

Inspection report for Joy Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	383763
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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.

An inspection of the co-located primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The reports of this inspection and that of the co-located nursery are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre staff, representatives from the centre steering group and district advisory board, parents and family members using the centre during the inspection, some of the centre's partners and a representative of the local authority.

They observed the centre's work, including outreach activities running during the inspection, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Joy Lane Children's Centre is a phase two Sure Start Children's Centre which fulfils the full core purpose of services. It serves the western part of Whitstable, a mixed urban and semi-rural environment. The centre is open for 52 weeks per year and runs weekend activities once a month. A number of other partners regularly use centre facilities, including midwives and the local health visitors. The centre has a small core of staff and commissions a range of services, including from the voluntary sector such as Homestart and Family Action. It was designated in September 2008 and opened fully in April 2009, following a period of staff appointment and premises refurbishment. In addition to a number of small rooms, the centre has four main areas for group activities and crèche facilities, with access to outdoor play areas and a small garden, and the grounds of the co-located Joy Lane Primary School during school holidays. Some activities are run in venues within the community.

The centre works closely with other children’s centres in the area, named as the Canterbury Coastal Children’s Centres. In particular, it has strong links with Swalecliffe Children’s Centre, with the manager and most staff working across both centres. The local authority has delegated governance to the Canterbury District Children’s Centres Advisory Board, which monitors the work of all the children’s centres within the locality. A joint steering group with Swalecliffe Children’s Centre feeds into the advisory board and there is parent forum representation on both supervisory groups.

There are 915 children under five years of age living within the centre’s reach area. Most families are from White British backgrounds, with a number of other heritages represented within the area in small numbers. Very few families speak English as an additional language. The area is economically diverse, and approximately one in five families live in areas identified as being within the 20% most deprived areas in the country. The level of unemployment and percentage of families dependent on workless benefits are below the national averages. On entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage provision, children’s skills, knowledge and abilities 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Joy Lane Children’s Centre provides a good service to families. It has developed well since it opened, and is highly regarded by those using its services. They particularly value the outstanding care, guidance and support by centre staff, shown in comments such as ‘an absolute lifeline’. Exceptionally strong partnership working, with professional partners and families, is central to the centre’s success. Consequently, teamwork is strong and a broad range of good quality services meet the needs of families in the area. Families appreciate that their views about centre development are listened to and acted upon, and show this through their excellent contribution and direct support to further the centre’s sphere of influence. For instance, parents and carers introduce new families and provide practical support, such as setting up the centre garden to grow fruit and vegetables which are then used to encourage healthy eating in centre activities.

Parents, carers and children thoroughly enjoy attending centre activities and develop a wide range of skills and knowledge, and achieve good health and educational outcomes. Adults improve their skills as parents, and children develop social and early educational skills which enable them to access nurseries or school confidently. While centre staff promote children's communication skills in many effective ways, including through singing and signing at the end of most activities, these skills are not as well developed as other aspects of children's development such as their social, creative and physical skills. The strong links with health professionals mean that health outcomes are promoted successfully. Key health and education indicators are improving.

Safeguarding procedures are good, and families feel safe in the centre in the knowledge that staff are always on hand to provide support. Staff are alert to any signs of concern and work well with other agencies to ensure that appropriate and effective support is put in place at the earliest possible stage. Information is available about job opportunities in the area, and case studies show that individuals have been supported to follow paths leading to improved experience and qualifications which have led them into employment. However, this aspect is not always given the same priority as other aspects of the centre's work.

The centre is effectively led and managed, and governance arrangements support its evaluation and development well. The centre's self-evaluation is comprehensive and accurate, and provides a strong basis for the areas identified for further development. Staff are ambitious to raise aspirations further within the community and they have taken effective steps to extend the range of activities to venues more accessible for those identified as in most need of support living in the areas of greatest deprivation. There is no sense of complacency about the centre's significant achievements to date, reflecting the centre's good capacity for further growth and development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Review and refine the action plans currently in place to promote children's communication skills further.
- Increase the centre's contribution to adults' economic well-being by providing greater access to information and support for them to engage with activities which promote their training and employment opportunities.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

A wide range of programmes effectively promote healthy lifestyles and emotional well-being. Good use is made of the crèche outdoor areas to promote children's physical activity in all weathers, and parents and carers are helped to gain a good understanding of how to promote a healthy lifestyle for their families in activities such as gardening, cooking and support for breastfeeding and weaning. Because much of the antenatal care within the area is provided at the centre, parents are

given a positive, welcoming introduction to the work of the centre. Consequently, a large majority of families engage with the centre and with health services. The success in promoting breastfeeding, particularly by peer supporters, has led to a rapidly improving rate from a low starting point three years ago. Other health indicators, including smoking cessation and children who are obese, are positive and reflect the carefully planned approach by health professionals working in partnership with centre staff. Opportunities to promote aspects of health are taken at every possible opportunity, such as a dental practitioner providing timely advice and support in an informal way at baby and toddler groups leading to positive outcomes.

