

Inspection report for Egerton Park Children's Centre

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| Local authority | East Sussex |
| Inspection number | 362472 |
| Inspection dates | 17–18 November 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Michael Kubiak HMI |

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| Centre governance | Local Authority |
| Centre leader | Fay Mitchell |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Cygnets Nursery EY300796 |

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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 managers, strategy manager and assistant strategy manager, centre leadership team, children's centre teacher, members of the local advisory group, members of the Bexhill Consortium (Local Partnership for Schools), the family outreach service, Learndirect, the childminder coordinator and Jobcentre Plus. They had formal and informal discussions with parents and children, and visited a young parents' group, 'Bumps to Babies' group, 'Parent Get Together' and the information drop-in shop where the outreach services are based.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its business plan and area business plan, data about people who attend the centre, case studies and evaluation of services.

Information about the centre

Egerton Park Children's Centre was designated in April 2005 and is governed by East Sussex County Council. Children's centres in East Sussex are organised by district and managed by an area coordinator. Egerton Park, Sidley and Pebsham children's centres are located in the Rother district and work closely together. Some services are provided at all centres within the district and some are provided at specific venues to avoid duplication. The local population is mostly White British, with smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups including Eastern Europeans. Around 18% of children under five in the area are living in workless households. Attainment on entry to the nursery is with skills and understanding lower than those typically expected. Around 72% of children achieve at least 78 points across the Foundation Stage Profile with communication, language and literacy the weaker elements. The centre's catchment area is varied in terms of deprivation.

The centre is open on weekdays from 8.30am to 5pm and on some Saturdays. It is open for 51 weeks of the year. The main provision is run from the children's centre site with Cygnets Nursery based on the ground floor of the centre. Cygnets Nursery has been subject to its own inspection and the report can be found at www.Ofsted.gov.uk. A qualified teacher is based at the site, supporting the nursery and crèche and other local early years provisions. Outreach services are based nearby in a converted shop in Bexhill Town Centre. The core staff teams are employed by the council. Crèche services are commissioned by the centre from the Bexhill and Battle Under Fives Association.

Various partner organisations use the centre's building but are not based there.

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 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 overall effectiveness of the centre is good. The partnerships the centre has established with other agencies and the effectiveness with which they work together are outstanding, as is the way all users enjoy and achieve as a result of the centre's provision. The ways that users of the centre contribute to its development are excellent. Parents and users highly value the safe and welcoming environment and the range of services that are offered both at the main site and the other sites within the district. Risk assessments are undertaken across the centre and any identified hazards are quickly reduced. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and robust and follow county council processes. Commissioned services are also required to have robust recruitment procedures. Safeguarding policies and procedures are clearly understood by all staff and effective information ensures that users are effectively safeguarded.

Those in charge demonstrate a clear vision and this is understood by centre staff. They have an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas where further improvement is needed. Data is used to shape the services of the centre, although this is not always specific to the centre's area and is not sufficiently detailed to demonstrate the impact of the services. Staff have a thorough knowledge of the community and some have been established in the community for many years. The centre is seen as an integral part of the community. The local advisory board is effective in guiding and supporting the centre, but it does not set targets which are sufficiently challenging to bring about improved outcomes for centre users.

The targeted early intervention work for those children and families in most need is making a difference. The centre has excellent links with other key professionals, such as social care and parent support services. Parents value the specific support which is offered through the family outreach service and the promptness with which support can be offered.

Outcomes for users of the centre are good and improving. Users have opportunities to attend parent involvement meetings and sit on the local advisory group and, as one parent commented, 'It has given us a voice. We are actually listened to.' They also take an active part in fund-raising activities through 'The Friends of Sure Start'. Users have the opportunity to attend short courses such as basic first aid, English for speakers of other languages and cooking on a budget. These courses are often oversubscribed and the centre is developing strategies to ensure that they are targeted at users with the most need and where they will bring about the most significant improved outcomes for children. There is a lack of short- and long-term planning in relation to courses that will help users to build on their knowledge and skills and which will lead to improved employment chances. The work of the Bexhill Consortium, of which the centre is a member, has been successful in sharing knowledge and expertise across a range of services and providing community-wide activities. Monthly network meetings ensure that the centre is kept up to date with what is going on in the area. Summer activities are provided by the children's centre, with some of these being targeted specifically in areas where there are hard-to-reach priority families who do not otherwise engage with the centre. However, they are not as successful at targeting these families throughout the year.

Parents and children attend a range of services both at Egerton Park and other children's centres locally. Parents value the support they receive and feel that they are able to drop in to the centre at anytime. They report that they feel less isolated and that staff are very supportive towards them, and, as one parent commented, 'I am not judged.' The centre is inclusive, users feel that they are able to contribute fully to the running of the centre and that their views and opinions are taken into account. The centre recognises the particular needs that parents with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities may have and a specific group caters for them.

