

# Inspection report for Rural Horsham Children and Family Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	West Sussex County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	365838
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joan Lindsay

<b>Centre governance</b>	Local Authority
<b>Centre leader</b>	Alison Robinson
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not Applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Not Applicable

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, a representative of the local authority and members of the Centre Partnership Body (CPB). They also held meetings with representatives from partner agencies including health services, Sussex Traveller Action Group, social services and the childminder network coordinator. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents, including key policies, the centre's development plan, user surveys and the centre's evaluation of its services.

## Information about the centre

This centre was designated in 2008 as a Phase Two rural centre, with services delivered from a mobile Children and Family Centre (C&FC) which is available for use for three days a week. The other two days it is used by the West Sussex County Council Library Service. The vehicle has a base at a special school (owned by the charity Scope) in Five Oaks, which provides training and meeting facilities and a venue for outdoor activities. The service has been operational since June 2009 and is managed jointly with the nearby Billingshurst Children and Family centre, which was not part of this inspection. There are 2.5 full time-equivalent members of staff. The manager, two rural outreach coordinators and two information assistants all work part time. The local authority governs the centre and partners and users are represented on the Centre Partnership Body (CPB).

The centre's reach area is very extensive, covering at least 70 square miles with a total population of 14,500. The vast majority (98%) of the population are of White British, White Irish or other White heritage. There are currently no known teenage pregnancies in the area. Baseline data for children's entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are not available at county and therefore reach level but there are known to be 775 under-fives in the centre's area with 75% registered with the centre. There are 39 lone parents in the area and 9.5% of the registered users are listed as smokers. There are several Traveller sites in the reach area. The area is

socially mixed but includes some of the most deprived areas in the Horsham district. In one area, the number of workless families is 22.9% (compared to a West Sussex average of 18.9%). Pockets of deprivation are said to be masked by the averaging of indices of deprivation across the Super Output Areas and by deprivation that can be 'hidden' within statistics and the physical layout of the villages. Particular problems for some families living in the area are compounded by lack of access to primary and secondary health care, the high cost of local shopping and lack of public transport and affordable housing. The centre provides a range of services and support, mainly for families of young children, by working in partnership with 12 pre-schools, six toddler groups and several faith groups in the reach area. It is open all year round.

## 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**

<b>2</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>2</b>
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## Main findings

The Rural Horsham Children and Family Centre is providing a good service. In the short time it has been established, it has made excellent progress in many areas, largely due to the highly committed team and the tenacious leadership of the centre manager. It has strengths in many key areas and has made a significant difference to the lives of many who live in its extensive reach area. It has been highly effective in assessing the needs of the community it serves. For example, users identified the school holidays as difficult for families in isolated areas so the centre now runs holiday activities that are much valued by the users. 'Amazing...don't know what I would have done without them,' was the comment of one mother.

Excellent and effective outreach work and very well-targeted support has already had significant impact on, for example, the economic and social well-being of many of its users. The centre has not yet had time, however, to consolidate some of its work and to show consistent impact in some areas such as in health. There is strong anecdotal evidence from users and partners that the centre has had a very positive impact on children's communication, language and literacy skills, but the lack of specific data makes it difficult to quantify accurately the impact it has on children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage overall. For this reason, the capacity for sustained improvement is good, as are the outcomes overall. The Centre Partnership Group, while being an excellent vehicle to bring together a vast number of partners, is not yet in a position to provide strong, strategic governance.

The cornerstone of the centre's work is the highly detailed knowledge staff have of the area they serve, down to individual families in some isolated areas. This, plus the hugely extensive range of partners that have been included in its work, means that care, guidance and support are extremely well targeted. This has led to some significant and life-changing experiences for almost all of its users. One person spoken to during the inspection stated that the centre has 'completely turned lives around'. Safeguarding is a high priority amongst the staff, especially given the unusual situation of having a mobile facility and of having a very wide number of volunteers and partners involved in the services it offers.

The centre's highly inclusive, mobile work has led to previously hard-to-reach groups, such as Traveller families, accessing and benefiting from the services that are taken to them. The centre is constantly evaluating what it does well and is striving to improve and finely tune what it offers in response to the needs of the users and its partners. For example, parents and their children in an isolated rural area with very limited public transport now benefit from the social aspects of a thriving toddler group and a regular baby clinic because of the determination and support of the centre staff. Although the centre is very limited in budget, resources and staff, and is young in its development, it is already providing excellent value for money.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the role of the Centre Partnership Group so that it is more involved in the strategic planning and self-evaluation of the centre through
  - training of members so they have a clear understanding of their governance role
  - creating a core group to be more closely involved in forming the centre's development plan.
  
