

# Inspection report for Little Hands Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	383774
<b>Inspection dates</b>	22–23 May 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Helen Hutchings

<b>Centre leader</b>	Vaughan Hawthorne-Nelson
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Centre address</b>	c/o Wincheap Primary School Hollowmeade Canterbury Kent CT1 3SD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01227 457087
<b>Fax number</b>	01227 457108
<b>Email address</b>	vaughan.hawthorne-nelson@kent.gov.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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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**Report published:** June 2012



## 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 pre-school are available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

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

## Information about the centre

Little Hands Children's Centre is a phase two Sure Start Children's Centre and fulfils the full core offer of services. It serves the western part of the City of Canterbury. The centre is open for 51 weeks per year and runs weekend activities as special events, holiday activities and those requested by partners. A number of other partners regularly use centre facilities, including midwives and local health visitors. The centre has a small core of staff and commissions a range of services, including those provided by the voluntary sector, for example Homestart.

The centre was designated in February 2008 and opened fully in January 2009 on the completion of its building. The centre is in the grounds of Wincheap School and operates next to an independent pre-school. All three work in close partnership but

are not formally linked. In addition to a number of small rooms, the centre has three main areas for group and crèche activities, with access to an outdoor play area and a wildlife garden. Some activities are run in venues within the community.

The centre works closely with other children’s centres in the district. The manager and most staff work across two 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 steering group feeds into the advisory board. There is parental representation on both groups.

There are 929 children under four years of age living within the centre’s reach area. Most families are from White British backgrounds, with a number of other heritages represented in small numbers. Very few families speak English as an additional language. The centre’s area is economically diverse, and approximately a quarter of families live in locations that are identified as being within the 20% most deprived areas in the country. However, for the area served by the centre as a whole, 16% of families are dependent on workless benefits, which is below the national average. The proportion of lone and young parents, 17%, is above average in the local authority. On entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision, children’s skills, knowledge and abilities are below the levels 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**

<b>2</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>2</b>
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## Main findings

Little Hands is a good centre. Families thoroughly enjoy the activities on offer. One comment typical of many accurately shows the impact of the centres’ work: ‘Staff have made such a difference to my life and my children’s lives.’ Parents value staff who know them well and are sensitive to their needs. The staff’s care, guidance and support for all groups, including target groups and those identified as in most need of intervention and support, is good. Safeguarding is good. Adults feel safe in the centre and know how to ensure the safety of their family. Families attending the centre rate it highly because they value the range of skills and knowledge they develop as a result of the activities on offer. In particular, parents develop a greater understanding of their children’s behaviour and development, which gives them a good foundation to support later learning. Health and educational outcomes are

good.

Good quality provision meets the needs of families well. The centre has established itself as a valuable resource within the area, and attendance is rising as more activities have been set up in venues across local communities. Activities such as Tea and Tots successfully engage a range of parents, including those who are isolated and vulnerable. Fathers are integrated well into most activities. Crèche facilities enable adults to attend a wide range of programmes to improve their parenting skills, independence and economic stability. However, reading resources in the toy library are restricted in number. A challenging, new initiative in collaboration with the local authority is coordinating resources between centres and partner agencies to further improve support for adults seeking employment, education or training.

Centre staff are ambitious to improve the lives of families in its area. Teamwork is a strength and staff know the area and its needs well. They involve families closely in centre development. Governance and accountability are effective and good use is made of data to set challenging targets. The manager and staff regularly review the impact of various activities so that gaps in provision are identified and services planned to increase the centre's effectiveness. Development priorities are well focused, for example, to further promote parents' involvement in developing children's play and communication skills. Partnership and multi-agency work is embedded within the centre's approach so that vulnerable and hard-to-reach families are identified early and effective action reduces the need for later preventative intervention. Outcomes for the increasing number of families using the centre are good and improving, showing the centre's good capacity to improve.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase opportunities for enhancing children's early literacy skills by including more books in the toy library.
- Exploit to the full, the newly coordinated resources to give even more help to adults seeking access to employment, education or training.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>2</b>
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The strong focus on helping families to improve their health is reflected in the example of the reduced rates for centre families at a local leisure centre. A high take-up of the offer contributes well to positive health outcomes, including low obesity levels for young children. Healthy snacks are a feature of centre activities. A strong, beneficial partnership with health services, for example antenatal and baby clinics held at the centre, effectively promotes family health. Over the last year, trained peer breastfeeding supporters have significantly increased the proportion of new mothers sustaining breastfeeding from 38% to 52%. Immunisation rates are also good.