The centre has very clear management and staffing structures. Members of the senior leadership team work very well together. There is a clear vision for the centre which has at its heart improving outcomes for children and families. A strong sense of teamwork exists throughout the centre and includes the outreach service based nearby.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the availability of data which is specific to the immediate reach area of the centre and that demonstrates the impact of its work.
- Further improve training and development opportunities, with clear routes of progression and ongoing support to develop users' employability skills.
- The local advisory group should strengthen governance arrangements by providing robust support and challenge linked to outcomes.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The outcomes for users of the centre are good and improving. Data is being used to effectively target services to improve outcomes and strategic planning ensures that any gaps in services are quickly addressed. Parental surveys and discussions with users show that satisfaction levels are very high and that parents benefit well from the range of services on offer. Courses such as 'cooking on a budget' have introduced children to healthier choices. The community café at Sidley promotes healthy choices for children and a range of healthy breakfast and afternoon snacks are available for children in the nursery. Groups such as 'Kickstart', based on providing physical activity, are very well attended especially by fathers, and healthy outcomes are promoted through the use of exercise. These initiatives contribute to a reduction in obesity levels. The percentage of parents who choose breastfeeding is steadily increasing. Parents report how they have valued guidance and gained a greater confidence when breastfeeding. Many parents go on to become breastfeeding peer support mentors.

The range of services available to users is well publicised. As the centre is one of three within the district, activities are offered at different locations and transport bursaries are available to support some families. Parents report that they feel less isolated and are well supported by centre staff and that they are able to make new friends. Users of the centre make a positive contribution to its work through the parent involvement group and their ideas and suggestions are fed through to the local advisory group. Users are encouraged to become volunteers at the group or through partner organisations such as Homestart. Parents speak very highly about courses and the significance of the crèche facilities, where they are confident that their children are safe and well cared for, which allows them to concentrate on their learning. Courses are popular and often oversubscribed. The centre has good links with Learndirect, Job Centre Plus, Bexhill and Hastings colleges. Courses run by the centre do not build on previously taught skills and are not ambitious. Progression routes to accredited courses and future employment are not clear. Users do have some opportunity, however, to gain recognised qualifications such as basic food handling.

'Parent Get Together' sessions are well attended, both at the centre and at other venues. Children and parents benefit from the range of resources available. Resources such as the toy library are provided during the sessions to allow families to easily access the toys available on loan. The centre staff build good relationships with the parents, who report that they find the staff to be friendly and approachable. The centre staff are knowledgeable about the range of services and provision in the area. They obtain feedback from parents about any topics they would like to discuss and obtain further information or arrange sessions for partners or other agencies to come and talk to them. The centre has built strong links with the Bexhill Consortium and the Rother Race Action Forum and regularly run community events. Centre staff and users also participate in fund-raising events such as Children in Need. The Friends of Sure Start recently presented a cheque for £1,500 to Sidley Children's Centre to equip a new sensory room.

Outstanding partnership working and secure systems ensure staff in different services identify and refer families most at risk. The family outreach service is key to supporting such families and resources are well targeted and specific to the individual needs of the family. Staff have a good knowledge of the services and support available and have good collaborative working relationships with a range of other agencies. There is evidence that the common assessment framework is improving outcomes for children and that the most appropriate services are identified and provided.

Accommodation is of a good standard and is well maintained. The nursery is based on the ground floor of the centre and has its own separate entrance. The centre has recently acquired an additional area of the garden which is used by the nursery and plans are in place for this to be developed. Space is well used and rooms are often used for a number of different activities. Children enjoy attending the centre and benefit from the range of activities that are available. They play cooperatively with one another and build positive relationships with each other and the centre staff.

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| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them | 2 |
| The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 1 |
| The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 1 |
| The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment. | 2 |

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a good range of integrated services and activities, both on site and in other community resources, which are well matched to the needs of the users. The centre is becoming more systematic in reviewing the range of services that it offers and ensuring that services are targeted at users with the most need. The initial assessment of need for families accessing the family outreach service ensures that resources are used effectively. Activities such as the summer programme are targeted in hard-to-reach priority areas. These are successful in engaging some parents who do not usually access the centre and they are fully evaluated. However, systems to ensure their continued engagement with the centre are not fully developed. Excellent relationships have been established with a wide range of key partners including health and children's social care. These ensure that

families receive a coordinated approach to meeting their needs. Staff use their knowledge of the services available to best support the families and accompanied initial visits to groups are offered where appropriate. Parents report that there are activities every day which they could attend if they chose to. The summer activity programme across the area was popular with parents, who reported that they valued the shorter sessions.

The centre provides good-quality information and guidance throughout the centre and in the community. Parents commented that if the staff were unable to answer any of their questions, then they were proactive in finding out and informing them of the answers. The website provides basic information about the service. Effective signposting ensures that users are aware of the range of services available.

There are limited opportunities for users to participate in accredited courses. However, practical courses such as cooking on a budget are very popular. The centre's educational plan lacks clear opportunities for users to develop their skills in working towards accredited courses that will improve their access to further training and employment. The initiative between the children's centre, Jobcentre Plus and the childminding network coordinator has been positive with four parents going forward to undertake the childminding registration course. This will hopefully lead to them becoming registered childminders.

