

Inspection report for East Grinstead Children and Family Centre

Local authority	West Sussex
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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 the centre management team, the local authority, health professionals, representatives from the advisory group, front-line staff, parents and partner agencies.

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

Information about the centre

The centre is located in purpose-built premises next door to Blackwell Primary School. There is a very small staff team of a team manager, recently appointed due to restructuring by the local authority and who is in charge of a five-centre cluster in Mid Sussex urban towns, one full-time equivalent information assistant, a part-time family outreach worker, and seven volunteers. The rural outreach worker also works at the centre regularly. The centre has a branch at the East Grinstead Library and a rural project. The centre also delivers some of its services in the community in order for more vulnerable families to access their services. The centre is not a full service centre and provides a graduated service and has a number of other professionals, such as health visitors and midwives, operating from the centre. Governance arrangements are provided by the local authority. A Centre Partnership Group is in place and includes membership of partner agencies and a range of stakeholders.

East Grinstead is one of the three main towns in Mid Sussex near the East Sussex, Surrey and Kent borders. Covering a large area and with a population in excess of 25,000, it is the largest settlement in the northern part of the county. East Grinstead town is an isolated town when it comes to access to services. There are 645 children in the catchment area. Around 80% of households in East Grinstead are owner occupiers. Fourteen percent live in social housing. The town has a much higher level of detached dwellings than the national average, but a lower level of semi-detached dwellings, flats and terraced housing. Just over one third of households in East

Grinstead are two-person households and 27% are single-person households. Overall, Mid Sussex shows low levels of deprivation. Generally, the population of Mid Sussex enjoys good health, with 74% of people declaring themselves to be in good health at the last census, compared with 68.8% on average in England. Crime rates are generally low compared with Sussex and national averages, and the area has the second lowest crime rate in West Sussex. Incomes are quite low. People have average educational qualifications. Their relatively routine jobs are in shops and offices. There is some unemployment, although less than the national and regional averages; claimant numbers have fallen by 78% since 1996. Ethnic diversity is predominantly White British or White European heritage with a small percentage made up of Eastern European origin.

Children's levels of development when they first start in the Early Years Foundation Stage are in line with national expectations.

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

East Grinstead Children and Family Centre is a good centre as it understands and serves the needs of the local community well. The support, commitment and dedication of all staff ensure the life chances of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families living in the area improve effectively. A number of families testify that they have overcome major barriers to success through the targeted and sensitive support of the centre staff.

Provision is consistently good. In particular, the decisive work of the outreach workers is highly successful in making contact with those families most in need. Staff form extremely positive and trusting relationships with all parents and children. One parent reflected this by stating to inspectors, 'The centre has turned my life round.' Partnership working between all agencies is good and plays a fundamental part in the effectiveness of the centre. Careful referrals and detailed exchange of information between all services result in timely intervention and early preventative work. This results in consistently good outcomes for the most vulnerable families.

Families are rightly proud of their children's centre. One parent said, 'It's a lovely place to meet up and the friendly staff are great with the children.' They unanimously say that the centre understands and meets their needs well, listens to their views and ensures everyone has equal opportunities to participate. The impact of the baby massage sessions has been particularly beneficial. The dad's Saturday club is growing in popularity. Those parents and carers with specific needs, in families of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are well supported by staff in the centre. The carefully-planned provision by staff in the centre, and their ability to signpost families to other services near-by, make a significant contribution to improving the skills, knowledge and enjoyment of children and their families.

Outcomes for children are good because of the consistent approaches of the centre. This has led to a rising trend in children's abilities and good achievement often from their differing starting points, so the gap is narrowing between the lowest 20% and the rest. A high priority is given to ensuring the centre's users are well cared for and understand how to keep themselves and their families safe. Robust procedures to safeguard them are implemented effectively by well-trained staff. Good multi-agency working and strong partnerships, for example with health professionals, provide a cohesive service that is helping to protect parents, carers and children, including those at risk of harm. The work of the police community support officer is much appreciated as information and support are given to many parents. Developing parents' understanding of how to promote the health lifestyles of their families is good. This is a continuing focus for the centre and staff are keen to broaden their services to the wider community but recognise that their limited service means they cannot do all they would wish.

