

Inspection report for Hythe Bay Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	362502
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Carole Skinner

Centre governance	Hythe Bay Church of England Primary School and Children's Centre Governing Body
Centre leader	Carolyn Chivers
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Hythe Bay Church of England Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Stepping Stones Nursery EY333206 Hythe Bay Children's Centre Nursery

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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, the community and family manager, the senior leadership team, staff and representatives from the local authority, advisory board and partner agencies, including representatives from the health service, parents and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including evaluations of services, safeguarding policies and records and minutes of meetings.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

The centre is managed by Hythe Bay C of E Primary School under a service level agreement with the local authority. It is part of the Shepway Rural local children's services partnership. The governing body of Hythe Bay school has appointed a committee to oversee the running of the children's centre. The Shepway 0–7 Strategy Group act as the children's centre advisory group. The family and community manager runs the centre on a day-to-day basis and is a member of the senior leadership team.

The centre provides a full-day-care nursery for children aged from birth to five years. It operates from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm from Monday to Friday and is open for 50 weeks of the year. Children are admitted from the age of three months. There is also a privately run sessional nursery on the site. In addition, the centre offers a range of services for parents and children, including 'stay and play' groups, baby massage,

midwifery and health visitor clinics, smoking cessation support, adult education, access to Jobcentre Plus and a citizen's advice service.

The centre's reach area covers a wide spectrum of deprivation, ranging from the 30% most deprived in Hythe town to more affluent areas further afield.

Approximately 17% of children live in workless households. Unemployment has risen since the closure of a large local factory. Thirteen per cent of families are eligible for working tax credits. Seven per cent of families are from minority ethnic backgrounds, a figure which continues to increase. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge levels similar to those expected for their age in most areas but lower in language and communication skills.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The centre works very closely with the school, nursery provision and breakfast and after-school clubs to provide a fully integrated service for local children and their families. Productive partnerships with a wide range of external agencies, other schools and early years settings contribute significantly to the centre’s coherent approach to supporting children and their families. Parents and users of the centre are fulsome in their praise of the services it offers and, in particular, of the support and guidance they receive from the family and community manager and the family support worker. As one parent commented, ‘The compassion and kindness shown, as well as practical advice, was just right and never forgotten.’ Centre staff know the children and families very well and ‘go the extra mile’ in assessing and meeting their individual needs. The care, guidance and support offered to users and the wider community is exemplary. Personalised support and guidance increases users’ confidence and there are numerous examples of how staff have made a real difference in times of crisis by taking prompt action or just by being a willing listener.

The centre is constantly alert to the need to increase its outreach into the wider community, particularly to make contact with the ‘harder-to-reach’ families. This aspect of its role is developing well through joint working with schools, pre-school settings and other children’s centres in the local network.

Staff listen to parents’ views and requests and take these into consideration when determining what services to offer. All aspects of the provision are evaluated and reviewed regularly and this ensures that services are carefully targeted to need. Where a gap in the provision exists, staff seek ways to rectify it. For example, they have set up a specific support group which has successfully engaged very young mothers who had been reluctant to attend other groups. Midwifery and health visitor clinics are run on site and the centre has instigated a successful, ground-breaking arrangement to work in partnership with a local GP surgery. This thriving partnership with health services has had a very positive impact on the number of families accessing services.

Opportunities for adults to improve their education and skills through courses that lead to accreditation are limited, although the centre provides a number of courses, for example in parenting and using computers, that are well attended and valued by parents. The centre has a service level agreement with Jobcentre Plus, although no face-to-face services are provided on site. Parents are able to access employment information and job vacancies but the centre is aware of the need to develop this

service.

Assessment data demonstrate that the centre is having a good impact on children’s learning and development and on narrowing the achievement gap between different groups of children. Central to its vision is the inclusion of children and families from all social and ethnic backgrounds. Initiatives such as international lunches are instrumental in promoting tolerance and respect for diversity. Good attention to safeguarding ensures that children, parents and other centre users are secure and well cared for.

Effective leadership provides clear direction for future development and gives the centre a good capacity to sustain improvement. The senior leadership team provides effective strategic direction for the centre and is instrumental in ensuring that it is integrated with the school to provide a seamless transition into primary education. Day-to-day management arrangements are rigorous and understood by all. Appropriate systems for governance and accountability are in place and currently being refined and improved. The advisory board’s terms of reference have recently been modified to give it a sharper role in supporting and challenging the centre. The full governing body has ultimate responsibility for the centre but has appointed a committee to oversee it which is in the process of being extended to include health professionals and parents. The committee’s role in monitoring the centre’s effectiveness and contributing to the identification of priorities for improvement is at a relatively early stage of development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the provision for adult learners by:
 - building on the good links with other children’s centres to devise a more coordinated approach to providing adult education and training
 - extending the existing links with Jobcentre Plus to develop a more coherent strategy to help parents train for and find suitable employment
- Improve the governance of the centre by strengthening the role of the governors’ committee and the advisory board in monitoring its effectiveness and determining improvement priorities.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre is making a good contribution to improving outcomes for the children and families it serves. Data show that the centre’s influence has increased significantly over the last few years and that its impact can be seen in the improving attainment of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children make good progress in acquiring the basic skills they need to prepare them for school. Children in the nursery make good progress in all areas of learning. Many parents report that their children grow in confidence and learn how to socialise and share toys. All users speak with great enthusiasm about how enjoyable all the activities are. Parents forge

strong friendships and share advice on breastfeeding and weaning and many give examples of how the centre has helped them to cope with a range of difficult situations, from domestic violence to obtaining financial help.

