

Inspection report for The Bridge Children's Centre

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| Local authority | East Sussex |
| Inspection number | 384155 |
| Inspection dates | 14–15 June 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | Michael Kubiak HMI |

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| Centre leader | Tracey Rose |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
| Centre address | The Bridge, 361 Priory Road, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 3NW |
| Telephone number | 01424 433611 |
| Fax number | Not applicable |
| Email address | tracey.rose@east.sussex.gov.uk |

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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Maplehurst Nursery 109298 |

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with front-line staff from commissioned services, partner agencies, the local authority, the contracts monitoring officer, staff employed directly by the centre and Trustees of The Bridge Community Centre. They spoke to parents and volunteers during arranged meetings and more informally. They visited a number of activities at the centre as well as observing some community-based groups and looked at a range of documentation.

Information about the centre

The Bridge Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2009. It is one of nine centres located within the Hastings and St Leonards district.

Services operate from The Bridge Community Centre. Many services are commissioned through the Trustees of the community centre, as well as some services which are provided directly by the children's centre staff. Services are offered on a locality basis and taxi bursaries are available for some families.

The centre's reach area covers the Farley Bank and Halton Estates and the Clive Vale district. There are currently 488 families living in the reach area with the majority being of White British heritage. The reach area is mixed in terms of deprivation. There is a large percentage of social housing, primarily flats, with small areas of privately rented and privately owned properties. Employment rates are poor with some 25% of children living in workless households. Around 14% of families are in receipt of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. Children's levels of skills and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those expected for their age.

The centre provides a full range of services, working in partnership with a number of voluntary and statutory agencies. The centre is open weekdays from 9.00am to 5.00pm. It is open for 50 weeks of the year, closing for a week in August and a week

at Christmas. Full day care is provided at Maplehurst Nursery, which is located nearby.

Governance arrangements are provided by the local authority. A Centre Advisory Group, that reports to the Hastings and St Leonards Local Advisory Group is in place.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The Bridge Children’s Centre is a good centre and makes an effective contribution to improving outcomes for families. Services are well planned and targeted support enables families to overcome many barriers. Staff effectively contribute their extensive knowledge of the community when planning services to ensure needs are well met. Close working between commissioned services, centre management and the community centre services ensures that individual families receive an integrated package of support. The centre is seen as an integral part of the community. As one parent commented ‘The Bridge is the centre for Hastings and Ore’.

Case studies demonstrate the impact that services are having on families. The Family Outreach Service is particularly effective in engaging families who face significant barriers to accessing the centre and there is convincing evidence that families make sustained changes to their lives as a result. For example, a socially isolated family who were unable to leave their home now access the centre. Families benefit from good opportunities to engage in learning and development and to volunteer at the centre and take-up rates are good. The extent to which parents are developing economic stability and independence is, however, satisfactory. Although some families from workless homes have been successful in obtaining paid employment not enough adults are currently accessing training or enhancing employability skills in order to increase their future economic and social well-being.

Provision is good, with an effective range of services both within the centre and at different venues within the community which enables good access to families from

target groups. However, services, particularly those which are not commissioned directly by the centre, are not fully integrated as information is not always shared, this impacts on the centre's ability to always effectively target services to bring about the most impact for all families. Staff are persistent and sensitive in supporting families to overcome barriers to accessing the centre. Families are very positive about the centre and their comments to inspectors included: 'I don't know what I would have done without it' and 'It's a lifesaver for me'.

Safeguarding is a priority and as a result families report feeling safe at the centre. Safeguarding procedures follow respective organisations' guidelines and are broadly consistent with one another. Effective partnership working between agencies is fundamental to safeguarding families and contributes to improving the good outcomes. Participation rates are good and improving, including successfully engaging most target groups. The centre provides an inclusive environment for all families. This was reflected by one parent who told inspectors: 'It's fantastic and really accessible to everyone. Male, female, whatever background. Everyone is always very welcoming.' The community café is very popular and provides an informal meeting place for families to meet and to support one another.

The centre is proactive in evaluating services. Families are encouraged to feed back informally and formally into evaluations which help shape future services, business planning and the centre's self-evaluation. The centre effectively uses data to measure the impact of its work and this feeds into shaping future services. There is a good range of tracking systems in place to show the impact of services on improving outcomes for families. However despite this effective commitment to evaluation and improvement not all the centre's targets are fully measurable. All staff are highly committed to improving outcomes and have a good awareness of the centre's strengths and areas where it needs to improve. This staff awareness, alongside the clear business planning, means that the centre's capacity to improve is good

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the economic and social well-being of families, particularly in developing adults' employability skills and access to paid employment.
- Further develop the services available to families to more effectively improve outcomes by:
 - strengthening information-sharing and working more closely with partner agencies to provide an even more comprehensive and cohesive package of support to families
 - making sure that all targets for improvement are measurable so that the centre can fully assess the impact of its actions and drive improvement further.

How good are outcomes for families?

