

Inspection report for Horsham Children and Family Centre

Local authority	West Sussex
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Reporting inspector	David Marshall

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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Horsham Nursery School

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

Horsham Children's Centre is a purpose-built setting which was planned to house the nursery, family support team and portage base. The centre opened in January 2008 and serves the centre of Horsham Town. The centre covers 11 Super Output Areas across the town. Horsham is a largely prosperous town with pockets of deprivation covering a wider area. Horsham Park ward is the most concentrated pocket of deprivation and this falls within the children centre's catchment area. Governance arrangements are provided by the local authority. A large Centre Partnership Group is in place and includes membership of partner agencies and a range of stakeholders from across Horsham and from other centres.

Horsham's health profile is very positive with indicators that are lower than the average in England. Statistics for 2010/11 show an improving trend in the decline in the number of children in Reception classes who are either obese or overweight compared to many other areas across Horsham. West Sussex recent figures suggest this has dropped from 15% in 2007/8 to 6.5% in 2010/11.

The most recent unemployment figures show the area covered by Horsham Children's Centre with a greater downturn than other areas of Horsham and West Sussex. Recently several large companies have reduced their workforce and the number of children under four years of age living in workless households has risen from 90 in 2008 to 150 in 2010. The number of children in poverty has risen from 9.1% in 2006 to 10.9% in 2009.

The catchment has an estimated 20% of families from an ethnic minority background. There is a cross section of languages spoken by those using the centre. Horsham has a mixed housing stock, with 76% owner occupied. The number of households in social rented homes is 14% of their catchment, higher than in West Sussex and the South East of England figures.

In relation to household income, Horsham Park has a higher than average percentage of families from income deprived households with 13% compared to the Horsham average of 9%. The violent crime rate within the Horsham Park ward of the centre's catchment is significantly greater than that of the overall Horsham locality with 13.4 crimes per 1000, compared to 4.6 per 1000 in Horsham as a whole.

Children's levels of development when they first start in early years provision are in line with those expected for their age.

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

Horsham Children and Family Centre is an outstanding centre as it understands and serves the needs of the local community exceptionally well. The support, commitment and dedication of all staff ensure that the life chances of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families living in the area improve extremely effectively. A large 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 outstanding. In particular, the decisive work of the outreach workers, and Family Resource Team (FRT), is highly successful in making contact with those families most in need. More than one parent reflected the extremely positive and trusting relationships formed by stating to inspectors, 'The centre has been my saviour.' Partnership working between all agencies is excellent 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 positive outcomes for the most vulnerable families. The centre's latest data show that 100% of families are being

reached and helped. This means it is being truly effective both within and outside the area it is set to serve. As some families commented, 'Their outstanding reputation goes before them.'

Families and parents are rightly proud of the 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 consistently well and listens to their views. Those parents with specific needs, in families of disabled children and those who have special educational needs, are exceptionally 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 nearby make a significant contribution to improving the skills, knowledge and enjoyment of children and their families. At the moment, the majority of parents requiring specific learning help are being catered for very well. The high level of take-up of the outstanding numeracy courses is a particular strength. The centre staff have set themselves the target of meeting the learning needs of all the users to enable them to better achieve economic well-being and independence. The relationship with the Jobcentre Plus organisation has to be further enhanced to achieve this one objective. The centre's slogan, to meet the needs of 'all, not just the vast majority', is testament to its commitment.

Outcomes for children are almost always outstanding, 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. As a result the gap has narrowed between the lowest 20% and the rest. A high priority is given to ensuring the centre's parents 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. Excellent multi-agency working and strong partnerships provide a cohesive service that is helping to protect parents and children, including those at risk of harm. Developing parents' understanding of how to promote the healthy lifestyles of their families is excellent.

The leadership of the centre is outstanding. All of the very experienced centre staff have a total understanding of the needs of the local community and meet every day to discuss how activities are meeting the families' needs. Since its inception three years ago, actions to overcome weaknesses and gaps in provision in order to improve outcomes have been concerted and very effective. There are clear lines of accountability and reporting arrangements offer an excellent capacity to improve. Data from the local authority are growing in sophistication and provide information that is very well focused on the families in the reach area. Although, the range and depth of the Centre's evaluation of data means that planning for improvement, and how this will be measured, is extremely well developed, the centre's self-evaluation form (SEF), is very descriptive in places and the necessary evaluation of the full range of information available to identify specific targets to drive improvement and inform future planning happens elsewhere. Parents are encouraged to add their thoughts and ideas in many different ways. The centre does not rely on a family forum, but finds many different and innovative ways to involve parents and respond

to their needs. The Partnership Group, where strategic decisions are made, has a huge range of partners from across the whole of the town. Their role, particularly in providing challenge and advice, is very well developed and all members have responded to the need for greater evaluation and reflection on their outcomes to improve their provision even further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The centre must focus on the one aspect of improving economic outcomes for all users by further engagement with employment agencies.
- The centre leaders must refine their use of self-evaluation to prevent duplication and bring their evaluation data together.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Case studies and discussions with families demonstrate that there is a very high level of satisfaction with the centre's provision. A number of parents 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 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 very 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 6.5% by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre actively promotes, and is successful in, smoking cessation.

