

Inspection report for Six Bells Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Six Bells Children's Centre Crèche

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 year's inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, other members of staff, key partners, representatives of the local authority, the advisory board and groups of parents and carers.

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

Information about the centre

Six Bells Children's Centre serves an area which is amongst the most economically deprived areas in England, with high levels of unemployment and many families living on low incomes or benefits. There is a high level of multi-occupancy and short-term housing and the population is relatively transient. Most families are White British and about 16% come from other ethnic groups, mainly White European such as Czech, Slovak, Polish and Russian.

The centre was opened as a Sure Start Centre in 2005 and designated as a phase one centre in October 2007. It provides a full range of services for its designation and, alongside Cliftonville Children's Centre with which it works in partnership, is the main hub for health and family services for the area. As well as at Six Bells, services are also provided at a variety of other locations in the area. The centre is managed by the local authority and is open 51 weeks a year for eight hours a day. There is an eight place on-site crèche facility provided in partnership with Thanet Early Years Project. The centre has a partnership agreement with My Nursery, a nearby private nursery which provides 36 places for children from two years to five years. Children arrive at the centre with a range of skills and knowledge are generally well below those expected for their ages.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Six Bells is an outstanding children's centre which provides exceptionally high quality services and makes a really positive difference to families' lives. Parents and carers praise the staff for their care, sensitivity and responsiveness. The services help them, and their children, become confident, relaxed, and learn and develop together. Families feel safe and happy because of the welcoming atmosphere and the exceptionally high priority given to ensuring safety and well-being. There are very high levels of trust so that parents and carers have confidence in sharing sensitive information. As a result, support is effectively targeted. Parents and carers are routinely asked for their views and the centre takes these very seriously; as a result, parents know that what they say really matters and makes a difference.

Excellent partnership working results in highly integrated and coordinated work across health and family services and meets the needs of families, particularly those who are experiencing difficulties, extremely effectively. Even people without children come into the centre at times of crisis, which highlights how positively it is viewed in the community. Young parents, in particular, speak proudly about their developing skills and their goals for the future. They believe that the children's centre is helping them to achieve something better for themselves and their children.

There is a wide range of interesting activities and courses. In response to the shortage of play spaces in the local area, there are many opportunities for outdoor play and physical activities. Well-coordinated action to address particular concerns has resulted in significant improvements. For example, breastfeeding rates have more than doubled and mothers could not speak highly enough about the practical guidance and support from the breastfeeding support coordinator and peer volunteers. Very comprehensive action to address home safety has resulted in a sharp decrease in the number of young children needing to be admitted to hospital. Improving children's communication and language is another area where concerted action is being taken alongside key partners such as childminders, local nurseries and health visitors. Achievement in this area is also improving strongly. The centre is very good at engaging parents, pitching activities at the right level, building their

confidence so that they become more able to cope with greater challenges and as a result, when parents start courses, nearly all complete them. Many comment positively on how much they value the range of parenting courses and also the opportunities to develop their wider skills and employment prospects.

At the heart of this success is a well-trained, enthusiastic team of staff, partners and volunteers, who are passionate about making a difference. Leaders are highly reflective, quick to examine provision and seek further improvement. There is very effective cooperation with partners, including other children's centres, so that expertise is shared and services complement each other rather than compete, thus making best use of resources and providing excellent value for money. Sharp and robust lines of governance, accountability, roles and responsibilities at all levels provide considerable challenge and support to staff.

Great importance is given to promoting mutual respect, celebrating diversity and ensuring that families from different groups are able to access appropriate services. There is a strong commitment to involving fathers, and the monthly Thanet Dads group is very popular. However, the centre is not always as successful as it would like in encouraging fathers to take advantage of opportunities during the week. In its drive for improvement, the centre has sharpened its systems for gathering, analysing and using information about its performance and there is a strong emphasis on evaluating the impact of its work. The improvements in data are relatively recent so that there is more to do to determine precisely whether there are differences between access and outcomes or trends between the different groups. There is no complacency, rather a determination to improve further which, when added to its track record of success, illustrates the centre's outstanding capacity to secure further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Fine-tune the use of qualitative and quantitative data to ensure that the needs of all groups are addressed effectively.
- Explore and plan ways to involve fathers more in day-to-day activities.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Attendance is high at various health groups and these activities catch the families early and make a strong impact on their developing understanding of how to live healthy, safe and enjoyable lives. A well-coordinated focus on developing communication and well-being means that parents learn the importance of talking and singing with their babies. Teenage pregnancy rates in the area are reducing. Almost all of these young people are involved with, and receive specific support from, the Teenage pregnancy integrated team. As a result, take up of contraception has considerably increased and there is an increase in this group's access to education, employment and training. The early evidence suggests strongly that

second pregnancies are also reducing.

