

# Inspection report for High Beeches Children's Centre

---

<b>Local authority</b>	West Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	365724
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 May 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Patricia Davies

<b>Centre governance</b>	Local authority
<b>Centre leader</b>	Julie Smyth
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Centre address</b>	Unit 1 Highlands Farm London Road Bolney West Sussex RH17 5PQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01444 255477
<b>Fax number</b>	Not applicable
<b>Email address</b>	acd.ruralbolney.c&fc@westsussex.gov.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Handcross Primary School
<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.

---

**Published:** May 2011



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100024](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100024).

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester  
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

No. 100024

© Crown copyright 2010



## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's manager and staff members, representatives from the centre's advisory board and from the local authority, other managers of centres and services in the area, including health and outreach professionals, and with users.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection judgements

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

### Information about the centre

High Beeches is part of a team of nine centres working together in mid Sussex. It is one of four centres in this team serving rural communities and covers a wide geographical area. The centre's core contact with users is provided through a mobile service, taking customised vehicles out to six main village locations. These visits often combine the centre's activities with others taking place in the village at the same time. The centre has an office base in the village of Bolney, which also provides storage and parking for the team's mobile vans. High Beeches is a phase two centre and offers the full range of services under its registration. These facilities include outreach work, 'stay and play' sessions, a toy library, weekly baby group, computer and internet access, and links with local privately run Early Years settings, with health professionals and the local authority's multi-agency teams. There is also access to guidance relating to family matters, education and employment.

The area served by the centre is wide ranging in terms of its social and financial composition, with very small pockets of deprivation. Where deprivation is present, it relates largely to education, housing and to isolation caused by limited public transport available to facilities in urban areas. There are no secondary schools or further education establishments in the centre's area. Over 90% of families are from White British backgrounds. The percentage of unemployment is 22% and the proportion of children under five from homes living on workless benefits is 6%. Levels of obesity and of children who are overweight are approximately 7% and 14% respectively. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the area is below average. Children's skills and knowledge on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is broadly as expected, with falling levels in relation to speech and communication.

There have been several changes to the centre's leadership in the last three years, including a short period of temporary management. Staffing is now settled. The current centre manager took up her position in September 2010. Governance arrangements with the local authority include an advisory partnership group. There have been some changes to its membership recently. The centre has just entered the consultation period for a possible merger of its provision with another centre. This proposal is part of a local authority review of its children centre services.

## Overall effectiveness

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

3

## Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

## Main findings

High Beeches provides a satisfactory service to its community. Although still at a relatively early stage in developing some partnerships and aspects of its work, the centre is increasingly forging mutually valuable links with existing groups in its area and across local services and professional teams. Those registering with the centre and using its facilities have increased steadily. Its regular mobile contact with the area's village communities is much valued by users, particularly those who feel isolated from family and friends elsewhere and are unable to travel easily to amenities in local towns. Parents and carers greatly appreciate the opportunity to extend children's enjoyment and learning with toys and books loaned out from the van and like the ready access there to a wide range of information and support.

Staff extend a warm welcome to all. As a result, parents and carers say they feel safe to share any worries and concerns with centre staff. Their confidence was exemplified by one parent who spoke of her 'peace of mind', knowing that she could use the centre for even the smallest questions, because 'you get the human contact and good answers.' Such positive support has enabled the centre to improve the circumstances of individual families at troubled and stressful times. Courses arranged for adult users are popular, and have included those to increase their skills and show a pathway into further education, training and work. Nevertheless, this aspect of the centre's services, including links with national employment agencies, is not as far forward as some others.

At the heart of the centre's work are enthusiastic staff and the close working relationships they have forged with each other and with other centres. There is much give and take, so that drivers, for instance, can be changed around as needed and resources shared. The different expertise of individual staff members is also used across the centre teams to benefit all. The flexibility and goodwill of these informal partnerships is being increasingly strengthened by more formalised working practices, including those to sharpen the evaluation of its services. For example, the analysis of data has enabled the centre manager to identify trends particular to the local area and, therefore, key groups to target. This information has aided its self-evaluation and given the centre a realistic understanding of its effectiveness. Clear priorities for improvement are used thoughtfully to shape its services and resources. Another developing area is the collection of feedback from users, other agencies and pre-school groups about the outcomes of the centre's work. Where this detail has already been gathered, it shows the popularity of the centre's activities and users' desire for more. Nevertheless, there has not yet been enough evaluation of this kind

for the centre to know and demonstrate the full impact of its work and celebrate users' achievements. Links with and feedback to and from county-wide health services, while moving on at a good pace, are sometimes patchy.