The leadership of the centre is good. All centre staff have a good understanding of the needs of the local community and meet regularly to discuss how activities are meeting the families' needs. Actions to overcome weaknesses and gaps in provision in order to improve outcomes have been concerted and effective. The necessary leadership changes have been made well and there are clear lines of accountability and reporting arrangements offering a good capacity to improve. Data from the local authority are growing in sophistication and provide information that is well focused on the families in the reach area. Self-assessment is thorough and, although there is a good shared understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement, the evaluation of data is still being developed. Although parents and carers are encouraged to contribute ideas through the Family Forum, they are not yet fully involved in the Partnership Group where decisions are made. A range of partners are represented on this advisory board, which is very well led and chaired. However, their role, particularly in providing challenge and advice, is still being 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

- The centre must ensure planning for improvement is updated by:
 - using a full range of data to evaluate consistently
 - focusing on improving outcomes for users, specifying how success will be measured.
- The centre leaders to support the further development of the Centre Participation Group by:
 - ensuring all board members understand their support, advice and challenge role
 - parents and carers are given the opportunity to be actively involved in the decisions made on their behalf.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Case studies and discussions with users demonstrate that there is a high level of satisfaction with the centre's provision. A number of 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. Parents and carers 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.

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. Families 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. Data show that children who have accessed the centre services have improved their physical development, and there has been a drop in levels of obesity to 8% by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre actively promotes, and is successful in, smoking cessation, but their limited service leaves it wishing it could do more.

The children are making increasingly good progress. The numbers reaching levels expected for their age have risen year on year to 60% in 2011, 52.9% in 2010, against a national average of 59%. Also significant is the way the gap has narrowed between the lowest 20% and the rest, to 26% in 2011, which is well below the national average of 31.4%. Parents and carers say that they and their children feel totally safe. They 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. Parents and carers feel better equipped to take care of their children by learning first aid. Case studies show that extremely 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.

All parents and carers 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. As yet these are not fully used by the centre in determining their way forward. 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. There are a number of volunteers working at the centre at the moment and all users readily support others.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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 identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
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	3
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?

2

Assessment of families' needs is efficient and effective and this informs the centre's planning. The health visitors pass on information about all births in the reach area to the children's centre who then makes contact with the family inviting them to the centre. Early assessments of the families' particular needs are made, which may lead to a higher level of intervention and possibly referral. Effective and regular interagency meetings then monitor the progress of the family, the adults' needs and those of the children. There are good procedures for developing the team around the child and, if necessary, child protection plans follow. This good inter-agency working provides continuous and effective support which results in some children being removed from the child protection plans. All families are given the different levels of support needed whether by social services or by the centre team members who act as outreach workers with families needing less urgent support.

Information about the needs of particular families and data provided by the local authority are used by the centre staff to plan their activities. A strong focus is placed on vulnerable children and their families who have been identified for enhanced provision. Activities are planned for children and their parents or carers to work

together developing the child's early learning skills so they are more prepared for learning when they move into the Reception class. This good work is carried out in the centre and involves many volunteers who are greatly appreciated by all users. Other programmes, such as the outstanding Rhyme-Time session observed in the library, are helping adults to appreciate the value of different activities, give suggestions for what to do at home and strategies for managing difficult behaviour. The stay and play sessions, such as the excellent Teddies Club run every week by volunteers, are also particularly popular and becoming oversubscribed. The staff are effective in promoting good parenting skills and regular visitors, such as benefits advisers, give additional input. The courses for adults are limited due to the centre's service agreement, but several parents have attended the Confident Parenting group, successfully enabling them to become more independent and confident. The modern and bright building is completely accessible for wheelchair users and children and adults with disabilities are fully included and well supported. The additional needs support group and music therapy sessions are justifiably very well received and make a real difference to people's lives.

