

Inspection report for Mill Hill Children's Centre

Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	362527
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Alex Baxter

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre manager	Mary Lilley
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	Mill Road, Waterloooville PO7 7DB
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Linked school, if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Mill Hill CC incorporating Small Steps CC Growing Places @Jubilee Corner Nursery and Growing Places @ Waite End Nursery

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.

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's management group, the local authority, the partnership committee, other partnership agencies located within and outside the centre, members of the Parents' Forum, staff and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
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Information about the centre

Mill Hill Children's Centre is a phase 2 children's centre, managed by Hampshire County Council. It received full core offer designation in July 2009. The centre has developed from an Early Years Excellence Centre. It is merged with Small Step Children's Centre, two centres with one staff team. Mill Hill also has close links with Crookhorn Lane Children's Centre. Mill Hill Children's Centre is located on the site of Waite End Primary School. The children's centre core offer of Early Years Foundation Stage provision is delivered via one provider in two settings: Jubilee Corner, based

within the centre at Mill Hill, offers sessional childcare from six months plus, 9am to 3pm term time only. Waite End Nursery is open from 8am to 6pm for 51 weeks of the year for full-day care for children aged between 0 and five and is located on the adjacent Waite End Primary School site.

The centre provides various services and hosts several local authority agencies from a range of buildings and facilities, all located within easy reach of each other. Because of its location on the edge of the ward, Mill Hill uses Springwood Community Centre and 'A Place to Play' in Waterloo town centre as outreach bases for a variety of other groups and activities. It serves a densely populated urban area where there is an above-average take-up of free school meals, reflecting a higher-than-average proportion of families that are dependent on workless benefits. Educational attainment in the area is significantly lower than the national average. The vast majority of the catchment area is White British. The children's centre manager retired in August of this year. A new centre manager was appointed at the beginning of September. She shares her duties equally with the partner Crookhorn Lane Children's Centre and is supported by a full-time coordinator based at Mill Hill.

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

1

Main findings

Mill Hill is a good setting that is widely appreciated within its community. It is improving rapidly as the new manager, assisted by the coordinator, develops a strong leadership team. Together they are extending partnerships with other services and schools. This is increasing the use of a wider range of expertise and resources to reach out to more users providing the effective services and support which they need. This skilled and committed teamwork, underpinned by extremely well-founded strategies to identify strengths and areas to develop, demonstrates an excellent capacity for sustained improvement.

Safeguarding children's welfare is a significant strength, which extends across all users and staff associated with the centre. The very caring role models presented by all staff, and by others who work at the centre, are much appreciated and followed by many parents and carers. As a result, parents and carers are improving their understanding of how to keep themselves and their families safe.

Parents and carers make good contributions through the Parents' Forum and governance, via the Partnership Board. This Board is very effective and continues to improve as the new manager encourages their greater involvement in decision making. Leaders have established excellent strategies for identifying the needs of the

families within the community that the centre serves. These are underpinned by very close working relationships between centre staff, volunteers and with the staff across a wide range of local authority services; some of whom are well placed within the children's centre's own accommodation.

Home visiting by health and outreach workers and 'drop-ins' make the first supportive contacts with families. Examples include 'Small Steps', 'A Place to Play' Springwood Community Hall, now accompanied by Crookhorn Lane 'Drop-in' opportunities such as 'Baby Lunch Café' and 'Inbetweenies',. These in turn give rise to 'word of mouth' communication between parents and professional contact across a range of specialist services such as schools, Job Centre Plus and portage/supporting children with special educational needs and/or disabilities at home, which enhances the support given to vulnerable families and children.

Parents and their children respond eagerly to the support they receive. This inspection and concurrent school and childcare inspection findings support the centre's own evaluations that children in the Early Years Foundation stage make good progress. Users' views expressed individually or within the Parents' Forum also show that parents and their families achieve similarly well. The users' enjoyment and successful engagement with children's centre services are seen in their committed participation in organised events such as the 'gazebo' party' in the park and in their willingness to sustain continuing involvement in a range of activities, particularly those which enhance their parenting skills. Parents and carers talk appreciatively about the friendships made with centre staff, volunteers and other parents and carers and of the social interaction and equal treatment and inclusion enjoyed by their children. As a package, this support significantly enriches their self-esteem and parenting skills, so much so that an increasing number of parents and carers volunteer in the support of others.

