

Inspection report for Felpham Children's Centre

Local authority	West Sussex
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with managers, staff, parents, a member of the advisory board and representatives of partner organisations. They talked to parents, staff and children throughout the working day at the centre. Inspectors observed the centre's work, reviewed case studies and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The centre is located on the site of infant and junior schools. It is housed in accommodation that could be lifted from its current position on land owned by the diocese to land located further back in the schools' grounds, which is owned by the local authority, if required in the future. The centre has been purpose built for use as a Phase 2 children's centre. The centre is not a full service centre, in that there is no nursery provision on site. The centre has one part-time manager, three part-time information assistants and one part-time family outreach worker. Governance and accountability are achieved through a Centre Partnership Group and Family Forum.

The centre building comprises three outside areas: the courtyard, with ball pit and canopy; the playground area with road markings and the side garden; and, a social area equipped with toys, public access computers, a water cooler and a drinks vending machine. There is an office and reception area and a medical/one-to-one room. There is also a self-contained stay and play/training room with interactive whiteboard facilities, an accessible toilet with changing facilities, a kitchen and access to the courtyard and side garden.

In general, the reach area of the main centre is fairly affluent with the majority of housing being private, owned or rented accommodation. There are small pockets of

social housing within this area. The satellite centre, located just under half a mile away in The Hut, Hotham Gardens, is in one of the ten most deprived, hard-to-reach areas in the country. Ethnic diversity is predominantly White British/European with a small percentage made up of Eastern European origin. The satellite centre is currently offering universal services from its base in the hard-to-reach area. It is working in partnership with a local housing association, who owns the building, to develop and offer services to the 250 families living in this different locality, who would not have easy access to services in the Felpham base. There is an average level of worklessness across the two centres and, as a result, an average proportion of families that are dependent on benefits. Children’s levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are broadly average.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Increasing numbers of families, including those who are hard to reach and the most vulnerable, are benefiting from the range of good quality services provided by Felpham Children and Family Centre. As a result, outcomes are improving and are good. Strong outreach and effective community liaison work underpins the centre’s successes. Well-qualified, skilful staff have a good understanding of the needs of the community and develop positive, trusting relationships with families. As a result, parents and carers, including those who are new to the area, feel welcome, fully included and well supported.

The centre has built strong partnerships with a wide range of agencies, in addition to health and social care, so provides well-integrated and cohesive services for its diverse groups of users. Users say that this makes a real difference to them. They value the easier access they have through the centre to a wide and varied range of information, guidance and support on issues such as housing, debt management, local schools and childcare. The more recent provision at the satellite centre in a more deprived area has begun to make a significant difference to many more users. As the staff there stressed, being award winners for their work from the housing association, there is still more to do but a very good start has been made.

Users say that they feel safe and well cared for at the centre and are increasingly aware of how to keep their children safe too. Robust safeguarding procedures and practices are given a high priority and implemented consistently by well trained and vigilant staff. Good multi-agency working is making a strong contribution to successfully supporting families and children who are in need and most at risk of harm. It has been particularly beneficial in helping parents return to work and in the provision of health care as midwives and other health professionals work from the centre. The work of the Police Community Support Officers is much appreciated as they give information and support to many parents. Effective joint planning and working practices between the local schools and centre, in a recent School Readiness Programme, are making a significant contribution to supporting the transition into education for children and their parents and carers.

Equality is promoted effectively and diversity celebrated well. The views of users are gathered regularly and make a positive contribution to shaping the services offered. A varied programme of well-resourced and interesting activities is matched to the diverse needs of users. Good arrangements are made to ensure that all groups have the opportunity to participate, for example by making some activities available during the early evening, weekends and school holidays for working parents, fathers and those with older children. If there is one aspect of the centre's work that is particularly impressive it is that of the part-time outreach worker. His ability to effect amazingly positive outcomes with the young people he meets, and their parents, is very well documented. The use of his 'Happy Mat' is becoming celebrated throughout the area. As one parent testified, 'He has made all the difference to our family. We all have so much more confidence now.'