Children thoroughly enjoy the good opportunities for outdoor play and, during a visit to the Secret Jungle Childminder workshop, children enthusiastically took advantage of the space to run, climb and balance. Children are very caring and fully engaged in all of the activities because the provision is so well organised to meet their needs. They have lots of opportunities for discussion, questioning and exploring language. The achievement of children is improving strongly and there has been a significant improvement in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores over the past two years. There is a strong emphasis on healthy eating through freely available fruit and links with the Windmill Allotment project, where children enjoy the chance to help grow vegetables. Parents are positive about the Healthy Eating courses and say that they now cook from scratch and use more vegetables than they did before.

Adults and children feel very safe in the centre. The strong focus on well-being means that parents with particular difficulties such as extreme anxiety have been supported very well. A visit to Baby Massage group provided some lovely evidence of how safe and relaxed babies, and their mothers, feel. Older children are beginning to develop a good understanding of how to stay safe. They know to wear helmets when they use the trikes and, in the Wiggles and Giggles group, children showed that they understood the rules about red and green traffic lights. Due to a well-coordinated programme of activity, the numbers of parents accessing the Home Safety equipment scheme more than doubled over the last year and the rate of hospital admissions decreased by 37% during the same time.

Children are encouraged to share and cooperate and not only do the children respond well to this but their parents also cooperate well and behave positively towards each other. A good number of parents are helped to develop their parenting skills and make an increasingly positive contribution to their children's learning and development through attending a range of courses at varying levels of difficulty and challenge. Their feedback and comments show that they are learning about child development and the importance of play, particularly messy play, and improving their relationships with their children.

Parents and carers make a strong contribution to the advisory board, steering group and parents' forum and the centre uses many interesting and varied strategies to encourage them to share their views. There is good uptake of training for volunteer roles and a high number make an important, and extremely highly valued, contribution as peer breastfeeding supporters. Parents and carers also make a good contribution by helping to organise events and through fundraising for charities. Recently, parents baked cakes and organised nail art session to raise money for a national charity event.

The centre uses a careful pathways approach to involve adults in learning and improve their skills and their employability. About one third are involved in some sort of group, course, volunteering or training, and completion rates are high. Parents who are currently attending the Career Confidence course are very positive about the

impact it is having and how it is helping them to set personal goals. During the inspection, the Young Parents Plus group was very engaged in completing project work and showing a good level of understanding. All expressed the aim of gaining qualifications and going on to further education or training.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1
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?

1

The children's centre contributes to an overarching strategic group, Margate Taskforce, and there is excellent partnership working across agencies to identify and assess the needs in the area. The centre uses information well to inform its provision. Over 80% of the families in the area are registered and involved with the centre in one way or another.

Midwives and health visitors ensure early contact by alerting families to the services on offer and also letting the community involvement workers know of particular family issues. Initial assessments are sensitive but thorough and the team are tenacious in following up and provide individualised support, for example being at the door to welcome new parents or even accompanying them to the centre for the first few times. Regular health clinics, Bumps to Baby groups, breastfeeding support and specific health-related services for teenagers are well attended and are reaching a very high proportion of the relevant families.

Key among the centre's activities is its exemplary work to support the more vulnerable members of the community. Inter-agency work on their behalf is firmly embedded and highly effective. The community involvement workers each have specific responsibilities for championing different hard-to-reach groups and the team has an excellent understanding of an extensive range of support and services. These services include financial advice, gaining access to grants to improve living conditions, specialist support for mental health and, most importantly, services to ensure that children are protected from harm. Some important services, such as legal

advice and respite information, are provided at the centre for victims of domestic abuse, reflecting the high incidence of this in the local area. Similarly, high quality resources and expertise are available both in the centre and through access to specialist partners to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

All of the team are trained in Early Years Foundation Stage practice so that they have a good understanding of the needs, interests and development of young children. There is a good range of activities for children which complement those provided by the partner nursery. Activities are planned carefully so that they meet the needs of various age groups and, where possible, the needs of individual children. There is a strong focus on developing communication and language through larger events, regular groups and in the partner nursery. The activities observed during the inspection were pitched perfectly to stimulate learning and enjoyment and capture the children's imagination. Centre-based teachers provide high quality support for other pre-school settings, for example by modelling good practice with groups of children, accompanied by nursery staff or childminders. The centre is very responsive to changing needs in the area and amends provision accordingly. For example, a small group of children, many from Eastern European backgrounds, were not receiving pre-school provision and parents were often not aware of the need to register children for school early in the year. A Ready Steady School Group was set up in partnership with schools, the Minorities Communities Achievement Service, several early years settings, and childminders, and this helped to ease the transition from home to school.

The team understands that parents often need to be enticed in with short-term 'fun' activities before being ready to commit to something more challenging. It therefore, provides a good range of courses and groups pitched at various levels of challenge and commitment. Case studies show that many people come to large-scale events such as Keep Calm over Christmas or Child Safety days, then start joining centre-based groups, gradually building up through parenting courses, volunteering, adult education courses and beyond.