Parents show a growing understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe and healthy. A successful 'Stop Smoking Service' has helped many to give up smoking. The centre has set challenging targets to increase the percentage of mothers who sustain breastfeeding, following a dip in the previous year, although it already has better outcomes than its statistical neighbours. As part of its strategy to reduce higher-than-average levels of obesity among young children, the centre provides nourishing home-cooked meals and plenty of fruit and vegetables for snacks. The popular pushchair-friendly weekly 'Walking Group' for adults and children promotes the benefits of fresh air and exercise. Optional weekly 'weigh-ins' before the walks enable parents to see the fruits of their efforts. A weekly football club for fathers has positive health benefits as well as increasing their contact with the centre. Specialist speech and language services, baby massage, play therapy and close links with mental health services greatly enhance children's development and give parents a deeper understanding of their children's physical and emotional needs.

Parents and children feel safe at the centre and staff constantly reinforce safety advice to less confident parents, such as not leaving a baby unattended on a bed or high-level changing mat. 'Child Safety Week' promoted safe practices around the home, road safety and first aid. The centre noted a good response from parents, which opened up discussions on the use of mobile phones and seat belts in cars. Structured parenting programmes, informal discussions, home visits and a mobile phone 'lifeline' all help parents in different ways to deal with potentially dangerous situations. The centre works closely with social services and other agencies to ensure the safety of children who are subject to a child protection plan. Channels of communication are swift and effective and staff follow up meticulously any causes for concern. The centre receives effective support from the inclusion manager when supporting children subject to Common Assessment Framework processes.

The centre plays a key role in promoting mutual respect within the local community. In a joint initiative with the school, events such as coffee mornings, international lunches and an 'International Day' have been highly successful in facilitating friendships and celebrating cultural diversity. The centre helps to improve outcomes for adult users by providing information and advice on a variety of topics, such as debt management and applying for tax credits. Individual case studies illustrate the centre's impact on improving users' own skills and employability, though its scope for engaging adults in education programmes that lead to qualifications is limited.

<p>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</p>	<p>2</p>

The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

2

How good is the provision?

The centre works effectively in partnership with health services to identify and meet users' needs. Strong partnerships with health visitors, midwives and the local GP surgery are having a very beneficial impact on increasing the centre's outreach and attracting more parents to use the full range of services on offer. Weekly midwife and health visitor clinics provide good opportunities for the family support worker to make new parents aware of the various 'stay and play' activities. These are well attended and meet the needs of children of all ages. In 'Mucky Pups', an all-age session, children thoroughly enjoyed lots of messy play as they experimented with paint and play dough. There is a good range of groups that effectively meet the needs of children from 0–5 years of age, such as 'Blooming Babies', 'One is fun' and 'Two's Too'. The '3/4, Knock on the Door' group for three- and four-year-olds is designed to prepare them for starting school. Feedback on all of these activities is very positive – both children and parents thoroughly enjoy them. As one parent said, 'It helps my child to learn and it helps me learn how to help them.' High quality nursery provision and full-time day care contribute significantly to children's good learning and development.

The centre adapts services to meet users' needs in the light of feedback from parents and other agencies and priorities identified through the analysis of local and county-wide data. For example, it is stepping up its efforts to engage with younger parents and the more vulnerable families, particularly those with disabled children, as staff are aware these groups' needs are not met as well as those of others. In conjunction with health colleagues, and in response to identified needs, the centre has set up a support group for parents of twins. Staff are well aware of the need to increase the range of adult learning opportunities, particularly those that lead to qualifications. Nevertheless, the centre has offered GCSE mathematics and is effective in signposting parents to other opportunities. Currently the centre offers a four-week computer course to improve users' skills in using the internet and sending emails. Private providers and volunteers run French, Spanish and art appreciation classes for the wider community, all of which are well attended and valued.

The quality of care, guidance and support for children, families and other users is excellent. Senior managers ensure that families are able to access a wide range of support such as counselling services, the 'One-Stop Domestic Violence Drop-In' and

the very well-attended weekly Citizens Advice Bureau sessions. The Citizen’s Advice outreach worker reports that Hythe Bay is very successful in encouraging parents with young families to seek advice and support. There are numerous examples of how staff have supported families in times of crisis. As one parent put it, ‘They go over and above their job role to help.’ The wide range of integrated services includes the popular breakfast and after-school club and a full programme of activities during the summer holidays.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Effective leadership and management at all levels ensure that the centre provides good value for money. The headteacher and senior leadership team share a vision for the centre that is based on high expectations for all children and their families. These are reflected in the challenging targets that are set and agreed with the local authority. The family and community manager leads the centre with dedication and sensitivity on a day-to-day basis. He and the family support worker have forged excellent relationships with families and have an in-depth knowledge of their needs. The qualified teacher provides high quality support to the centre and nursery staff and also offers training and support to early years practitioners in other settings. She has also provided training for childminders in the locality. The centre benefits from the expertise of the school’s deputy headteacher, whose recent analysis of data demonstrates the centre’s increasing impact on children’s progress.

