

Inspection report for Snowdrop Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 383621 |
| Inspection dates | 12–13 October 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Joanne Caswell HMI |

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| Centre manager | Kathryn Rogers |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Sunshine Corner Nursery (EY282231) Aylesham Neighbourhood Project (EY224511) |

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre management team, the local authority, health professionals, representatives from the advisory board, steering group and board of trustees, a local headteacher, frontline staff, parents and partner agencies.

They observed the centre's work, visited the linked early years setting, made observations of outreach services and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Snowdrop Children's Centre is managed by the Aylesham Neighbourhood Project, under a service level agreement with Kent County Council. Aylesham Neighbourhood Project is a registered charity that was established in 1997 to address the needs of families in the deprived area of Aylesham, a former mining community. It is governed by a board of trustees composed entirely of local parents. Governance arrangements are provided by a charitable organisation on behalf of the local authority. A committee from the board of trustees forms the centre's steering group. This includes health services, local nurseries, schools and community groups. The steering group feeds into the Dover, Deal and Sandwich Children's Centre Advisory Board, a sub group of the Local Children's Trust Board.

The centre is a phase one centre which was designated in 2004. It is located in Aylesham and serves the wards of Aylesham, and Little Stour and Ashstone, which are very rural and cover a large geographical area. This includes the villages of Aylesham, Nonington, Goodnestone, Ash, Wingham, Preston, Staple and Stourmouth. Transport links within some parts of the area are exceptionally limited. The centre serves one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Levels of unemployment are high within some pockets of the local area. The number of children living in households dependent on workless benefits has increased since last year. The community served by Snowdrop Children's Centre is less ethnically diverse

than other parts of the area, with the majority of families of White British heritage. Children’s levels of skills and understanding on entry to school are generally in line with those expected for their age.

Snowdrop Children’s Centre provides the full core offer services. Full daycare is provided by Sunshine Corner Nursery which is located on the site of the local primary school. Crèche facilities are provided on site by the Aylesham Neighbourhood Project.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Snowdrop Children’s Centre offers a very welcoming, friendly and safe environment for local families. One parent expressed the view of many parents by stating to inspectors, ‘I don’t know what I would do without the centre – it’s a lifesaver.’ Staff are particularly dedicated and highly committed to ensuring services are tailored specifically towards individual need. As a result, assessment is rigorous and personalised, ensuring families benefit from relevant support services. This has an increasingly positive impact on improving outcomes for all children and parents. The care and guidance shown towards all families are outstanding and staff work hard to give an exemplary level of individual support to those who are in need.

At present, the centre reaches a good range of families identified as being most vulnerable within the catchment area. Careful analysis of data ensures targeted families receive the appropriate support, and attendance levels for all groups are increasing. The centre works consistently hard to improve this even further. Registration and referral levels are good although, due to poor transport links within the area, some families do not access the services as frequently as others. A recent comprehensive consultation with these families has helped centre management identify new and innovative ways to reach these areas and improve participation rates. As a result, an increased range of outreach services has been developed and the centre works extremely hard with local schools, health services and partner agencies to increase provision in the hardest-to-reach communities. This is already leading to services benefiting more families. Centre management and the local

authority are monitoring this closely. Challenging targets have been set to reach a much larger number of families and relevant action has already been taken to successfully achieve this. Self-evaluation is robust at all levels and used systematically to drive improvement. The centre and local authority have a very accurate view of the centre's strengths and areas for development and are taking concerted action to drive the centre forward. Therefore, the centre demonstrates good capacity to improve.

The centre is managed well and governance arrangements are good. This ensures all staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and support one another well. As a result, services for families are fully integrated and links with external agencies are good. This has an increasingly positive impact on improving outcomes for families, as referrals between agencies are swift and effective. There is strong evidence of improvement across all outcomes. However, the current range of adult learning opportunities is slightly restricted.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff are highly trained and ensure families identified as being at risk are closely targeted and supported. There are good procedures in place for partnership working between all key agencies to share relevant information and develop close inter-agency working.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the opportunities for adult learning to enable a larger majority of families in the area, including those from target groups, to further improve their economic stability and independence.
- Build on strategies already in place to engage consistently with a larger majority of most vulnerable families.

