

# Inspection report for The Village Sure Start Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Kent County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	383733
<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 November 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joanne Caswell HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Chris Cummins
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Castle Hill Community Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Castle Hill Village Nursery (EY371457) The Village Crèche (EY330580)

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.

Ready for sign off

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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 group and steering group, the linked school's headteacher, front-line staff, parents and partner agencies.

They observed the centre's work, visited the crèche and linked nursery, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The Village Sure Start Children's Centre serves the urban area of East Folkestone and is one of eight children's centres within the Shepway district. It is a phase one centre which originated from the Sure Start Local Programme and was designated in 2004. The centre is purpose built and is located on the same site as Castle Hill Community Primary School. There is a mixture of privately-owned homes and rented accommodation within the area, with a high proportion of social housing in the north of the reach area. Folkestone town centre is some distance away for families and transport services are limited. The centre serves three of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Currently, most of the families using the centre live in these areas. Children's levels of skills and understanding on entry to school are often lower than those expected for their age.

Levels of worklessness and unemployment are high within the centre's reach area and are above the county average. The number of lone parents is also higher than average. The majority of families living in the area are of White British heritage, although there is an increasing number of Czech, Slovak and Roma families. Full daycare is provided by the nursery, which is managed by Castle Hill Community Primary School. The nursery offers care for children aged under five years, Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm, throughout the year. Crèche services are offered to support centre activities.

The Village Sure Start Children’s Centre provides the full core offer services and has health professionals, such as health visitors and midwives, operating from the centre. Governance arrangements are provided by the local authority. A steering group is in place and includes membership of partner agencies and a range of stakeholders.

## 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

The Village Sure Start Children’s Centre provides a welcoming and inclusive environment. The provision is of good quality and this contributes towards the improving outcomes for local families. Staff are particularly dedicated and totally committed towards arranging and delivering services which are personalised to meet individual need. The care, guidance and support offered to families, particularly those experiencing crisis, are outstanding. One parent expressed the view of many by stating to inspectors, ‘I can’t express enough what this centre means to me and my children.’

Leadership and management arrangements are good. The centre manager is a strong strategic leader who inspires his staff and is committed towards their professional development. This results in a highly motivated team with a shared commitment towards improving services and outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Services are targeted appropriately as staff have a secure knowledge of the needs of the local community. Assessment procedures are rigorous. Partnership arrangements between most agencies are good, although some improvements are necessary at strategic level to strengthen provision.

The centre works consistently hard to reach the families who are hardest to engage. This is reflected in the centre’s data which show, despite major financial cuts in the centre’s budget, reach figures and attendance rates at centre services continue to rise. Contact with most targeted groups is good. Concerted action has been taken to address the lower numbers of disabled children using the centre. This has resulted in improved links with specialist agencies, such as Portage, and a wide range of support groups and services for local families. Targeted support is in place to increase the

number of minority group families regularly accessing the centre. The centre recognises fewer fathers are attending than other groups and is working hard to increase this.

There is clear evidence to show good impact of the centre's services, although limited evidence of longer-term impact evaluation. Governance and accountability arrangements are good at every level. The centre manager works collaboratively with the local authority and linked school's headteacher and reports regularly to the advisory board and steering group. Consequently, the centre is held to account and improvements continue to be made. The centre currently reaches a large majority of the most vulnerable families in the community and works hard to access those who are harder to engage. Detailed action plans and improvement programmes clearly reflect the centre's ability to review its practice and monitor provision effectively. As a result, the centre demonstrates good capacity to improve.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- With local authority support, gather a more complete profile of the long-term impact of the centre's services to enable a more rigorous analysis of data on improvements made for families from vulnerable groups.
- Strengthen partnerships with health services at strategic level to ensure the centre regularly obtains all necessary data to target services at those most in need.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>2</b>
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Outcomes for children and families who use the centre are good. There is a strong focus on improving the healthy development of children and emotional well-being of adults. Particularly good support enables an increasing number of mothers to breastfeed their babies. Current data show breastfeeding rates have improved by 44% since 2008. The specialist Lactation Consultant sensitively supports mothers and success rates are good. Many mothers told inspectors they would not have been successful in breastfeeding their babies without support from the centre. Health visitors and midwives work directly from the centre and parents access health advice easily. A wide range of groups encourage the healthy development of the whole family. For example, the centre offers activities to improve the well-being of mothers through the All About Mums programme. Relationships between parents and children improve well as a result of groups, such as My Dad and Me, baby massage and the You Make the Difference course. Young parents and teenage mothers are supported well and have specialist midwifery services and support groups. Obesity rates in children continue to improve as parents develop a clearer understanding of the importance of healthy eating and undertake regular exercise.

