

Inspection report for Hailsham East Children's Centre

Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	366348
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Kubiak HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Sarah Hinks Sandie Piper (Acting)
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school, if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Hailsham East Community Centre 156387

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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.

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and a Senior Inspector (Early Years).

The inspectors held meetings with the centre managers and staff, representatives from the local advisory group, parents' forum, community partnerships, health services and the local authority. They visited the 'Seahorses' group, 'Pop In and Play', an antenatal session, the crèche and the parenting course. They spoke to parents formally and informally around the centre.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key policies, case studies, the centre's self-evaluation and business plan, evaluations of individual services, risk assessments and notes of the local advisory group meetings.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

Hailsham East Children’s Centre was designated in 2005 and is governed by East Sussex County Council. Centre staff are employed directly by the county council.

The centre’s catchment area is one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The local population is mostly White British, with smaller percentages of Eastern European and Bengali families. There is also a large settled Traveller community. Around 30% of children under five in the area are living in workless households, which is above the national average. Children start early years provision with skills below those expected for their age.

The centre is open all year round, from 8.00am to 6.00pm weekdays, and on some Saturdays. Services are run within the centre, with some groups being offered at other local venues. Day care is provided on site by the local authority. This was 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 centre and day-care setting.

The centre is based within a modern multi-purpose building which includes a large hall, a community centre and day centre for older people. It is fully wheelchair accessible. The centre has its own offices, reception, meeting rooms, crèche room and information and communication technology (ICT) suite. There is also a separate community café and large meeting area.

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. Users value and enjoy their time there and the good care, guidance and support offered by the staff. Centre staff support users both at the centre and in their own homes. Parents and users feel very welcome at the centre and value the safe, secure and welcoming environment it offers. Risk assessments are undertaken for all activities provided by the centre. Recruitment procedures for staff employed at the centre are rigorous and robust and follow local authority guidelines.

The centre has gone through recent changes in management. The acting manager has ensured that it continues to deliver effective services. The local advisory board meets on a regular basis; however, these meetings are too focused on sharing information among group members. Governance arrangements are secure. The advisory group is working towards developing a more strategic view by setting targets and making the centre more accountable.

Data are available from a number of sources and the centre is able to obtain data specific to its reach area. Data are being used to inform evaluations of specific services but do not feed effectively into the centre's self-evaluation and business planning.

Feedback from parents and case studies show that the outreach work from the centre is bringing about positive change to the families who access this service. Work is focused and time limited, with clear boundaries and expectations.

Outcomes for users of the centre are good overall. Parents see it as part of the community and feel able to drop in at any time. Outcomes for improving the healthy lifestyles of users are not as successful as other areas of their work. As a result, the provision for promoting breastfeeding, encouraging smoking cessation and reducing obesity levels in children is not as effective as other strategies adopted by the centre.

Parents have the opportunity to sit on the local advisory group and the parents' forum. Other ways that parents contribute to the work of the centre is through surveys and suggestions, although the effectiveness of these systems is variable.

Users have the opportunity to participate in a range of training, including English for speakers of other languages and parenting courses. The ICT suite provides a learning environment with a range of useful resources. The centre has an effective volunteering scheme, with good levels of support. This develops users' confidence and aids their progress towards gaining paid employment.

The centre staff know the community well and show a good understanding of and sensitivity to the diverse needs of the area it serves. The resources and displays at the centre reflect some aspects of the community. However, the range of centre users is not yet fully representative of all groups in the wider community. The centre has established good links with community resources and takes an active part in

community-based activities.

Regular evaluations of the centre's activities are undertaken to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the community. However, these evaluations do not effectively feed into the centre's business planning and self-evaluation process.

All staff demonstrate a commitment to the work of the centre and use available resources and data to recognise strengths, identify gaps in services and plan services to increase its effectiveness. Individual outcomes for users of the centre are good overall and improving. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop and implement effective strategies to improve the healthy lifestyle choices and outcomes for centre users.
- Strengthen equality and diversity across the centre by actively planning to ensure that activities reflect the wider community.
- Improve the business planning and self-evaluation to ensure that it accurately reflects the centre, is regularly reviewed, and is updated to reflect changes in the services.
- Strengthen the governance arrangements to ensure that challenging targets are set for the centre, linked to improving outcomes for children and families.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The outcomes for users at the centre are good and improving, although healthy outcomes are weaker. The centre is well used and parents value the services available. Users contribute to the work of the centre through the parents' forum and representation on the advisory group. Feedback about the centre is also encouraged through the use of suggestion boxes and books. However, this is not always fully effective as the parents' forum currently only consider suggestions made from the box. Parents are encouraged to visit the centre at any time and many make use of the community café where they can sit and chat. The centre is seen as part of the community and takes an active part in community-based activities. These community events are used as an opportunity to publicise the work of the centre.