Improvements in parental well-being are reflected in comments such as 'Professional staff are always on hand when we have a bad day.' Similarly, mothers with post-natal depression attending a follow-up session to a specialist commissioned programme indicated how the provision had greatly reduced a feeling of isolation. The assessment of the needs of vulnerable children and adults is effective and timely, and involves other partners when the needs extend beyond the expertise available within the centre. Families feel safe because advice on safety is readily available and includes specific programmes such as paediatric first aid and safe sleeping, giving parents and carers greater confidence that they will be able to deal with emergencies should they arise. The reasons for hospital admissions are carefully analysed and are addressed in centre activities. For example, carers' attention has been drawn to how heated hair appliances were contributing to an increase in emergency hospital admissions, thereby helping to reduce emergencies further. Case studies show how outcomes are improved for the majority of children on child protection plans.

Children's behaviour at activities is exemplary and they enjoy very positive relationships with their carers. Relationships between families using the centre are extremely warm and supportive, leading to almost all target groups making an excellent contribution to decision making. They respond very well to the many opportunities to share their views and are very well represented on advisory and supervisory groups. They say that 'we feel part of a bigger family' and have high aspirations for the centre, saying that they want to ensure that more can 'treasure' the available facilities. Many provide practical support, volunteering their time to raise the centre's profile by carrying out leaflet drops or contributing to additional fun activities such as preparing a centre float for the Whitstable Carnival and holiday events.

Children's early learning is promoted effectively through good quality activities, contributing well to the improvement in children's skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, around 69% of children achieve at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with communication, language and literacy the weaker elements. This is above the national average. The gap between the bottom 20% of children and others has narrowed rapidly over the last three years, reflecting the effectiveness of how the centre promotes and supports parents and carers to understand all aspects of children's early development. However, children's language and communication skills

have not developed as well as other aspects of their development, and the promotion of children's speaking and listening skills remains a high priority for staff in preparing children for later learning at school. The majority of families are improving their economic position as a result of the centre's work, including providing the facility for Connexions to provide advice and support for young parents and recent school leavers who are leaving local authority care. Several others have improved their circumstances by gaining experience as volunteers and developing the confidence to improve their qualifications.

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	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?

2

The centre's good provision is recognised in parent and carer comments such as 'it's wonderful' and 'we wouldn't be without it'. Care, guidance and support are excellent because continuity in staffing has enabled centre staff to develop an exceptionally strong understanding of the local community and its families. Families value the timely, practical and trusted support of experienced staff who know them well. Consequently, the range of activities is carefully planned to meet the needs of the large majority of families effectively and changes are made in the light of emerging and differing needs. For example, the length of some programmes was shortened to ensure that other identified programmes could be introduced within the available financial resources. This approach was agreed with the Parent Forum and fed back to other families through information at reception.

As the centre has developed and evaluated the impact of its services, there has been a greater emphasis on running activities which are within easier reach of those living in the areas of greatest deprivation, some of whom have been identified as having the greatest need. Consequently, a range of outreach activities, including regular family group and baby and toddler groups, has been developed to make them more accessible to some vulnerable families. This has successfully increased the number of families using centre services while not diminishing provision for other families. The

highly effective partnership between professionals from other centres and agencies, and centre staff, means that those families in need of more intensive support are identified and supported extremely well. This is often in times of crisis and through using the Common Assessment Framework, and also for extended periods of time until their circumstances improve.

Centre staff place priority on ensuring that activities are of a good standard using high quality resources to promote purposeful learning. This was seen in a childminders' group where activities inside and outside reflected the theme of 'Under the Water', with children painting, reading with their carer and 'fishing' in a water tray. Regular observations and learning records help parents and carers to learn about and monitor their child's development. The centre schedule includes a wide range of activities supporting family learning and reaching most target groups, including sessions such as Men Behaving Dadly, promoting effective parenting and engaging working parents at suitable times. Centre staff actively support families in finding nursery and school places, enabling adults to return to work. Opportunities to promote other forms of adult learning are signposted, for example, adult education courses within the locality. Individuals are given support to access information electronically on request and a local job list is available at reception. However, these facilities are not readily accessible without the help of centre staff, limiting their impact in helping adults to gain access to training or to 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	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Partnership and teamwork are the cornerstones of the centre's success. Enthusiastic and committed leadership, combined with considerable expertise and complementary skills across the staff team, ensure that the needs of families are met effectively. An exceptionally wide range of partners and parents are represented on all advisory groups and, consequently, excellent use is made of feedback from families and other professionals working in the area. The centre manager, staff and others with governance and supervision responsibilities use a comprehensive range of data effectively, so that evaluation is rigorous and ambitious targets are set. Staff have developed a good knowledge of the area since the centre opened and use this alongside their well-informed understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development to plan and adjust provision as budgetary constraints and the needs of the locality change. Consequently, the centre gives good value for money.