Site security ensures that families feel safe and protected. Outreach work enables

families to identify hazards within the home, and advice is readily available during centre activities. Advice on sexual health and domestic violence is readily available, including effective partnerships in times of crisis. Relationship counselling shows significantly improved emotional health and well-being. Staff work closely with other agencies and use the Common Assessment Framework well to ensure that services are coordinated for families in need of additional support. Case study information shows that many families achieve good outcomes, including for looked-after children and those subject to protection plans. Young parents are supported particularly well, and the vast majority progress to college or employment.

Evidence shows how much families value the programmes on offer. Children thoroughly enjoy the range of activities, with messy play in Friday Fun and a wide range of outdoor equipment. Activities such as Music Mayhem and Baby Signing improve children’s communication, language and literacy skills, a relatively weak area in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Books are readily available in the crèche but there are insufficient books in the toy library to enable more parents to read to children at home. The impact of the centre’s work in promoting all aspects of children’s early development is seen in a sharp three-year increase in the outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Children relate well to one another and their behaviour in activities is considerate, for example, sharing and taking turns. Adults comment on the good relationships with each other and with centre staff. They say that the good role models provided by male and female staff broaden experiences for children and help them to strengthen their relationships at home. Parents are involved well in the development of the centre. The use of a series of ‘You Said, We Said’ displays ensures that families understand how their views and feedback on activities are used by staff in planning next steps. Communication is further strengthened through a carefully planned and innovative approach using social media sites.

The centre has a strong programme promoting opportunities for volunteers to develop the skills needed to follow their career aspirations while providing valuable, additional support for families using the centre. For example, a parent and toddlers group is run by volunteer parents and the volunteer support for breastfeeding is exceptionally effective. The centre provides regular up-to-date information about job vacancies and outreach work supports those requiring housing or financial advice to access the services they need.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>and social development</b>	
<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>	<b>2</b>
<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>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>2</b>
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The range of services and activities meets the needs of families in the area well. Provision has been developed systematically since the centre opened and is based on rigorous evaluation and identification of the needs of the area. Because the centre's reach area is crossed by two major road systems, it has taken time to build up the number of families using the centre's services. Now that the centre has established outreach activities within the areas of greatest deprivation, a large majority of families are benefiting from contact with the centre. This is having a significant impact on reducing isolation, particularly for lone parents and the most vulnerable families. Another significant success relates to the joint work with Cantercare, a charity providing support for young parents, helping them to become independent and develop their parenting skills.

Centre activities promote purposeful learning. In most activities directly involving children, staff support parents in keeping an eye on their child's progress and recording this in a 'learning journal.' Staff then use the information well to plan subsequent sessions and to monitor children's developmental milestones.

Centre staff have gained the trust of families. Outreach workers plan support very carefully, setting up personalised plans for families to access the help they need to cope in times of crisis and to build independence for the future. They work closely with other agencies, including health and social services, to ensure that support is well coordinated and focused through a series of realistic goals. The effectiveness of the practical support provided is reflected in comments such as: 'Staff don't judge, they empathise with me. Without Little Hands we would still be in a bad place.' Childcare is available through the Free for Twos scheme. The success of this support is seen in a three-year reduction of families dependent on workless benefits. Staff in the school indicate that the early identification of family and children's needs and how these are dealt with by the centre has resulted in children entering school much more prepared for learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision.