The centre works hard to ensure that parents are valued and empowers them to develop their skills. Staff are excellent role models and support parents in managing their children's behaviour. Through individual tailored support the centre offers appropriate guidance and advice, effectively building up parents' confidence and self-esteem. Users are full of praise for the centre and the services it offers. As one parent commented, 'People care about you here.' The family outreach service is a strong feature of the centre. It offers an initial eight-week programme of targeted support for parents in their own home. This is making a big difference to the lives of

the people who access this service. One parent who used the service commented, 'The outreach team was amazing.'

The centre has been successful in engaging the Traveller community in the work of the centre and has undertaken joint activities with a local school, for example by creating a 'Traveller cookbook'.

Users are encouraged to develop healthy lifestyles, benefitting from sessions such as 'Seahorses,' a water-based activity that runs from the local swimming pool. As one parent commented, 'It has really made me confident to get him swimming, we love it.' Parents attending the centre are encouraged to play in the outside area with their children to encourage their physical development. The centre has good links with health colleagues. There has been limited success in promoting healthy lifestyle choices and staff are not always proactive in communicating the benefits to all users. As a result, breastfeeding rates and smoking cessation rates are low, and obesity levels are increasing.

Risk assessments are undertaken regularly for the centre and for outings to ensure that children are provided with safe play opportunities. 'Safety Days' are well attended and home safety schemes, where parents are able to access safety equipment such as fireguards and stair gates, help to keep children safe at home. Families benefit from the input of family outreach workers who can visit specifically to look at home safety. Children stay safe as safeguarding arrangements are good and relevant support is provided for children on child protection plans.

Group sessions at the centre are well attended. A crèche is available for some of the groups, which allows parents to focus on their activity. For some parents it may be the first time they have left their child and they feel reassured that their children are nearby and well cared for. Joint planning for the group sessions, crèche and nursery based at the centre follows the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Activities are focused on areas where children need to develop the most. The centre teacher and staff have worked hard at targeting activities to improve children's communication, language and literacy. Rigorous procedures and monitoring are in place and early indications are that children are making much better progress in this area.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
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	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 and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a good range of purposeful activities and resources. Activities are well planned and children are provided with a range of opportunities throughout the centre. Parents are encouraged to develop their skills in playing with their children so that they continue with their children's learning at home. As one parent commented, 'It gives me lots of ideas of things to do at home.'

Assessment procedures are good and a multi-agency approach ensures that services are tailored to meet the individual needs of the families. Joint visits with other services, including the Traveller Education Team and health visiting colleagues, ensure that services are well coordinated and avoid duplication. Outreach services are targeted and the impact of this work is swift, with many families needing no additional support after the initial eight-week period. Case studies demonstrate the positive impact of the outreach service on improving outcomes for families.

There has been some success in engaging areas of the community who do not access the centre. Data are now used to identify more clearly areas of the community which are not engaging with the centre and information forms will be sent to families in these areas. Incentives, such as a free hot drink at the community café, are being trialled to encourage people to complete and return the forms.

The successful volunteer scheme has resulted in a committed and enthusiastic range of centre volunteers. Many volunteers are successful in obtaining future training and paid employment, especially at the children's centre. As one volunteer commented, 'The best thing I have ever done!' Adults with learning disabilities and/or disabilities have the opportunity to volunteer at the centre and their contribution is valued.

The ICT suite is a learning environment with a range of learning materials and access to computers. Centre users and staff have the opportunity to work alongside each other and a culture of lifelong learning is fostered. There are high aspirations of the users of the centre and effective signposting and support to enable them to access courses and develop their skills. Achievements are acknowledged but are not always widely celebrated.

The space is well used and resources are of a high quality. In the café area children can access play equipment and there is a small book area. Library books are available in the book area and parents are encouraged to borrow books. The outside area is well used.

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 staff work effectively as a team, building purposeful links. Despite the recent management changes they have continued to work effectively. The centre's self-evaluation and business plan give leaders an overview of its priorities. These documents are not yet sufficiently detailed to include specific targets and a lack of review and updating means they do not accurately reflect the good work and success of the centre. However, the centre knows its community and reach area well and is targeting support appropriately to ensure it reaches the most vulnerable. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve is good.