Staff are committed to improving the outcomes for families. Courses based on speech and language help parents to develop their children's language and build on information that parents are given in their 'Chatter Matters' pack when their children are young.

The qualified teacher provides guidance and support to the centre and nursery and works with them to ensure consistency and to improve services. The good links between the centre and nursery mean that issues can be identified early and support and interventions put in place. These interventions may involve centre staff, parents, other agencies working with the family and the nursery.

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| 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 | 2 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre's business plan and the area business plan ensure that the centre's leaders are aware of what its priorities are and of how these plans contribute to the county-wide plans. The centre uses an extensive range of data to inform their planning and to identify priority areas. This data is not always specific to the reach area of the centre and does not always include clear measures of impact.

The local advisory group meets regularly, shares information and resources and ensures links are made across agencies. The local advisory group are supportive of the centre but does not yet set challenging targets for the centre to further improve outcomes for users. The parent information group is well attended and meets regularly to share ideas and suggestions and take forward any issues. One group member commented, 'I felt that as a parent what I thought mattered.'

The centre's leaders work very well as a team and have built purposeful links. Services are of a good quality and matched to the users' needs. Evaluation of the impact of the centre's work and with individual families is undertaken in supervision, team meetings and multi-agency meetings and through case studies.

All policies and procedures are clear and meet requirements. Safeguarding is a particular strength with clearly defined robust procedures. The centre follows the local authority policy that staff do not commence work until all their checks have been completed. All services commissioned by the centre are required to have a safeguarding policy and only staff who have been thoroughly checked, including a Criminal Records Bureau check, can work in groups associated with the centre. Procedures are in place to ensure that this information is kept up to date. Staff and volunteers have a comprehensive induction process when they join the centre. Procedures are in place to safeguard family outreach workers when on visits.

Equality and diversity are successfully promoted. The centre works with partner agencies to identify specific areas of the community and to provide targeted work. 'Snapshot' survey weeks have been undertaken to obtain data on the backgrounds of users of the centre including religion, sexual orientation and gender identity. Support from centre workers and translation services have ensured that all users were able to participate. The centre has devised a book showing the centre through pictures which can be used with parents. One partner agency commented, 'The children's centre has put additional needs at the centre of what it does.' Parents value the input that they have to the running of the centre. They feel that they have a voice and their feelings and views are taken into account. Centre staff use their knowledge of the services available both at the centre and in the wider community to support families and effectively signpost them to the most appropriate services and support.

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood | 2 |
| 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 | 3 |
| The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide | 1 |
| 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 |

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Egerton Park Children's Centre on 17 and 18 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

The main centre is based in a modern building within Egerton Park and provides you with an attractive, safe environment where you feel well cared for. Family outreach services are based in Bexhill High Street. Groups and activities are also offered at Sidley Children's Centre and Pebsham Children's Centre and limited support for transportation for some families is available. Drop-in groups, such as 'Parent Get Together Lunch Club', 'Parent Get Together Breakfast Club', and 'Bump to Babies', are popular and are well attended. The centre provides you with an extensive range of information and you report that you feel that you can just drop in if you are passing if you need any advice or have any questions. The centre works hard to ensure that information is available to all potential users; however, more could be

done to help those parents who find it hard to access the range of services offered by the centre.

The centre staff have a good understanding of the community and are committed to supporting your children's development and your own skills. The family outreach service supports you well in time of need and staff work hard to build positive relationships with you and build up your confidence. You benefit from the range of training and short courses on offer and find these enjoyable. The crèche facilities allow you to focus on the training and short courses and you are confident that your children are safe and well cared for. We have asked the centre to plan more accredited courses and build on your employability skills.

The centre listens to users' views and takes them into account when planning future activities. Parents' views are regularly sought both informally and formally through surveys and questionnaires. The parent involvement group is active and well attended. One comment shared with inspectors was that 'parental involvement is very strong at the centre'. The local advisory group, which looks at the work of the three local centres to ensure that services are integrated and effective, considers the suggestions from the parent's group. The local advisory group do not yet set challenging targets for the centre linked to improving the outcome for centre users.

The centre's self-evaluation and business plans cover all areas. They identify areas where the centre is doing well and areas where it needs to develop. Systems to measure how well the centre is doing in improving outcomes for families need to be further developed and will allow for clearer identification of targeted support.

The centre staff work hard to ensure that its activities are well organised. They work well with other agencies to ensure that you receive the services that you need. They work hard with other agencies to ensure that activities are provided throughout the year for you and at potentially difficult times, such as in the summer when you may find it difficult with your children not being at school. As one parent commented, 'there is something going on every day.'

There is mutual respect between staff and you. The staff have high expectations of you and want you to achieve the best for your family.

Those of you who need it are given additional support in a range of ways through the family outreach service.

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