Care is exemplary. The team give rapid and appropriate support which makes a real difference to people's lives. The centre is rightly highly regarded by the wider community and this is confirmed by the feedback from parents who say that the care and support they receive is excellent, including being listened to. One person wrote, 'The staff have really given me a chance.'

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leadership and management are excellent. Leaders assess needs very well and are highly skilled at targeting action in different ways to engage as many people as possible. The significant improvements in key outcomes are evidence of their success. There are clear lines of accountability and effective decision making and excellent involvement of partners and parents to evaluate and make decisions about future activities and how partners will work together to achieve improvements. Care is taken to support and inform parents so that they are well prepared and able to make valuable contributions to meetings, which could otherwise be very daunting. Parents' views are taken very seriously, with many opportunities for them to give feedback, make decisions and influence the work and direction of the centre. As a result, there are very high levels of satisfaction, and parents are extremely vocal in their appreciation.

Each member of staff has clear responsibilities and cooperates well to share knowledge and expertise. Their work is further enhanced by very tight and evaluative performance management systems with regular reviews, and measurable targets on activity and, increasingly, on the impact their work has on improving outcomes. The centre has remained within budget despite significant cuts in funding. Services are carefully reviewed. There are close links with other centres and services and there is careful planning to make sure that services dovetail rather than compete. There is excellent partnership working and many examples of successful events and outcomes as a result of this. As well as steering group meetings, partners also attend team meetings to raise awareness and increase information sharing and working together.

There is a high priority placed on ensuring equality of opportunity and inclusion. Responsibilities are clear and procedures thorough. Information is provided in different languages, Braille, recordings and communication symbols and resources for children such as books, toys and the sensory room reflect different groups and needs. The quality of the data is not quite good enough yet to analyse precisely whether gaps in outcomes between groups are narrowing significantly. Policies, training and practice to ensure the safety of children and adults are exceptionally thorough and implemented rigorously and regularly. Communication and partnership working is excellent, particularly with social services, to ensure the health and safety of the most vulnerable.

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	1
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	1

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	1
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	1
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	1

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

The centre works in partnership with My Nursery, a private nursery offering places for two to five year olds. At its last inspection in July 2009, the nursery was judged as outstanding. The on-site crèche is provided by Thanet Early Years Ltd. Its last inspection in November 2009 judged that it was meeting regulations and prior to that, in June 2007, it was judged to be providing a good level of care.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Six Bells Children's Centre on 23 and 24 November 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding. Thank you for contributing to this inspection. Those of you we spoke to and the examples of feedback we looked at gave us very valuable information about the work and impact of the centre.

Six Bells provides high quality services and makes a positive difference to families' lives. Your comments show how much you value the staff for their care, sensitivity and quickness to respond to your needs. This is helped by the welcoming atmosphere and the exceptionally high priority given to ensuring your safety and well-being. The services help you and your children to become confident, and to relax, learn and develop together. There are high levels of trust between yourselves and staff so that you have the confidence to open up about sometimes quite difficult problems. This is important because it means that the support is sharply focused on meeting the particular needs of individual children and families. The centre takes your views very seriously, amending activities or making sure there is easy access to particular services. You know that what you say really matters and makes a difference.

Most of you make good use of important services such as the health clinics and Bumps to Babies group and we saw some very happy babies in the baby massage group. Because of excellent teamwork and a well-organised programme of action, various important aspects have improved considerably. Several of you couldn't speak highly enough about the practical guidance and speedy support you get from the breastfeeding supporter coordinator and peer volunteers. As a result of this excellent work, breastfeeding rates in the area have more than doubled. Similarly, action and equipment to help you make your homes safer has reduced the number of young children needing to be admitted to hospital. We saw some excellent opportunities for children to explore and learn in the Secret Jungle and in the Wiggles and Giggles group. The adults put a lot of emphasis on encouraging talking and this means that children's communication and language skills are improving.

The centre is very good at pitching activities at the right level, building your confidence so that you become more able to cope with greater challenges. We could see from your feedback that you also appreciate the different courses and sessions such as Healthy Eating on Budget, Playful Parents and Incredible Years. Your comments show that these help you understand your children better and enjoy spending time with them. Many of you also take advantage of the support to help you gain qualifications, find volunteering opportunities, sort out benefits and eventually help you into employment.

The leaders and staff are passionate about making a real difference to the lives of local families. There are excellent systems to make sure that different partners work very well together and look carefully at their work to see where they can make improvements. There is a strong emphasis on making sure that families from different groups are welcomed and able to use the centre's services. The team are keen to involve different groups, such as fathers, even more. There have been improvements in the quality and usefulness of data and information about how well the centre is doing in key areas. Some of these improvements are relatively recent so that up until now it has been difficult to see exactly whether there are differences between how well different groups are doing. We have asked the team to sharpen up this further. The success of the centre over the years, added to the staff's very clear determination to continue improving, shows that there is outstanding capacity to become even more effective in the future.

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