At times, not enough use is made of the centre's well-equipped and spacious facilities. In order to meet the needs of an increased number of families the manager has plans to create more 'drop-in' and other supportive courses. These include, for example, more parenting for fathers, visiting theatre groups and 'how to read to your child' sessions to further enhance children's language and emotional development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Make even more use of the centre's spacious facilities and resources and further develop the skills of volunteers to meet parents' and children's needs, enhancing in particular their language and emotional development.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Very thorough procedures and consistently high quality pastoral care from staff and volunteers help the children to feel very safe during the breadth of children's centre support activities. All staff, but particularly outreach workers and health visitors who visit the family home, ensure that children's welfare needs, especially of those considered vulnerable, are identified and tackled at an early stage. This early intervention and support helps to ensure that children, including those at risk and others with complex needs, feel and stay safe. Close support of children's centre staff also leads to the beneficial development of parenting skills, particularly for teenage and young mothers. Most other outcomes are at least good and continue to improve. However, given their low starting points, children's emotional development remains an area of concern. While courses such as 'baby massage' are already lifting parents' self-esteem and parenting skills, their full effect in lifting children's emotional development has yet to emerge at the time when children are ready to attend school full time.

Expectant mothers speak very appreciatively of the empowering support and guidance and care that they receive both before and after child birth. Teenage and other mothers receive very effective support in how to breast feed or bottle feed their babies and in providing healthy foods. As a result, children are nourished well. Children attending the nursery and child-minding sessions at the centre enjoy lots of exercise both indoors and outside in the centre's spacious and well-equipped facilities. Consequently, they make good contributions and also make good gains in adopting healthy lifestyles.

Inspection observations, centre evaluations and comments of users clearly show that children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve well. Parents and their children enjoy their learning and willingly express their ideas and contribute well to decision making at the centre in response to the very warm encouragement from staff and volunteers. Very supportive dialogue with teenage mothers and fathers during parenting sessions, and the supportive work of children's centre teachers in the attached nurseries, for example, are helping to enhance the children's communication and language development. Other popular groups such as the 'Boogie Mites' music and activity sessions also promote enjoyment and lift parents' and children's self-confidence and communication skills. At times though, including when snacks and refreshments are being consumed, opportunities to develop the children's speaking and listening skills are not always used to best effect.

User and children's centre evaluations show that families are supported to make good progress in managing their economic well-being. Parents, especially members of the Parents' Forum, appreciate the guidance they receive from the Peers Education Partnerships (PEEPs) activities about how to manage and organise household tasks. Individual mothers describe the positive benefits of being able to attend mathematics and English training courses at the centre and of their continuing and increasingly successful pursuit of further qualifications and job opportunities. Mothers also appreciate the 'Drop-in' sessions, for example, at 'A Place to Play' and

the empowering support from staff, which in turn has enabled them to become volunteers, helping other families to tackle their concerns more effectively.

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, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
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

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has made significant progress this year in reaching out and making contact with an increasing number of families in need across the local and wider area that it serves. This has been achieved, for example, through the amalgamation with 'Small Steps', the greater parental access to 'Drop-in' support and to an enlarged outreach capability to reach parents in their homes. The centre is very effective in collecting evidence of the breadth of needs of children and their families. Children's centre senior managers and the local authority make very good use of data which show how the outreach services and partnerships with other service providers are enabling the centre to reach more users and to address their needs more effectively. This is seen, for example, in the increased engagement with fathers, single parents and young mothers. The centre continues to develop beneficial links with a range of local authority and health partners and these include, health visitors, child minding, extended services, portage/ supporting children with special educational needs and/or disabilities at home and Job Centre Plus employment support.

Having made contact with more parents, the new centre manager has rightly identified the need to make more use of the centre's own facilities to support local groups, develop more 'Drop-in' type activity and, for example, to provide more courses for fathers. Nevertheless, user and centre self-evaluations show the good support offered to users, including, for example, the very good outcomes of the 'Positive Parenting Programme'. Centre assessment also show the benefits which parents and their children derive over time from continued involvement in the variety of children's centre services. This is seen in user records and in a letter supplied by one parent, for example, which, reflecting similar progress of others, showed how this mother and her child began by 'dropping in' at 'A Place to Play' so that her child could mix with other children. By finding out about the range of support services and

courses offered, this parent progressed through 'Craft Toddlers', studied Makaton signing, joined the Parents' Forum and attended a range of skills and health and safety courses, and is now planning to undertake a nursing degree.