All staff provide good levels of support, advice and guidance for whoever comes into the centre. This results in families feeling confident in the support they will receive. There are striking examples of how families and individuals have been helped in times of crisis. This level of care, engagement of outside agencies where appropriate, and advice ensure children are safeguarded and families enabled to get the support they need. This includes personal support for those in violent relationships. Many aspects of care, support and guidance are provided by the well-trained staff, but where activities are not available at the centre adults are signposted towards other agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus for help in gaining employment. Staff are trained to support adults to give up smoking and have had a small measure of success

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Management of the centre is good and is key to the centre's good capacity to improve even further. The work of the centre manager and staff has very effectively joined up the way the centre is run and has had a good impact on the outcomes for families. The advisory group members are suitably involved in the management of the centre. Their levels of skill and experience mean that they can be challenging and effective. However, although currently the group represents some of the families

well, there is scope for the parents and carers to be more involved and proactive in organising their centre. Senior leaders have high expectations of staff that are shared with them and with the centre's many partners. The development plan reflects these expectations and provides a great deal of useful data to enable these targets to be more specific and measurable.

Resources are managed very effectively. Activities are costed carefully and evaluated according to their success so that the centre provides good value for money. For example, the Teddies sessions are an expensive programme to run but they are considered very carefully and are self-financing through the excellent volunteers and are helping parenting skills, and children's learning, in the process.

Equality and eliminating discrimination are at the core of the centre's work. The centre responds swiftly to any concerns. Some previously hard to reach parents and carers have been encouraged to come to the centre as a result of strong partnership work with health services and the outreach work. Safeguarding is paramount in the centre. The site is secure and there are very robust procedures and continually reviewed records are kept of everyone connected to its work. All staff play a highly important monitoring role in this aspect. Early notification of any child protection concerns leads to swift action that is recorded in the centre's confidential files. Staff who work with children and vulnerable adults are extremely watchful and alert to concerns and are very clear about procedures.

Partnerships with other agencies are very good and reflect the hard work centre staff have put in to meet the emotional and physical needs of users. For example, health visitors, the Family Resource Team, midwives and links with childminders have all contributed greatly to the outcomes for users of the centre. Satisfaction levels are high. Many users had been given a sense of self-worth and confidence that had been absent before and this is having a very positive impact on their relationships with their children and hopes for the future.

Self-evaluation is accurate, although at times over modest as the centre's management is far from complacent. Some useful, and appreciated, changes have been made as a result of evaluation, for example the opportunities for borrowing toys at the library.

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 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,	2

illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	
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	3

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 East Grinstead Children and Family Centre on 17 and 18 November. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection, we talked with parents, staff, partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak to us to share your thoughts about the centre.

All of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoyed using the centre. It has made a big difference in many children's and families' lives, particularly those who facing challenges that make life difficult. We could see how much you enjoyed activities where you could play with your children and help them learn, such as in the Rhyme Time, Bunnies and Stay and Play sessions. Many of you told us about the important things you had learnt about keeping your children safe in the first-aid courses and Confident Parenting courses. We could see there were many ways in which the staff at the centre helped you to understand how to make your families lives healthier and how to keep them safe.

We know many of you enjoy coming to the centre to use the outside area to meet with other mums and to let your children use the good range of toys and resources. Many of you told us that your children are making good progress in their learning and so are many of you. Some of you have learnt about using computers and even how to be successful in the written part of the driving test. The way that so many of

you are able to go to the centre at the library and enjoy their facilities and borrow books at the same time means a lot to you. These good outcomes for you and your family are because the staff at the centre want to do the best for you. They find out what your children need and what you think is important too and plan a good range of activities to support you. Staff work extremely well with the staff at the library and those in the primary school so that your children are helped in a similar way. As a result, they find moving on to new activities fun and they are well prepared for learning. The centre also works extremely well with the health visitors, the midwives, the Family Resource Team and childminders so that your children have the best start they can and you feel well supported.

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 link with the local school is very 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 try to 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. We have asked them to make sure you, as parents and carers, are given the opportunity to be on the group that discusses changes so that they know straightaway what you feel about the centre and how it can be even better. 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, and evaluating, the information the centre is given very carefully.

Thank you again for helping us with our inspection and do not forget the centre staff do want to know what you think about the activities they provide and how they can be improved. We wish all the very best to you and your family.

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