Governance and lines of accountability are clearly understood by staff and all safeguarding requirements are met. Effective decisions have been made in the placement of key staff within the wider area team to help ensure that users benefit from consistent contact with staff they already know. The centre's advisory group is keen to lend full support to the centre's work. While it has now started to create close working partnerships with the centre manager and staff, it is not yet playing a full role in helping to improve the centre's services and effectiveness. All these factors, taken together with its steady improvement to date, point to the centre's secure capacity for taking its improvements forward.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the evaluation of the impact of the centre's services on its users in order to assess their achievement fully, celebrate outcomes and shape provision, by:
  - seeking regular feedback from parents, carers and children about the centre's activities
  - sharing information systematically with other groups and agencies, especially pre-school groups and health professionals.
- Develop strong links with education providers and national employment agencies to provide adult users with opportunities for increasing their knowledge and skills, undertaking further education and gaining employment.
- Draw the advisory partnership group into a close working partnership with the centre manager and staff in order to fully support their work to improve the centre's services and effectiveness.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>3</b>
----------

While the centre is not yet able to demonstrate fully its impact on users' achievement, it is clear that adults and children are enjoying its activities and making valuable gains from its resources, support, information and advice. Happy, safe and confident use is made of the van, with children behaving well in the confines of a small space and users having friendly relationships with staff. Work to support children's preparation for school is gaining pace. For example, their imaginative play and physical dexterity are extended through sessions of 'messy' play and active, practical activities. Parents and carers find comfort meeting up with others when they feel isolated at home and grandparents appreciate the chance to spend time and create strong bonds with their grandchildren. The use of an existing post-natal clinic in one village has grown with the introduction of a baby group run by the centre at the same time, thus ensuring children benefit from these important early checks on their health and well-being. Adults report the value of access to information about parenting skills, and health visitors report that children's oral health is usefully promoted by the chance for parents and carers to purchase good quality products directly from the van.

New courses for adults are also starting to have an impact. A father reports that cookery sessions have increased his confidence in cooking for the family and ensuring they have a healthy diet. Parents and carers increased their knowledge and confidence for dealing with emergencies through first aid training. Adult users attending a recent course also valued the information they received about how to move towards further education or paid employment. They noted that they felt confident now to look for work, and to explore opportunities for training and further education. The well-being and safety of vulnerable families, including those in need of high-level help and protection through the local authority's assessment, social services and multi-agency work, have improved as a result of the centre's work on their behalf. For example, guidance on parenting skills and access to counselling services have helped parents manage their children's challenging behaviour more effectively. Securing a pre-school place has left parents free to develop business opportunities, thus adding to the family's financial independence, while advice about benefits has facilitated more security of income for other families. By gaining funding for a car seat, the centre has given one parent and her child the chance to take advantage of transport offered by friends and reach facilities in nearby towns.

Increasingly, users are having the chance to feed back their satisfaction with the centre's courses and activities, the benefits that have been gained and what else they would like to see. While this activity is relatively new, imaginative strategies are designed already to collect children's views and ensure that giving these evaluations are not overly arduous or time-consuming and are, therefore, more likely to be completed. In this way, users are starting to influence the centre's services. Consultation with the wider area's parents' forum has guided decisions about resources designed specifically for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, which will benefit directly the centre's provision and outcomes.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>3</b>
----------

The centre now has a firm programme of activities based on carefully researched local knowledge. The consistent delivery of its services since November last year has gained the trust and satisfaction of the villages it visits, so that the numbers registering and using the centre have edged up month by month. Step by step, the centre is extending the range and quality of its activities but, given the particular stage of its development, provision still has further to go. For example, opportunities for adult users to join courses and training arranged by or through the centre are beginning to open up, but are as yet relatively limited.

Assessment information from the local authority has provided a valuable overview of the particular needs of communities in the area. The cookery course was, therefore, introduced specifically as a start to addressing issues with weight. The availability of 'story sacks' for use at home is also designed to make early headway with children's speech and language development. Plans are well in hand to equip a van with sensory resources for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the centre is working with other centres to provide services to Traveller families in the area. Where provision is already becoming established, learning is much enjoyed. At the popular 'stay and play' sessions, children get to use a wide range of resources and exciting materials. Pre-school and toddler groups like the chance to extend their facilities through these events and by borrowing additional toys from the centre's library. They also appreciate the expertise and advice available on the spot from centre staff.