Children and adults feel safe at the centre and good attention is given towards ensuring the premises are secure. Parents develop a much clearer awareness of

safety within the home as staff carry out home-safety checks and help parents identify potential hazards. As a result, children have fewer accidents. Parents undertake first-aid courses and improve their confidence in dealing with children's injuries. For example, one parent stated she was more confident in managing choking incidents when feeding her child as a result of completing first-aid training. Children identified as being at risk are supported well and the centre's work is effective in reducing the numbers of children requiring a child protection plan. Staff are fully involved in the Common Assessment Framework and liaise closely with all relevant agencies. This ensures families receive necessary support and children's needs are assessed appropriately. Looked after children are supported well and the centre is used by a number of agencies for family liaison meetings.

Children make good progress in their learning from their starting points, both within the centre's linked nursery and the crèche provision. A qualified teacher oversees the Early Years Foundation Stage planning and assessment and data are reviewed regularly to ensure all children achieve equally. The gap between the most disadvantaged children and the rest is closing each year. Targeted support is successful in improving children's language and communication skills. For example, staff promote the Every Child A Talker programme and there are a number of groups available which support language and communication development. Parents develop new ideas for extending children's learning at home and benefit from many social groups which enable them to make friends and enjoy spending time with their children. The My Family and Me group encourages quality time for families after school and enables siblings to play together within a safe environment.

Children behave well at the centre and clearly enjoy their time there. Relationships between all centre users are very positive and parents clearly value the centre as an integral part of the local community. This was particularly evident recently in the way in which parents responded to the threat of severe funding cuts to the centre by lobbying the local Member of Parliament and local authority. Some parents are involved in the governance arrangements and all parents feel listened to and are confident to share their views. Children's voices are clearly valued and activities are adapted as a result of their interests and ideas.

There is good support for parents to improve their own skills and prepare to return to education and employment. The volunteer programme is well supported and many parents train to become peer supporters and receive university accreditation for this. Case study evidence shows parents benefit from a range of courses. Six parents have successfully completed early years training and are employed within the nursery and crèche. Some parents have been successful in enrolling onto university courses. A number of staff have completed courses as parents and been successful in gaining employment within the centre, offering excellent inspiration to other parents. The centre has links with Jobcentre Plus, although limited data are provided to demonstrate the impact of its services in supporting parents into employment.

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	<b>2</b>
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	<b>2</b>
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	<b>2</b>
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	<b>2</b>
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.	<b>2</b>

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

<b>2</b>
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The centre knows the needs of local families extremely well and outreach work in the community continues to reach a greater number of vulnerable groups. Lone parents are particularly well supported and the numbers of fathers accessing services is rising steadily through targeted services. Provision to support adults who speak English as an additional language is good and the centre ensures resources generally reflect the diversity of the local area.

The work of the Family Support Team is exemplary. The multi-disciplinary team has expertise in language development, breastfeeding, supporting children with disabilities and providing specialist services for victims of domestic violence. This ensures the quality of care for children and adults is exceptional. Parents describe staff as being 'amazing' and 'brilliant'. The strong partnership working between staff within the centre ensures families are swiftly referred to different services and support. This is particularly effective when families are experiencing crisis. Good links with Home-Start and the Rapid Response project ensure families facing challenging times are effectively supported. This may be in the provision of funding to obtain essential household items, or respite childcare provision within the centre.

The provision to help centre users learn and develop is good. Staff offer a wide range of courses and successfully tackle any barriers which may prevent adults and children from achieving. Courses offered by the centre are of good quality and staff are skilled facilitators in delivering training. As a result, parents develop good self-esteem and improved self-confidence. This leads to improvements in their parenting and provides key skills essential to securing employment.