Concerted action to promote equality has resulted in sustained improvement in the involvement of the groups identified as being in the greatest need of support, including from minority groups, lone parents, and those with disabilities. Diversity and achievement are celebrated well, for example, in the range of activities reflecting religious and cultural events, some of which are not directly represented within the community. Specialist sessions effectively target children and parents and carers with disability, so that a high proportion of families are engaged in specialist and general centre activities. Parents spoken with during the inspection emphasised how much they appreciate how the centre has enabled them to learn and broaden their outlook alongside others from different backgrounds, and are clear that there is no discrimination.

Evaluation surveys conducted by the centre show overwhelming satisfaction with the centre's work, including the range and quality of activities. The achievements within group activities are displayed and celebrated, strengthening participants' sense of identity and providing a rich record of centre activity. Practical and relevant information is displayed prominently across the centre. The very strong partnership with other professionals helps families and individuals experiencing domestic violence, acute poverty or high levels of debt to access the support they require in a timely way.

Safe recruitment and selection procedures meet statutory requirements and staff are well trained. Health and safety issues are monitored regularly. Comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken on all sessions, including venues used for outreach activities. Because families are confident that their children are looked after safely in the crèches, they are able to engage in adult learning effectively.

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, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1

<p>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</p>	<p>1</p>
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Findings from the concurrent school inspection in relation to children’s skills and knowledge on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage provision and partnership links were taken into consideration.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Joy Lane Children’s Centre on 2–3 May 2012. We judged the centre as good overall and some of its work is outstanding.

We very much enjoyed our visit to your children’s centre and would like to thank all of you who spent time to talk to us during the inspection. Your views helped inform us of how well the centre is doing and here is a brief summary of what we found:

Joy Lane is a safe and enjoyable centre which supports you well. Since it opened, it has established itself well as an important part of the community. You are very positive about how the centre supports you and of how, sometimes in difficult times, it is an ‘absolute lifeline’. Its activities are well planned to make sure that you develop your parenting skills and that your children are helped to get off to a good start. It helps to keep you and your children healthy. You feel very safe in the centre and value the crèche facilities so that you can attend other programmes of value to you, such as the Young Parents Group.

We saw children enjoying the company of others well at the parent and toddler groups, and how adults get along very well together so that they learn from each other in an informal way. This complements more formalised programmes organised by the centre. Staff observe your children well and record this in the ‘learning journals’ which helps you to promote their learning and development. Children in the area are doing well in relation to national outcomes by the end of the Reception Year in school, although their language and communication skills are not developed as well as other areas of their early formal learning in school. We have asked the centre to refine its action plan currently in place to find further ways to help to promote children’s communication skills.

You value the outstanding care, guidance and practical support of centre staff and how there is always someone on hand who is alert to any signs of concern. We observed how experienced and approachable staff are and they are always available to offer sensitive and timely advice, particularly when you might be having a 'bad day'. The support to find nursery places has been valuable in helping some of you to attend courses of help to you to get a job. Information about where to find help beyond is available in the centre, for example on job vacancies and financial advice. However, we have asked the centre to find ways for you to see the information more easily amongst the other leaflets in reception and to ensure that the computer is always available for immediate reference. The introduction of new activities in venues across the area helps those of you without transport to attend events more easily.

The centre is well led and managed and experienced staff are always looking for ways to improve it further to secure ongoing value for money. Parents and carers who represent you on the parent forum and steering and advisory groups are involved exceptionally well in sharing ideas for the future and supporting staff in evaluating the centre's impact. Partnership work is an exceptionally positive aspect of the centre's work which effectively broadens the range of activities and support available to families. Many of you have your first introduction to the centre on a visit to a midwife or health visitor. We saw how you receive a warm welcome and are helped to find out about other activities.

Thank you once again for your time and we hope that in future even more parents and carers will benefit from the services that the centre provides. The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.