Parents and carers seeking particular guidance or support are happy to visit the van. In some cases, the need is satisfied by a leaflet or book, or by being directed on to other services. In other cases, conversation with staff leads to outreach work with the family by the centre's rural coordinator and other professionals, leading to a marked difference in the lives of some. Effective links with the local authority's multi-agency panels ensure that the centre gets to know of families in crisis or at risk in their area and is drawn in to providing additional support where needed.

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>



## How effective are the leadership and management?

**3**

All the staff are committed to the growth of the centre’s effectiveness and impact, and keen for services to consolidate and expand. The centre manager has created close teamwork within the centre, and with colleagues from others. This cooperation ensures an efficient sharing of resources and professional experience. Accurate targets for improvement are supported by a sound evaluation of services and are leading to increasingly tailored provision for individual communities, families and groups. These factors provide satisfactorily for ensuring equal opportunities for users and the reduction of any discrimination.

Partnerships with other services are growing, fostered by everyday contact in the line of work and also by formal structures for contact and communication within the local authority. These factors are gradually strengthening links with, for example, the midwife service. Health visitors work alongside the centre to register families, and praise the benefits of the centre, linking families to other services where needed. However, some variability in links and communication with these health services remain. Partnership activities with pre-school settings are proving valuable, but the full potential for exchanging information and expertise, particularly to develop children’s knowledge and skills for the future, has not yet been fully realised. Given the centre’s increasing success, balanced with the early development and influence of some initiatives, value for money is satisfactory.

Everyday administration ensures that visits and activities run smoothly. There are regular and frequent checks on vehicles to ensure they are in good working order. Visits and venues are assessed for risk and vans parked so that users are safe entering and leaving the vehicle. The centre maintains appropriate safeguarding records on recruitment checks carried out by the local authority on their behalf and staff have suitable training in the protection of children. Computer alerts have now been introduced to sharpen the centre’s procedures and monitoring of safeguarding arrangements. Roles and responsibilities are clear and allow for one-to-one support for centre staff from their line manager. The centre’s advisory group contains much expertise and local knowledge. This group is poised to lend much stronger support to the centre than it has recently, including consultation about the centre’s possible merger. The group’s scrutiny of assessment information has provided a good start and an early link into local schools has been opened up.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</b>

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

Inspectors spoke with staff running private pre-school and toddler groups with whom the centre has contact.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the High Beeches centre on 19–20 May 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for your contributions to this inspection. Some of you took the time and trouble to come to the centre's office to speak with us, while others of you kindly talked to us when we joined staff on the van. All the information you gave us provided valuable evidence of the centre's work and impact.

Your centre is one of nine serving mid Sussex and it covers a wide rural area. It is a mobile service, visiting six main locations. It often links up with activities taking place in villages at the same time, such as independently-run pre-school and toddler sessions, and baby clinics. The vans have internet access, a wide range of literature and information, products you can buy for oral health and toys and books you may take out on loan to share with your children. Staff are available to offer guidance and support and point you through to other services to meet your needs. The centre also offers outreach work with families experiencing times of particular difficulty.

Your centre is providing you with a satisfactory service. After coming through an unsettled period during changes to staff, there is now an established programme of

visits and activities. It is clear from the increased numbers registering with the centre and using its services that you much appreciate this regular contact, enjoy its activities and value its support. Indeed, you told us so. In particular, you like the chance to borrow additional toys and books to share with your children and, importantly for some of you, the visits help to dispel the isolation that you feel, by having the chance to mix with other parents, carers and children. Others of you especially praised the difference the centre had made to the life and well-being of your family, including support to help manage troubled circumstances or improve financial security.

Staff are welcoming and friendly and take careful steps to ensure you and your children are safe using the van and its facilities. They are enthusiastic about their work and keen to take it forward. Already, activities like 'stay and play' are having a positive impact on your children's learning and enjoyment. Courses to do with cookery and first aid have also proved popular with adults and extended their knowledge and confidence to provide a healthy diet and act effectively in an emergency. While these and other initiatives are at a relatively early stage of development, the centre is gradually adapting its services to meet your needs more closely, based on a careful consideration of local circumstances. In order to help it make these changes even more successfully, we have asked that it gathers more feedback from you about its activities to assess how well it is doing and what it needs to do next, in addition, that it shares information more systematically with other services, especially health professionals like health visitors and midwives, and with the pre-school groups it joins to foster children's achievement and preparation for school. Given that those of you who attended the 'next steps' course found it productive and motivating, we have also asked the centre to strengthen its links with establishments offering further training and education, and with national agencies that help those seeking paid employment. The centre's advisory group is eager to support the centre's improvements and we have recommended that it works more closely with the centre manager and staff to help them in this work, so that you all gain even more from the centre's activities.

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