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	<b>2</b>
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	<b>2</b>
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	<b>1</b>

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

<b>2</b>
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The centre is managed well and is responsive to parents' changing needs. Throughout the inspection, many parents described the centre as giving them a 'lifeline' and being a 'life saver'. The senior management team works well together and is committed to providing services which meet the needs of the community. Partnership arrangements with most services are good and many agencies praise the work of the centre and its staff. However, sufficient data are not always shared with the centre from some partner agencies. For example, live birth data are not always made available and this has an impact on the numbers of children the centre is able to target from birth.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Procedures for checking the suitability of staff are thorough and good attention is given towards risk assessments and health and safety. All staff receive regular training in child protection and there are good links established between the centre and children's services. Early identification of need and effective intervention strategies ensure any child or family assessed as being in need is appropriately supported. A wide range of services ensures any adults and children affected by domestic violence and abuse are given very good support to cope and move forward in their lives.

Inclusive practice is evident throughout the centre. The building has been specifically designed to offer independent access to adults and children with physical disabilities and mobility difficulties. All adults and children are welcomed and positive relationships are established between users and staff. The Czech, Slovak and Roma families within the local area are starting to use the centre and their needs are being met generally well. Specialist groups for disabled children, such as the Affinity group, are well regarded and numbers of families attending are increasing. The centre's services for supporting disabled children have been endorsed by consultant paediatricians. Services to support disabled parents are generally good.

Evaluation procedures throughout all services are robust and consistently identify areas for development. The steering group and district advisory board meet regularly to review the centre's performance and view their role as the centre's critical friend. The centre manager consistently monitors data and comprehensive action plans and improvement programmes are implemented. This has resulted in a greater number of families from targeted groups accessing services. Staff deployment is good and



the multi-skilled team of professionals ensures support for families is excellent and is leading to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Consequently, the centre delivers good value for money.

Partner agencies generally evaluate their services effectively and this links into strategic planning. However, the lack of data available from some agencies sometimes inhibits the effectiveness of this. Self-evaluation procedures are good and the centre has a clear and realistic view of its strengths and areas for development. Tracking of individual children and adults is in place. However, this is not evident over a longer period. Therefore, limited systems are in place to show the impact of the centre's services over an extended timescale.

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	<b>2</b>
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	<b>2</b>
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	<b>2</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>2</b>
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	<b>2</b>
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	<b>2</b>
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	<b>2</b>

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

None.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected The Village Sure Start Children's Centre on 16 and 17 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. We would like to thank those of you who took

the time to talk with us about your involvement and experiences at the centre. It was very enjoyable to meet with you and your families. It is very clear that you value the people who work at the centre and the services they provide. Many of you told us the centre has a very positive impact on your lives.

Your children's centre has many good features, and one that is outstanding. We thought the care and support shown to you by the staff are exceptional. We noted how dedicated and passionate staff are in listening to your concerns and responding very quickly to refer you to relevant help and advice. This is particularly evident for families experiencing crisis. We thought staff are very good at understanding the needs of the local community and arranging services and activities which meet your personal circumstances well.

The centre uses data generally well and uses it to identify which families need the most support. The local authority and senior managers meet with the centre manager regularly and discuss any improvements which are necessary to ensure services really meet your families' individual needs. We noted that information held by health services is not always shared with the centre promptly enough. As a result, sometimes there is a delay and centre staff are unable to offer families support immediately after babies are born. We have asked the centre's management to address this with the health managers.

Procedures for making sure adults and children are safe are good. Staff provide a very welcoming environment and good attention is given towards helping you understand potential dangers within the home. Many of you told us how useful you found the home safety checks. We noted the wide range of support services provided when parents are facing challenges in their lives. A number of parents told inspectors the centre had really helped them when they had been experiencing difficult times.

Children benefit from their time at the centre and enjoy a good selection of quality play experiences. This enables children to learn and develop well and prepares them for starting school. All centre activities are of good quality and the nursery and crèche service enable children to benefit from purposeful play. Many parents told us how much they had benefited from courses completed at the centre. We were impressed with the number of centre staff who had used the centre as parents and been successful in obtaining relevant qualifications. This enabled them to gain employment within the centre and be a positive role model to other parents. The volunteer programme is good and there are many opportunities for parents to develop their skills and confidence through centre activities.

The centre's management is very committed to making improvements. It regularly reviews the services available and identifies where it can develop services further. There are good systems in place to ensure all staff are accountable and deliver services which really meet your needs. Staff regularly evaluate activities and consider what impact they have made to your lives. We noted that staff have not carried this

out over a longer period to measure the difference the centre has made to local families. We have asked the centre and the local authority to improve this.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you very much again for engaging so positively with inspectors during the inspection. We 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).