After a difficult first year when there were changes of leadership, the centre is now well led and managed. There are clear lines of accountability and reporting arrangements offering a good capacity to improve. However, the staffing levels at the centre present ongoing challenges with the development of services balanced with the need to complete paperwork required nationally and at county level. Although there is a good shared understanding of the centre's strengths and where improvements can be made, the quality, range and depth of its evaluation means that strategic planning for improvement is not robust. The centre leader has organised the overall provision well, but agrees that more time for evaluation could be found by better utilising the vast experience of the four part-time members of staff. A good range of partners are represented on the advisory board, the Centre Partnership Group. Their role, particularly in providing challenge and advice, has been well developed and all members realise the need for greater evaluation and reflection on their outcomes to improve their provision further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure planning for improvement is updated and robust by:
 - using a full range of evaluation techniques consistently
 - using all data and information available to set ambitious targets that are focused on improving outcomes for users
 - specifying how success will be measured.
 - using the expertise of all part-time staff effectively.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Case studies and discussions with users demonstrate that there is a high level of satisfaction with the centre's provision. Parents and carers who have felt isolated and experienced emotional difficulties or family crisis report that they have increased self-esteem and confidence as well as reduced levels of stress and anxiety. This has helped them to develop a more positive relationship with their children. Users say they enjoy spending time playing with their children, learning about their development and how to manage their behaviour successfully. When children are in the centre they play happily together, are inquisitive and develop their independence. They learn to share and communicate with each other and develop new skills.

Although there have been difficulties in providing the service through shortage of time, new mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies say that they are now being well supported, which encourages them to persevere through any initial difficulties. Users demonstrate that they have a better understanding of oral hygiene and have changed their routines as a result, for example by giving less sugary drinks and switching from a bottle to a trainer cup.

Users say that they and their children feel safe. Users are increasingly familiar with a range of safety precautions both inside the home and beyond. For example, they have an increased understanding of road safety, fire hazards and the need to make hot drinks away from children. Users feel better equipped to take care of their children by learning first aid. Case studies show that good multi-agency working, joint home visits and a clear understanding of the Common Assessment Framework are helping to keep vulnerable children safe, including those on the child protection register and those being looked after.

Users develop trusting relationships with staff and each other so are confident about sharing their views, talking about any concerns, making suggestions and contributing their ideas. A much appreciated parent forum, known as FFISHNET, has been established to build on this positive contribution further. Users develop a range of additional skills that will support their future economic well-being, including computer skills and how to manage their finances more effectively. Although there are few volunteers working at the centre at the moment, users readily support others. For

example, they suggested and organised a growing garden for gourds and pumpkins. These opportunities demonstrate their increasing enterprise skills and contribute to improving the economic well-being of some families. Others have benefited from donations by users of a range of equipment, such as stair gates and buggies, and the toy library is very well used.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	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 provision at the centre is good, with great skill shown by staff in gathering information to assess the needs of all users when they start at the centre and as they progress. Several users commented on how welcoming the front-desk staff are and how much difference this has made to their start at the centre. The details that staff collect sensitively from the users themselves, and from other organisations working alongside, enable all staff to get to know the users well and to tailor the services to their needs.

The centre contributes routinely to assessment for other services, such as children's individual education plans or their care plans, ensuring that services are effectively integrated. Informal information sharing among health, social care and early years professionals in the area ensures that the centre adapts its services well to users' needs. The range of groups is appropriate to the current priorities identified with partners in the area, and good progress is being made to extend this in the satellite area. Many users are being guided towards more purposeful learning and developing skills they did not know they had. As a result users talk of much greater enjoyment of learning.

Users who attend regularly gain confidence and learn from the play leadership and advice offered by skilled staff. Staff are well qualified for their roles and they carefully select the resources to suit each activity. The layout of the rooms is exploited well by staff and users so that development of skills continues to enable all

to make the most of their time in the centre. The provision of activities outside and on outings is a real prized strength of the centre. Other affiliated groups and individuals from outside the area come to use the provision on a regular basis.

Staff and others working with the centre pool their information to give advice and to secure resources for users, notably in times of crisis. Case studies show the in-depth support that the centre can coordinate for users. The situation for many vulnerable families is improving because of the information and guidance given.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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 leaders make good use of the space available to create a warm, attractive environment where all groups of users feel happy, safe and well supported. Resources are of high quality, celebrate diversity, breakdown stereotypes and engage all groups of users well. The use of the high-quality toy library is a particular strength enjoyed by very many users. Strong relationships with users, key partners, other agencies and the wider community are contributing to improving outcomes for children and families, and improving their emotional health and well-being. Consequently, the centre provides good value for money.

