develop a good understanding of the importance of play in promoting children's learning. Activities are of good quality and help to successfully engage parents in supporting children's development. Stay and Play groups, Music Bugs and Messy Play are well attended and provide positive experiences for parents and children to play together purposefully. Parenting courses, such as Learning Through Play, are well attended and help parents support children's learning at home. This has significantly increased the numbers of children from the most disadvantaged areas accessing high-quality early years provision. As a result, children develop key skills for learning and are very well prepared for starting school. The school transition programme is highly effective in helping the most vulnerable children settle quickly when they start school. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data indicate all children make good progress in all areas of learning. The achievement gap between the most disadvantaged children and the rest has closed from 25.3% to 21.9%.

Families using the centre develop very positive relationships with one another and community cohesion within the area is improving. Significantly positive links are made with the Traveller community, who are closely supported by the centre and fully engaged with its services. Some families using the centre, including those representing minority groups, are involved in the governance arrangements. This enables parents to be actively involved in reviewing service delivery and shaping

future provision.

Some families using the centre are improving their economic stability. This includes parents from all target groups. There is a good range of adult learning courses provided and 10 parents achieved accredited qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy during 2010–2011. Twelve parents are currently working as volunteers within the centre and two volunteers have successfully returned to work. The centre has sensitively supported some of the most vulnerable parents in accessing training opportunities. This leads to enhanced self-confidence and significantly improves outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged families.

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	<b>3</b>
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	<b>2</b>
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	<b>2</b>
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	<b>2</b>
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.	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>2</b>
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Outreach work in the most disadvantaged communities is highly effective and reaching the majority of the most vulnerable families. This ensures families who may be at risk receive professional support and benefit from specialist services. The centre supports 100% of children in its reach currently subject to a child protection plan and this significantly enhances children's safety and welfare.

Assessment is used satisfactorily to ensure services generally meet families' needs. This is based mainly on local intelligence provided by staff, rather than through the robust analysis of data. This is particularly evident for health provision. Although services are targeted highly effectively at those most in need, further assessment is not systematically carried out to increase reach to a greater number of families. As a result, the centre is currently supporting only a minority of the total reach area. However, the centre knows the issues facing families within the area and uses effective strategies to help overcome these. For example, the centre has its own vehicle to support families in isolated areas where transport is limited. As a result, families in the most remote areas are helped to attend services.

Provision for learning and development is good. The centre actively celebrates

achievement and successfully raises the aspirations of the families using the centre. The Achievements and Celebrations board promotes personal achievements of both centre users and staff, for example through the Star of the Month display. This leads to a positive culture in celebrating success and self-motivation. One parent praised the work of the staff in building her own self-esteem by stating, 'You're a person, not just a mum.'

The centre successfully engages families from key target groups in training courses and this has an extremely positive impact on improving outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged families. Good levels of engagement have been achieved with the Traveller community and the centre's work has been praised by the Minority Communities Achievement Service. For example, the centre organised family breakfast clubs for Traveller children attending the neighbouring school. This led to increased school attendance, improved punctuality and enhanced health and education outcomes for individual families.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the centre is good. Effective partnership working between all agencies ensures personalised support is given to families using the centre. Case study evidence shows that at times of crisis families are supported extremely well.

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

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre manager is an effective leader and is supported by a very dedicated team. All staff share a commitment towards providing high-quality services. Governance arrangements are in place and are clearly understood. The new chairperson of the district advisory board has significantly improved the effectiveness of the board in challenging the centre and making it more accountable. The previous procedures for evaluating the centre's performance, and the limited analysis of data, mean the centre had not been consistently delivering services across the whole reach area. This has resulted in the centre only reaching 45% of families overall. Therefore, the centre currently delivers satisfactory value for money. The new systems for data analysis are helping leaders to make improvements to how the centre targets its services. However, it is too early to assess its effectiveness. Resources have been deployed appropriately to target families most in need and this leads to significant improvement in outcomes for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.



Safeguarding procedures are effective and there are rigorous staff recruitment procedures in place. This ensures all staff, partner agencies and volunteers are thoroughly vetted. All staff undertake regular training and are confident in the procedures to follow if they have concerns about a family's welfare. Staff develop good links with other professionals and regularly carry out joint visits to assess individual families' needs and provide relevant targeted support. Good provision is given towards supporting families who may be experiencing domestic abuse and/or violence through the Freedom Programme. Early identification of postnatal depression ensures vulnerable parents are quickly identified and referred to specialist services.

Promoting inclusion is at the heart of the centre's ethos. All families are welcomed and staff assess need on an individual basis. For example, information is made available in different formats to support families who speak English as an additional language and those with literacy difficulties. Resources throughout the centre depict different family backgrounds, cultural heritage and ethnicity, ensuring all families within the reach area are represented positively. Specialist services are available for disabled children. The Little Dolphins group is well attended and the community paediatricians regularly use the centre to offer assessments for children with disabilities.

There are many ways in which parents and children regularly share their views and help shape future services. For example, parents freely voice their opinions through the Parent Voice and centre activities have been adapted as a result of parental feedback.

Links with partner agencies are good and improving. Staff build strong links with local early years providers and this leads to improved delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage within the reach area. Most partner agencies are involved in strategic planning and referral procedures between all services are good and effective at supporting families most in need.

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

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	<b>2</b>
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	<b>2</b>

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

None.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected Cranbrook Children’s Centre on 29 and 30 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. We would like to thank all of you who took the time to talk to us about your involvement and experiences at the centre. It was very enjoyable to meet with you and it was very helpful to hear what the centre means to you. Many of you told us how much you enjoy attending the centre and that it has made you feel more confident as a parent. You made it very clear to us that you greatly appreciate the staff and services at the centre. We noted how many good opportunities there were for you to share your views of the centre and how well these are listened to and valued. We found the caring aspect of the centre to be particularly strong. The manager and her staff provide good support, especially to those of you who may be experiencing challenges in your lives.

We noted the centre has been working very hard at targeting services in some of the areas where families are most in need. This is because staff know the local area, and the difficulties families are facing, very well. However, we found that staff are not always reviewing other information, such as data, to help them ensure services are targeted at a greater number of families in other areas. We have asked the centre’s management to address this.

We found that the centre’s leaders and managers are very committed to making improvements to services. They use a range of strategies to identify how services can be improved, but these were not always linked together and this made it difficult for leaders to assess whether improvements were being made or not. Senior leaders have now addressed this and are working to further improve how they monitor the centre’s performance to ensure it delivers services that your families need and can reach new families not yet using the centre.

Your children's centre has many good features. Procedures for ensuring children are safe from possible harm and abuse are particularly effective. This is because the staff are very knowledgeable about the correct procedures to follow to protect children's welfare. Many of you told us how safe and secure you feel at the centre and that you trust the staff and can ask them for help at any time.

There is a good range of activities within the centre which help children gain the skills and knowledge they need for future learning. The wide range of groups and activities help children to socialise with one another, develop independence and be well prepared for starting school. We noted that children settle quickly into school and make good progress in their learning.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for taking part in the inspection and wish you and your families the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).