The children are making increasingly good progress. The numbers reaching levels expected for their age have risen year on year to 60% in 2011, against a national average of 59%. Also significant is the way the gap has narrowed between the lowest 20% of children and the rest in 2011, to well below the national average of 31%. Parents 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 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 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. Families develop a range of additional skills which will support their future economic well-being, including computer skills and how to manage their finances more effectively. The need to develop further openings for families to gain employment opportunities, including through Jobcentre Plus, is the centre's priority.

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

Assessment of families' needs is extremely 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 which 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 inter-agency meetings are held to monitor the progress of the family, the adults' needs and those of the child or children. There are excellent procedures for developing the team around the child and, if necessary, child protection plans follow. This rigorous 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. A high proportion, around 60%, of vulnerable families are successfully supported and involved, but the centre continues to focus on those who are hard to engage. The reported statistical increase in domestic abuse in the area immediately prompted the formation of a Freedom Group at the centre. This initiative has been monitored and proved to be very successful in meeting the needs of this identified

group.

Information about the needs of particular families and data provided by the local authority are used by the centre staff to plan their activities to work together developing the child's early learning skills so they are more prepared for learning when they move into the Reception class. The high levels of attendance of parents, up to 64%, helps them to appreciate the value of different activities, give suggestions for what to do at home and suggest strategies for managing difficult behaviour. The stay and play sessions, such as the excellent Wrigglers Club, run every week, are also particularly popular. The staff are very effective in sharing good parenting skills and regular visitors give additional input. Advisers on benefits, for example, come in to discuss issues that are important to the families attending. The baby massage sessions are particularly popular and very effective. The modern and bright building is completely accessible for wheelchair users and children and adults with disabilities are fully included and well supported. Family Learning this year includes: First Aid, Family Numeracy, Budgeting, Learning Together at Home, and School and Families Together. The centre regularly offers 'How English is Taught & How Maths is taught' sessions. All of these options are hugely popular. The growing attendance at the centre, 45% of families from all areas, is testament to their success.

All staff provide excellent levels of support, advice and guidance for whoever comes into the centre. One parent's comment typifies this care: 'You can just drop in – they always find time for you.' 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 high level of care, engagement of outside agencies where appropriate, and advice have ensured children are safeguarded and the families enabled to get the support they need. This includes personal support for those in violent relationships.

Staff are trained to support adults to give up smoking and have had a real measure of success. Overall, the mental health, confidence and self-esteem of adults are exceptionally well promoted. Most 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 Pinnacle People for help for the long-term unemployed.

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

Management of the centre is outstanding and is key to the centre's excellent capacity to improve even further. The work of the headteacher, centre manager and staff has very effectively joined up the way the centre is run and has had an outstanding impact on the outcomes for families. The advisory group members are totally involved in the management of the centre. Their levels of skill and experience mean that they can be challenging and effective. 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 excellent value for money. For example, the excellent Dynamic Dads sessions are an expensive programme to run but they are self-financing through the agreed payment schemes and volunteers, and are helping improve parenting skills and children's learning in the process. Self-evaluation is accurate, although at times over modest as the centre's management is far from complacent.

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 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 which 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 families have been given a sense of self-worth and confidence which had been absent before and this is having a very positive impact on their relationships with their children and hopes for the future.

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	1

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	1
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 Horsham Nursery School and childcare regulated provision was inspected on 24 and 25 April 2012. This provision is located on the same premises and managed by the headteacher. The findings of the inspection contributed to the children's centre inspection judgements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Horsham Children and Family Centre on 25 and 26 April 2012. We judged the centre to be outstanding.

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 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, Wrigglers 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 Hub café 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 very good progress in their learning and so are many of you. Some of you have learnt about using computers, how your children are taught mathematics and even how to be successful in the written part of the driving test. These excellent 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 nursery 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 exceptionally well led and managed. The links with the nursery and local school are very positive and helpful, particularly as your children get older and start their education. Everyone at the centre works extremely 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 their self-evaluation is all brought together and is as detailed as it can be. We have asked the leader to involve all staff and work together to make sure there are as many opportunities for you as possible to see what employment openings there are in the area, and make sure you are always well prepared.

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.