Equality and diversity are promoted well so that centre users reflect the cultural, ethnic and social diversity in the community. Families, including those who are new to the area and those who have children with disabilities, are provided with the relevant specialist support, advice and resources. Consequently, they are fully included in activities and have equal access to the full range of services available.

Thorough attention is paid to ensuring users and staff are safeguarded well. Early notification of any child protection concerns leads to swift action that is recorded in the centre's confidential files. All appropriate checks and extensive risk assessments are carried out thoroughly and recorded carefully. Well-trained staff work in close partnership with other agencies to provide early interventions and support for the most vulnerable, including children and families at risk of harm. Families facing a crisis or danger from domestic violence are protected immediately by the joint work of the centre and other services, including some voluntary sector organisations.

Links with the local schools are intrinsic in the leadership, management and governance arrangements of the centre. These provide good continuity of provision and support for families. Lines of accountability and reporting arrangements between the centre, school and local authority are clear and understood. The role of the Centre Partnership Group is well understood by all its members, particularly how they use the range of relevant information available to inform their questioning and advice. The local authority has introduced a system to collect information and provide the centre with an analysis of local data which is being developed further. The centre routinely collects and analyses information about activities and individual users. Outreach support plans are in place for those who are most vulnerable. However, the centre's strategic plan for improvement is not robust. This is because it does not build on its successes through consistent evaluation of the full range of information available to identify specific targets or clear success measures to drive improvement and inform future planning.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Felpham Centre on 26 and 27 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

More families in the area are using the centre and taking advantage of the good range of services and activities that it has to offer, including family fun activities run in the school holidays. Those of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoy being at the centre because you meet other families and make new friends. This has been particularly helpful for those of you who are new to the area. You really value the friendly welcome that you are given by all the staff. You are confident that they give you lots of good advice and support. If they cannot offer you what you need themselves then they know who can. They point you in the right direction about a whole range of things such as housing, managing your finances and childcare.

Staff do everything they can to help those of you who might find it difficult to come to the centre. This might include providing you with support and advice in your own homes. The member of staff, with his 'Happy Mat', is someone many of you have got to know really well and really appreciate. Some of you told us that this has really helped you to gain more confidence, so you now attend some of the activities at the centre too. Staff have also helped you to complete forms and accompanied you to meetings with other organisations if you have needed it. This has been especially helpful at times when some of you have been experiencing a lot of difficulties.

You told us how the centre is making a real difference to your lives. Those of you who have moved into the area or have recently had a baby explained that the centre has made you feel less isolated, anxious and worried about the changes in your lives. You told us that you have been better able to cope, for example with managing your child's behaviour, sleeping and eating habits.

The centre offers a good variety of activities that are advertised well at the centre and other places locally, such as the schools and shops. The centre's toys, books and other equipment are good. You appreciate that the staff get to know your children very well. You told us that they provide activities that your children really enjoy. The centre regularly asks for your views about what it offers and how it could improve. You are happy to make suggestions because you know that they will be taken seriously. For example, it was your idea to have an allotment and hold charity fundraising events.

Keeping you and your children safe is taken very seriously by the centre. All the correct checks have been carried out by the centre's leaders to keep you safe.

Staff are well trained and work together as a team to keep everyone free from harm. You told us that you feel safe and are confident that your children are well cared for at the centre. You have learnt a lot about how to keep your children safe at home and when out with them, for example by learning about fire risks, dangers to avoid when cooking and road safety.

The centre runs very smoothly because it is well led and managed. The links with the local schools are helpful, particularly as your children get older and start their education. Everyone at the centre works well together as a team and is determined to provide you with the services that you need. Leaders regularly check what your different needs are and what the centre is doing to help you. As well as what you tell them, they get lots of other information to help them improve the services even more. They have a plan to help them do this, but it is not yet as detailed as it should be. We have asked the leader to involve all staff and work together to remedy this by looking at the work they are doing very carefully. There is a good community group of people who work with the centre staff to help them improve services and they are doing a good job.

Thank you for contributing to the inspection by talking to us and sharing your views.

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