- Develop a means to measure more accurately the impact of the centre on the children who have contact with it.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>2</b>
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The centre has a strong focus on healthy eating and encouraging a healthy lifestyle. It has already changed the habits of parents and the health of children through, for example, providing fruit rather than biscuits at toddler groups and encouraging healthy eating through 'Come Dine With Us' cookery courses. There has been strong support, with significant outcomes, to improve the emotional and mental health of some of its users. One person described their contact with the centre as a 'lifesaver' and another simply said 'it has made me happier'. Although now growing in strength, the links with the health services have been relatively slow to develop and so some

aspects of health promotion such as breast-feeding are not as strong as others, such as oral health.

All those who use the services offered by the centre are kept safe and specific potential problems in relation to using the bus, such as where to park for safe access by users, are given detailed thought. Children behave well, for example in the way they treat the books in the library and how they share a fairly confined space with each other. The centre runs many first aid courses for parents and carers, seen as necessary in areas where primary and secondary health care may be some distance away. This helps to keep children safe in the home but there are still some instances of accidents and the need for child protection plans. However, the centre has clear evidence of where it has had a positive impact in supporting families so that children are removed from plans or do not need to be supported by one.

Children show high levels of enjoyment in activities organised and facilitated by the centre. The bus, with its cheerful outside decoration, is a wonderful attraction for the children coming for story time or with their parents and carers to select from the excellent range of books and toys which are appropriate to their ages and stages of development. During the inspection, children participated with great enjoyment in an animal story, repeating the noises, naming the animals and sharing in the excitement of lifting the flaps in the book. They learned to share, to think of others and their communication skills were enhanced. There is evidence to show that the number of children achieving at least average standards by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving year on year in the reach area. However, the centre does not yet have a method of accurately measuring its own impact on these figures because of the difficulty in collecting useful data across such a wide reach area. Anecdotal evidence shows that adults also thoroughly enjoy the services and courses offered. For some, including those who had previously found it hard to engage with other services, the impact has been significant in relation to improving their personal confidence. 'It has just been wonderful for me,' was one of very many similar comments made to inspectors.

All the staff involved in the centre are excellent role models for developing strong relationships and showing respect for others. The centre has made a significant difference to some rural communities and made them much more welcoming and less isolating for some. For example, where toddler groups had struggled to either continue or to be set up in the first place, the centre has fought doggedly on their behalf and has offered continuing support so that several are now highly important to the life of the communities they serve. While the centre is highly aware of the need to engage users in evaluating the services offered, they are not yet playing a full part in the governance of the centre.

Families are extremely well supported, with clear signposting to other agencies, to help them develop confidence and skills to enhance their economic well-being. For example, the highly effective volunteer scheme, with 30 current participants, has led to extensive training opportunities and significant changes to the lives of some, such as moving on to employment or to a university course. Fifteen have gone on to

further education in the short time the centre has been running. This is because the centre has empowered and given confidence to those who may otherwise not have thought themselves capable. Users say that staff 'go the extra mile' and one person said that the volunteer role 'gave me a reason to get out of bed'. Children are also developing excellent skills for their future through the centre promoting a love of reading, with almost 1,000 books lent out since its inception. Their social skills have also been greatly enhanced through the visits to the bus and the many toddler groups facilitated by the centre.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>1</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

<b>1</b>
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When the centre was first established, the centre manager undertook a highly in-depth 'mapping' exercise of the reach area. This detailed information has been used to extremely good effect to assess the needs of users, even down to individual isolated families. Through the highly integrated services with partners, the needs of the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups are thoroughly understood, and there has been demonstrable improvement for many. This is also as a consequence of the excellent levels of care, guidance and support that are consistently provided by all staff. Their strong, proactive approach to identifying where problems lie, often reacting at times of crisis for users, means that they have built up a high level of trust and respect amongst those they come into contact with. For example, one person stated that staff had been 'lifesavers', that they were available night and day, and had followed up issues quickly and stuck with them until resolved. This approach has led to strong improvements in the way parents and carers understand how to care for their children, and to well-targeted support for wider groups such as grandparents and childminders.

The rural nature of the centre means that it has focussed on providing a highly effective range of services which include courses, offered in response to parental needs, as well as weekly stay and play sessions. In addition, it has built up a very wide network of partnerships to plug the gap in the specific services it cannot cover. As a result, the overall range of services through signposting, for example for

smoking cessation, and the highly effective outreach work, meets the needs of users extremely well.