Data are specific to the reach area of the centre. Reports are readily available to staff and they are beginning to use data to inform their work and to ensure that resources are targeted where they bring about the most change. Staff have been trained on using data and are beginning to use them in a more purposeful way, for example by looking at low attendance based on geography and targeting publicity at these areas. Data are also used to feed into the regular service evaluations which are undertaken. These evaluations include users of all centre activities and ensure that they continue to meet the changing needs of the community and inform future planning. Systems for evaluating the work undertaken with individual families through the family outreach service are very effective. Objectives are set at the start of the work and an evaluation is completed at the end. These clearly show the positive impact of this work. Parents are often signposted to other groups within the centre or services within the community to offer continued support. Assessment systems for allocating outreach services are not yet formalised.

The local advisory group consists of representatives from a wide range of organisations across the community. They are supportive of the work of the centre and the contribution it makes to the community. The group does not yet set targets for the centre and neither does it hold it to account effectively.

Equality and diversity are promoted at the centre but not consistently well in all areas. The centre has been very successful in engaging the Traveller community and

in working with the Traveller Education Department. Publications in the centre are available in community languages. Books available for families reflect the wider community. However, displays and information within the centre are not reflective of the wider community. Publicity material does not always include positive images of excluded groups. There is limited information around the centre in community languages. The centre is building good links with the older people's day centre based on site and joint activities benefit all participants.

Evaluations of individual services and groups are undertaken and include analysis of information from group members. At present, these evaluations do not feed into the centre's wider self-evaluation and business planning. As a result, business planning and self-evaluation is not regularly reviewed and updated to keep abreast of the changes and improvements being made within the centre.

The centre uses a number of different ways to gain individual feedback from users, both formally and informally. 'Snapshot surveys' are effective in obtaining the formal views of centre users. Informal feedback is not always captured. Systems for communicating action taken following feedback are inconsistent. When responses are given, however, they are clear and communicated well.

Management arrangements for the centre are understood by staff and there are clear structures. Regular individual supervision and performance management systems are effective. Family support workers have the opportunity to discuss any specific issues relating to their work through regular group supervision. Professional development of centre staff is given a high priority.

Safeguarding is given a high priority at the centre. Recruitment of staff follows local authority procedures and new staff cannot commence employment until all checks are completed. Full checks are completed by volunteers. Recruitment procedures are consistent with the safeguarding procedures of the local authority. Induction procedures are robust and ensure the safety and welfare of children and centre users. All the required policies and procedures are in place and meet requirements.

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	3

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	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 nursery at Hailsham East Community Centre was inspected as part of the children’s centre and obtained an overall judgement of good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Hailsham East Children’s Centre on 9 and 10 February 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre is based within a modern, bright building which is fully wheelchair accessible. It provides you with a safe and welcoming environment where you feel free to visit at any time. Many of you use the facilities of the café alongside other people from the community.

You feel that you are always treated as individuals and with respect and that staff build positive relationships with you and your families. As one parent commented, ‘You are not just a number, they know you and your child by name.’

You value the fact that staff know you and that you are always made to feel welcome. You enjoy attending the groups at the centre and at other local venues. Those of you who use the crèche feel that this is a very good service and that it gives you time for yourself to attend other courses or sessions.

The outreach service is very effective in offering you additional support. One parent commented that the outreach service was ‘amazing’. It is made clear to you how the outreach service can support you and you are involved in decisions throughout the whole time you are being supported. The staff have good links with other organisations and are able to direct you to other areas of support when you need it.

Parents have the opportunity to sit on the local advisory group. The group does not yet set targets for the centre to improve the service it offers you and your families. We have asked them to look at how they can do this. Some of you also sit on the parents' forum. Your views and opinions are sought by the centre and these are used to shape the service. Other ways that you can feed into the work of the centre is through the suggestions box, which is considered by the parents' forum. The suggestions book is not yet fully utilised by the parents' forum.

The centre's self-evaluation and business plan cover all areas of its work. These documents are not regularly updated and do not always reflect the good work being achieved across the whole centre. We have asked the centre to look at making these documents more useful.

You are well supported in accessing services and activities that will support you in improving your lives and those of your families. The centre has not been as successful in working with you in developing healthy lifestyles for you and your families. The centre needs to do more in encouraging you and your families with this.

The centre ensures that it is working to engage families from all areas of the community and, generally, this is being done well. For example, excellent work has been undertaken with the Traveller community. The centre has also worked hard at encouraging parents of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to engage in the centre. We have asked the centre to make sure that images and information are more representative of all parts of the wider community.

You report that centre staff want the best for you and your families. They are always there to support you. As one parent commented, 'people care for you here'.

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