How good are outcomes for families?

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Families access a wide range of targeted and universal health services. Designated support for young parents is provided through the Young Active Parents (YAPs) group. The centre is increasingly successful in reaching young families and supporting them through parenthood. As a result, many parents told inspectors how much they had gained through the excellent care and support shown to them by staff. Good links with health professionals, such as midwives and health visitors, ensure targeted support is in place to support children's healthy development. For example, parents praised the cookery courses they had completed which helped them understand how to provide healthy, nutritious meals for their families. As a result, children's attitudes towards healthy eating have improved and obesity levels in children are reducing. Good provision enables parents to develop strong emotional well-being and improve self-esteem. For example, parents commented the 'Bumps and Beyond' group had particularly helped them if they were suffering from postnatal depression and prevented feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Children and parents feel safe at the centre and know they can seek advice at any time. One parent described the support of staff as 'amazing'. Parents receive professional advice from safety experts which helps them recognise potential hazards within the home and whilst on outings. Free home safety checks enable parents to obtain relevant equipment to keep children safe at home and reduce accidents. Strong provision for keeping children safe and supporting family welfare leads to a significant reduction in the numbers of children requiring a child protection plan. Looked after children and those involved with the Common Assessment Framework are particularly well supported and receive the relevant services to promote their welfare. This leads to improved outcomes for these families.

Children and parents enjoy their time at the centre and benefit from high-quality, purposeful activities. One parent told inspectors she had discovered, 'Learning is fun.' As a result, she had developed the confidence to undertake training towards a formal qualification. Children's development is closely planned for and monitored and parents have an improved awareness of how to support children's learning at home. Fun activities, such as making story sacks, enable parents to become much closer involved in their children's learning and recognise the value of play in supporting development. As a result, children are better prepared for school and make good progress in their learning.

All families using the centre make a positive contribution. Relationships are good between all adults and children and an increasing number of parents are becoming involved in the governance arrangements. Many parents undertake volunteer roles and participate in evaluating the centre's services and shaping future provision. As a result, parents feel passionate about the centre and its place in the community.

Parents develop good skills to improve their economic well-being. Vulnerable parents have completed courses, such as 'Money Matters', which helped them budget their finances effectively. Many parents praised this course and confirmed it had positively influenced the way they spent money on shopping and household costs. There are many opportunities available to support parents' development. This successfully builds confidence, self-esteem and parenting ability. The 'Skills Club' helps parents understand how to prepare for employment and plans are in place to develop the 'Skills Factory' in partnership with local employers. Good links with Jobcentre Plus enable families to be supported in identifying employment needs and preparing for interviews. Plans are in place to develop links with other agencies to enhance further the provision to increase adult learning. A good number of parents apply to be volunteers and undertake a range of roles within the centre. Some parents have already been supported in returning to training and employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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| The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are | 2 |

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| identified and appropriate steps taken to address them | |
| The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 2 |
| The extent to which children are developing skills for the future, and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment. | 2 |

How good is the provision?

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The centre knows the needs of local families exceptionally well. Good partnerships with community groups and strong links with services provided by the Aylesham Neighbourhood Project, such as the Family Support team and Relativity team, enable staff to work cohesively and provide support services to families identified as being vulnerable. For example, there is strong support for lone parents and designated groups for fathers and male carers. The YAPs group undertakes a wide range of activities to support personal learning and development and improve parenting skills. Recent work with the local Traveller community has improved links with a greater number of families who are starting to use the centre. Consequently, outcomes for all families are improving well.

The increased range of outreach services and community events leads to a much greater range of families being reached. For example, the 'Playdays' group has been set up in a rural village school in one of the hardest-to-reach areas. This enables families who are restricted from accessing the main centre due to poor transport services, to access health services, parenting support and provision to help encourage children's learning and development. Centre staff work hard to find additional ways to support families in the most rural areas.