All services and activities are planned with a clear target audience in mind which has been identified through self-evaluation or input from users and partners. For example, the ‘3/4, Knock at the Door’ group was introduced after Reception teachers identified that many children were unprepared for school and parents often did not understand the importance of play in early learning. Scoping and evaluation sheets include clear expected outcomes and success criteria for each activity, showing how each contributes to the centre’s core offer. Subsequent evaluations of the activities demonstrate their impact but do not always relate this to the success criteria. The children’s centre action plan identifies the most important priorities for improvement, sets deadlines and includes relevant references to national data indicators. It is currently in draft form and is somewhat thin on detail. It has yet to be agreed by the advisory board and governing body.

The local authority is working with the Shepway network of children’s centres and the joint advisory board to clarify accountability and the two-tier governance arrangements. The advisory board’s revised terms of reference focus firmly on its role in scrutinising the centre’s self-evaluation and challenging it to improve. These new performance management arrangements are in their first year of operation. The governing body receives detailed reports and evaluations from the centre leader and is well informed about the centre’s effectiveness. The children’s centre committee has a sound understanding of the issues faced by the centre. Its role in monitoring the quality and impact of the services offered is at an early stage of development.

The centre has effective policies and procedures for safeguarding children and for ensuring the security of the premises. All staff are well trained in child protection arrangements and there are rigorous procedures for vetting staff and volunteers. There are clear protocols for sharing important information with the relevant agencies in order to keep children from harm. Risk assessment procedures are thorough. Written records are not always maintained in an agreed and similar format to ensure the greatest rigour and consistency.

Close liaison with the school’s inclusion manager and the speech and language specialist ensures high quality support and guidance for children with special educational needs and their families. After identifying a marked increase in the proportion of children in the reach area from minority ethnic backgrounds, leaders took prompt action to adapt services to meet the needs of these families. The resulting international days and lunches have done much to promote equality and mutual acceptance.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2

The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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

The inspection of Hythe Bay Church of England Primary School on 8–9 December 2010.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Hythe Bay Children's Centre on 9–10 December 2010. We judged the centre to be good overall.

Your contributions to the inspection were greatly appreciated and we would like to thank those of you who took the time to meet with us and share your thoughts about the centre. From talking to you and our own observations it is clear that you feel very much at home in the centre and that you enjoy all the activities it provides. Your children make good progress in their learning and development, growing in confidence and learning how to play happily with others. Many of you clearly benefit from the baby massage sessions and the clinics run by health visitors and midwives, not to mention the close links with the nearby doctor's surgery. The centre works very successfully with these partners to make health services more accessible for you and to put you at your ease in welcoming surroundings.

Being healthy and keeping safe are clearly at the top of the centre's agenda. You and your children benefit from the nutritious meals and snacks provided and from events like 'Child Safety Week', which highlighted important issues. It is encouraging to see how many of you have taken advantage of the 'Stop Smoking' group, dads' football and the walking group. Although the centre provides some good opportunities for you to further your own education, these are more limited than they would like, particularly courses that lead to additional qualifications. Linked to this, the staff are keen to develop closer links with Jobcentre Plus so that they can provide you with a better all-round service. We agree that the centre is not as effective in these areas as it could be and have asked centre leaders to improve them.

The centre listens to what you have to say about the services it offers and takes account of your suggestions when planning for the future. The 'post-it' board near the entrance is a good way of letting you have your say. We were very pleased to see that staff also respond to your ideas.

The centre provides you and your children with an interesting range of activities and services. The 'stay and play' groups are clearly very popular and are carefully planned and adapted to meet the needs of your children. All of the activities on offer provide good opportunities for you to make friends, to talk and share experiences and to learn from each other and from the dedicated staff who are always there for you. Several of you told us that the staff 'go the extra mile' in supporting you, especially in times of difficulty. We agree that they provide outstanding care, guidance and support for you and your children and are very diligent in following through any concerns they may have. If they are unable to help you themselves they put you in touch with other agencies or organisations who are better qualified to help you.

All of the senior leaders work well together to make sure that the 'Hythe Bay experience' is a good one. It helps that the centre can draw on the expertise of the school leaders to check that they are providing a good service. The governors and the external advisory board have set up new systems to check how well the centre is performing and whether it is meeting the new and challenging targets that have been set in collaboration with the local authority. Because these systems are quite new, they are still developing. We have asked the governors, advisory board and local authority to work together to make sure that they are rigorous in evaluating how well the centre is performing.

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