The centre celebrates achievement well through awarding certificates for attending courses, for example for users and the many volunteers. Children are also helped to develop their personal and social skills well through the centre's work to set up and guide toddler groups. Children's communication, language and literacy skills are particularly well developed through the wonderful choice of books and activities to promote a love of reading. Methods of measuring the impact on children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are difficult because of the very wide reach area. However, the fact that the centre has contact with three quarters of children under the age of five in the reach area demonstrates that its provision is having a positive impact on improving the outcomes for a large number of children and families.

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

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

**2**

The day-to-day management of the centre is excellent and the local authority is instrumental in ensuring there is support and challenge through regular monitoring of the provision and through the Annual Conversation. The Centre Partnership Group is very large, bringing together 53 different agencies and groups. While this is highly effective in bringing partners together, its size makes it too unwieldy to ensure it is effective enough in the strategic leadership and planning of the centre. Parent representation on this group is not yet strong enough. There is excellent communication of high expectations to all from senior leaders and a very strong team ethos with a joint vision for improvement. However, the development plan is not yet highlighting measurable targets for improvement in all relevant aspects.

The centre uses all its relatively limited resources to the utmost extent. It has been successful in securing a range of grants and in supporting others to do so, for example a toddler group has now had its annual rent covered and can buy toys for its own toy library. The use of extremely willing and well-trained volunteers makes a substantial difference to the quality of the centre, not only enhancing aspects such as publicity but also to the services and support offered by using skills such as counselling.



Equality and diversity are key to the centre's rationale and, as such, there has been a strong impact on the lives of some groups such as Travellers (Sussex Traveller Action Group describe the centre as 'excellent') and children with disabilities. The wheel-chair friendly bus is much loved by children with disabilities who can access the resources easily. The needs of disabled volunteers have been met. The centre meets its statutory duties in this aspect, as it does in safeguarding. The centre is quick to identify any concerns in relation to children's safety and to put in appropriate levels of support. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out appropriately on all those connected with the centre.

A very wide range of evaluation strategies are in place and the resulting information is used to guide future services and activities. The centre's own self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate, and there is a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development. There is clear evidence that evaluations have led to change and improvement for users. For example, the much-improved partnerships with the health visitor service have led to the establishment of a child health clinic taking place at a village toddler group. This is also an example of the many partnerships the centre has established in the short time it has been in existence. This has largely been as a result of the tenacious attitude of the centre leader whose passion for integrating services for the benefit of users shines through. The many partners spoken to during the inspection stated the services were highly cohesive and had a very positive impact on users' lives. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is a strong tool in supporting and improving the lives of centre users, especially the most vulnerable.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>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</b>	<b>1</b>
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## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

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### **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Rural Horsham Children and Family Centre on 23 and 24 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we looked at your centre's plans for development and numerous other documents, and we spoke to a very wide range of partners working with the centre, as well as all the staff and representatives from the local authority. We also visited several activities, including those taking place on the wonderful bus! Thank you for your participation in the inspection. Those of you we spoke to were unanimous in your praise for all the centre staff had done for you and your children. Many of you told us how the centre had changed your lives because of the support you had been given directly by staff who 'go the extra mile' for you. The centre listens very well to your views and tailors activities to meet your needs, such as putting on more holiday activities. However, it would be good to see more of you represented on the Centre Partnership Group. This is an area we have asked the centre to look at as the group currently is very large, and therefore it is difficult to gather everybody's views and ideas together to decide what the centre needs to improve, and how it is going to do it. It does, however, bring together a huge number of partners. This is because the centre manager has a strong commitment to integrating services so that the staff can provide you with the most tailor-made support it can.

We have seen the impact of the excellent care, support and guidance in the way the centre help parents and carers in bringing up their children safely, and in helping groups to develop so that those of you who live in more isolated areas have somewhere to go for advice, to meet other parents and carers and even just to see a familiar, friendly face. The resources at the centre such as the bus, the books and the toy library are used extremely well by people such as the highly committed staff and the army of volunteers. The impact is obvious in the way children are developing a love of reading and in their personal development. However, their achievements

when they go to school, and the impact the centre has had on this, are not yet well enough measured or tracked to show just how much impact the centre has had. This is something else we have asked the centre leaders and managers to develop.

Overall, the centre has made some outstanding progress in the short time it has been in existence and, with a very strong, committed staff, who are very well aware of the centre's strengths and areas for development, the centre is well placed to continue to improve.

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