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>groups</b>	
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**2**

Governance and accountability are clear. The district advisory board provides a rigorous annual review, ensuring that the centre's targets are ambitious. The steering group has an influential role in coordinating the interests of professional partners and families using the centre. Value for money is good because of the good provision and outcomes for families. Within the rigorous controls set by the local authority, the centre regularly evaluates its cost-effectiveness. In this context, the centre is involved in the development of a new initiative which aims to make the present good provision even better. Through the establishment of an employment forum involving Jobcentre Plus, voluntary agencies and other centres sharing strategic resources, the focus of the new initiative is to improve adults' access to further employment, education or training. Partnership work with other agencies and professionals is strong, reducing duplication and ensuring that planning integrated responses to families' needs is coherent.

The centre has developed well under the steady leadership of the centre manager and input of experienced staff. They work very well as a team using their complementary skills to support one another. Management support for staff is good and the continuation of training is actively promoted. All achievements, including those of families and staff, are celebrated. For example, when courses are accredited, the certificates awarded are presented alongside the award of a book, as a key part of the centre's strategy to promote family literacy.

The centre's self-evaluation is accurate and based well on data related to effectiveness. Families' views are valued in generating relevant ideas on how the centre can improve. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. All staff and other professionals using the centre are Criminal Records Bureau checked and recruitment processes are good. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection.

The centre is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination. Staff treat everyone with respect and parents comment on how well groups from all backgrounds work together cohesively. The centre regularly celebrates different cultures and backgrounds in its 'Our World' activities. The team includes staff with additional language skills, which are used to ensure that families with English as an additional language are well supported. As services have been extended into venues in the most deprived areas, the proportion of families who use the centre from these areas has increased substantially. This indicates the success of how the centre engages with targeted groups.

These are the grades for leadership and management.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional</b>	<b>2</b>
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<b>supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<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>	<b>2</b>
<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>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<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>	<b>2</b>
<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>	<b>2</b>

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

An inspection of the primary school was conducted at the same time as this inspection. The judgements made towards the Early Years Foundation Stage provision have been considered in relation to the centre's inspection and the impact it has on preparing children for school. A copy of the school's report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Little Hands Children's Centre on 22–23 May 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection we looked at your centre's improvement plans and many other documents. We spoke with a range of partner agencies, centre staff and representatives from the centre steering group and district advisory board. We also spoke with parents and family members using the centre during the inspection. Thank you for your welcome and for speaking so openly to us. Our discussions with those of you we were able to meet helped us considerably in finding out about the centre's work. You were very positive about everything the staff do to help and



support you. Typical views were: 'Staff have made such a difference to my life and my children's lives.'

Many of you commented on the friendly welcome you receive to introduce you into the centre. The photographs show just how much you enjoy the range of activities. Staff have successfully increased the number of families using the centre's services as they have extended activities to venues closer to the different communities in the area. This helps considerably by reducing walking time or difficult journeys. This is just one example of how staff are continually finding ways to improve services. There is a good capacity to improve further because staff know exactly what has to be done next.

Some of you told us how you appreciate that staff do not 'judge' you but give you valuable practical support. The staff ensure that you have good support and guidance, particularly in times of crisis. The support to find childcare places has been valuable in helping some of you to attend courses that have been useful in finding a job. We have asked centre staff to exploit to the full, the newly coordinated resources provided by centres working together to give you even more help to progress into further education, training or employment.

Centre activities such as Tea and Tots and parenting courses really help you to understand how to support your children's development and learning. We saw that you are often helped to monitor your child's development, sometimes logging this in a 'learning journal.' Developing children's early literacy skills is a key centre priority. However, we noticed that the toy library has very few books so we have asked the centre to increase the number of books available to you.

The centre collects useful data on the success of its activities and uses them to develop new services. Centres within the city work well together, sharing resources and avoiding duplication of activities. Teamwork is very strong and staff share expertise well so that you have ready access to support even when some staff are at other centres. You are confident to ask for help because you feel safe and secure in the centre. The centre holds safeguarding of children as a high priority. Your views are sought regularly and your ideas are taken seriously so that you have considerable influence on how your centre is developing.

Thank you once again for your time and we hope that you will continue to benefit from the services that the centre provides.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).