The quality of care for children and parents is excellent. All families who use the centre benefit from the nurturing and friendly atmosphere. A strength of the provision is the care provided to families at times of crisis. One parent described the centre by stating, 'It's just like family here.' Another parent said, 'You always know staff are there if you need them.' Information is extensive on family support issues and is readily available to all parents and adapted to meet individual need.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 2 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups | 2 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups. | 1 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

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The process of self-evaluation at all levels plays a fundamental part in the way in which the centre recognises how to improve and is continuing to raise standards. The centre manager is a strong leader and is supported by dedicated staff who share a commitment towards meeting the needs of local families. This is summarised by a view from one parent who told inspectors, 'If it wasn't for the staff here, I don't know where I would be.' Persistent and concerted action is being taken to ensure the centre reaches a higher percentage of all families within the area. The centre knows where these families are through its careful analysis of data and consultation. Adaptations to provision are already being made to reach the most rural communities where attendance is currently lower than other areas. Improvements are already being seen and this demonstrates the centre provides good value for money.

Governance arrangements are good. There are clear lines of accountability in place and the steering group, advisory board, trustees and local authority work together cohesively to set targets and monitor improvement. Strategic planning is good and highly effective and the views of centre users, including those not using the centre, routinely inform future planning. Analysis of data shows all targeted groups access the centre's services and no groups are disadvantaged or discriminated against. The centre has taken concerted action to increase the numbers of fathers and male carers using the centre and this leads to improved attendance. Designated provision is offered to disabled children and/or disabled parents and this ensures these families received specialist support. Early Years Foundation Stage data show the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest is closing each year.

All staff are fully committed towards safeguarding arrangements. The premises are secure and offer a very safe, homely environment where families feel confident to ask for help. Staff are highly trained in all aspects of child protection, first aid and health and safety. Procedures for staff/volunteer recruitment are robust and ensure the safety of all families. Comprehensive risk assessments are routinely carried out to ensure safe activities and provision. Strong links with external agencies provide relevant support to families experiencing crisis or challenge in their lives. This improves the emotional well-being of children and adults which has a positive impact on development and improving outcomes.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day- | 2 |
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| to-day management arrangements are clear and understood | |
| The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes | 2 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose | 2 |
| The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Snowdrop Children's Centre on 12 and 13 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. We would like to thank all of you who took the time to talk to us about your involvement and experiences at the centre. It was very enjoyable to meet with you and your families. You made it very clear to us how much you appreciate the children's centre and the support you receive from staff. Many of you told us the positive impact the centre has had on your lives, particularly when you may be experiencing difficulties. We found the staff are extremely caring towards you and provide you with the relevant guidance you need.

Procedures for keeping children and families safe are good. Staff are dedicated to providing a secure environment and work closely with other agencies to obtain the specialist support you need. This helps keep children safe and reduces accidents and harm. The provision for helping you and your families develop healthy lifestyles is good. Many of you told us about the cookery programmes you had completed which helped you understand how to provide nutritious meals for your children. The links with health professionals are good within the centre. This enables you to regularly

seek advice from midwives and health visitors which supports the healthy development of you and your children.

The centre is a very happy and homely place. Many of you told us how much you and your children enjoy attending groups and developing new skills. We noted how well planned the activities are and how they help you to understand how your children learn and develop. We noted that many of you develop your confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being. This leads to many of you beginning to undertake formal training and qualifications and be successful in returning to work. For example, many of you volunteer in the centre and develop new skills. We noted that the current range of adult learning courses is slightly limited and have asked the centre to address this.

We recognised how well the centre is managed. All staff work together very well and share a commitment towards meeting your needs and providing the relevant support. The centre is becoming an important part of the local community. We looked at data and noted that some areas served by the centre are very hard to reach, as there is very limited public transport. This has a negative impact on whether some of you can access the services or not. We found that the centre management team and local authority are very aware of this and have recently consulted with families not using the centre to find out what additional services they need. As a result of this, the centre works hard in accessing these families and is increasing the range of services provided in the very rural areas. The local authority and centre management team are monitoring this closely. We have asked the centre to continue to build on this and develop a greater range of services which meet a larger number of families.

During the inspection we noted the centre meets the needs of a wide range of families and that no families are disadvantaged in accessing services. We recognised how inclusive the centre is and staff ensure all families are welcome.

Thank you once again for taking part in the inspection. We would like to wish you and your families the very best for the future.

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