The centre provides exemplary care, guidance and support, as seen, for example, in the significant number of parents and carers who, having been supported at a time of need, are now acting as trained volunteers in support of other families in need. The parents questioned, without exception, consider the centre to be a safe place to come to for support at times of crisis. The centre's inclusive ethos is evident on entry as very considerate and capable administrative staff provide a warm welcome and present a setting where all users (children and parents and grandparents) are valued. The centre's staff and its partnerships with a range of local authority providers also ensure that this high quality care reaches out equally successfully to the wider community. The services provided promote good learning and development for all users, including for parents in literacy and numeracy. At times, though, adults do not communicate or question the children to best effect when children undertake self-chosen activities. Even so, there is particular enhancement and learning development of parenting skills for vulnerable families and teenage, single and other young parents.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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

All aspects of leadership and management are at least good and are improving as the new senior management team collaborate with increasingly effect to ensure that the needs of a greater number of users are fully met. For example, current managers are building well on the work of the previous manager by deploying staff and sharing expertise and additional facilities and resources from the now amalgamated 'Small Steps'. They are also using the closer links with Crookhorn Children's Centre to good effect to reach out to more users and to make full use of wider partnerships to tackle families' complex needs. Particularly strong aspects of leadership and management include exemplary safeguarding arrangements, a clearly shared and determined commitment to improvement, and excellent self-evaluation, with the latter two being key aspects of the centre's outstanding capacity to sustain further improvement.

All those working at the centre consistently implement the carefully planned and agreed health and safety policies. Procedures for checking the suitability of staff, board members and volunteers are very thorough; risk assessments of the site and of risks associated with specific children, visits or lone working are equally rigorous in helping to ensure the safety and well-being of users of the centre and its services. Mill Hill is an inclusive community where all children are treated equally. Staff are considerate and consistent in the effective way that they encourage diversity, for example, quickly accessing support for families who have English as an additional language. All staff ensure full support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the centre is full equipped, with ramps and suitable toilets for the disabled, for example, to accomplish this.

The manager's and coordinator's excellent communication with staff and with the local authority's quality assurance and performance officer and strong mechanisms for ascertaining the views of users and partners and of the engagement with users inform their very good understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. In particular, the Parents' Forum is a successful feature, much appreciated by parents and staff alike, which is making a beneficial contribution to the lives of users of the centre, not least in boosting parents' self-worth. However, while there is very good data of families reached and some useful data of how well families make progress, the latter remains a developing feature.

Governance is good and is improving as the new manager seeks to involve members of the Partnership Board, which also includes parents and school representatives, in the strategic development of the centre. The good day-to-day management of the centre is underpinned by the excellent work of the administrative staff and by the very well-planned professional development opportunities for staff and increasingly for volunteers. While the centre's resources are generally used well, current well-founded aims include basing more activities at the centre so that centre staff, teachers and child minders can make even more effective contributions, for example, in supporting fathers and lifting children's emotional development.

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	1
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	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
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	1

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

This inspection took account of the inspection findings from the concurrent early years inspection of full-day care at Waite End Nursery and of the sessional childcare at Jubilee Corner Nursery and also of the Section 5 inspection of Waite End Primary School.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Mill Hill Children's Centre on 14–15 October 2010. We judged the centre to be good overall and to be a place where parents and their children make good progress. We found that with a new manager and with strengthened partnerships with other centres, schools and service providers, Mill Hill is improving rapidly and already has several outstanding features.

The amalgamation with 'Small Steps' last April increased the facilities and staff skills available at Mill Hill. This term, by bringing in the manager of Crookhorn Lane Children's Centre, leaders have enriched the expertise and range of service opportunities even more. This increased capability has already increased the number of families served by centre, notably by developing more 'Drop-in' opportunities, including for example, at 'A Place to Play' in the centre of Waterloo. Mill Hill now has an excellent capacity to improve into the future.

We judged the centre's procedures for keeping your children safe, for supporting vulnerable children and to help those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to be very thorough indeed. We also find that children make good progress during the centre's various activities.

We agree with you that the staff who work at the centre, those who visit you in your homes and others who staff the various outreach locations, all treat you with respect, promote warm relationships and work hard to help you with your various needs and problems. We were particularly impressed by the large number of parents and carers who continue to enrol in a continuing number of courses to seek further skills and qualifications and to become more skilful parents, and by the increasing number of you who now volunteer in support of others.

We were also impressed by the very good contributions of parents on the Partnership Board and Parents' Forum in helping the centre to reach out and help an increasing number of vulnerable families. Representatives of teenage and young mothers' groups and of fathers' groups all express appreciation of 'parenting courses' and of the positive impact this has in helping you to become better parents. Other parents interviewed also stressed their improving self-esteem and the enjoyment now experienced as parents in looking after their children. You also told us about how well your children are progressing as a result of attending activities such as 'Boogie Mites', child-minding sessions and in the attached nurseries. Our inspection findings agree with your observations.

Several of you clearly feel that having the opportunity to 'drop in' for support and contact is very important for you and we agree that more could take place within the Mill Hill welcoming facilities, and so we have recommended this to the centre manager.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your appreciative thoughts, feelings about the centre and suggestions about how it might improve.

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