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Healthy lifestyles are effectively promoted through activities such as the swimming group 'Aquababes' which encourage physical exercise. Families have open access to the outside play area at the centre where they enjoy being physically active. A comprehensive range of initiatives supports mothers with breastfeeding and as a result rates are increasing. The community café provides a range of healthy food and the provision of healthy snacks at group activities encourages children to eat healthily. Families participate in the community centre's organic allotment with produce from the allotment included in fruit and vegetable bags available to families. The centre offers a range of support to assist with smoking cessation, with nearly 50% of attendees giving up.

Children are helped to keep safe in their home through information provided by the centre and equipment loans as part of the home-safety scheme and by participating in activities during 'Safety Awareness Week'. Early intervention for those families most in need of support is very effective. The individual needs of families are addressed through a multi-agency approach to work and for the most vulnerable families may include support from a range of services including the Family Outreach Service, Community Parents and Homestart. Groups such as 'The Hub Club' are delivered at accessible locations, reducing social isolation for families and improving outcomes. Case studies demonstrate the positive impact the Family Outreach Service is having on safeguarding children and improving outcomes. Effective partnership working between the Family Outreach Service and social care colleagues provides good support to children who may be subject to child protection plans. Structured parenting programmes encourage families to build better relationships. Parents value the support they receive and comments which summarise the views of many include: 'they care about you,' and 'they notice things'.

Families attend groups run at the centre and within the wider community. Activities such as 'Playweek' provide families with opportunities to learn how to support their children's learning and become involved in positive play. There is a strong focus on language development in centre activities led by the early years' teacher, including the timely use of a language checker which helps to identify those who need specific support. Children make good progress from their starting points with 50% achieving at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage. Strategies to reduce the achievement gap between children are effective. Adults have regular opportunities to learn and develop new skills through a range of courses, including developing their numeracy and literacy skills. The volunteer programme is very popular and includes an effective package to support them to be confident in the role. Unemployment rates remain high and the qualification levels of families are low. The centre has rightly identified this as an area that requires improvement and is strengthening links with adult education providers in order to improve outcomes.

Many opportunities exist for families to contribute to the work of the centre. Informal and formal feedback is captured and services adapted as a result, for example the 'Once Upon a Story' group continues to run as a result of parental feedback. Families are appropriately involved in the governance arrangements of the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| 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 | 2 |
| 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 | 3 |

How good is the provision?

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Good links exist between the services offered by commissioned services and those offered by The Bridge Community Centre. Information is not always freely shared that would enable more effective planning of services to further improve the good outcomes. Groups run at accessible community venues widen families' access and effectively meet their needs and break down social isolation. Families are involved in and contribute to decisions about the activities offered and new services have been developed as a result. Families benefit from attending services and sharing their views and experiences with each other; for example many pregnant mothers attend the 'Bumps for Lunch' group, the 'Breastfeeding Support Group' and the 'Bridge Babies' for children under one year of age. These groups now run consecutively on a Tuesday afternoon so that pregnant mothers can receive information and support about breastfeeding prior to the birth of their baby and also to build up networks and discuss issues with parents of young children.

Staff use their extensive knowledge of services provided both at the centre and within the wider community to effectively signpost families to assist them in accessing the best service to meet their needs. Information is also helpfully displayed about the wide range of services that are available for parents. The centre provides inclusive activities for all children, such as the 'Come Rain or Shine' group. Staff act as good role models; however, they sometimes miss opportunities to influence families, for example by consistently promoting hygienic hand-washing procedures. The community café at the centre provides a relaxed space where families can meet informally. This is often a stepping stone for many families when they first access the centre, before moving on to the more structured drop-in groups.

A number of partner agencies provide good opportunities for personal development for families. A strong commitment from families to 'give something back to the

community' exists and as a result many go on to volunteer at the centre. Learning opportunities are offered at various venues within the local community and families are effectively signposted and supported to attend these. The centre successfully tracks children and measures their progress at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The introduction of the 'Every Child a Talker' strategy is improving children's language development. Good links have been built with local schools and activities such as 'Once Upon a Story' are strengthening these links and supporting children's transition to school well. Provision to meet the needs of those families from workless households by developing their employability skills is not fully effective.

Staff demonstrate excellent insight into the issues that families face and they offer high levels of care, guidance and support. The Family Outreach Service provides extremely sensitive support to families, and its close links with health and social care colleagues mean that support is effectively tailored to meet the individual needs of families. In addition multi-agency meetings provide an opportunity for partner agencies to discuss families and decide the most appropriate package of support; this may result in the instigation of Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedures as required.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| 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 | 2 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre's area coordinator and her team have built very good links with staff from the community centre and voluntary and statutory organisations and as a result families receive a comprehensive package of services and opportunities that enable good outcomes. Service-level agreements and contract monitoring ensure that services effectively meet the needs of the local community. Information about individual families attending commissioned services is widely shared. However, information about non-commissioned services is not always readily available; this impacts on the centre's ability to plan wider, targeted services and to plan more strategically. All staff are highly committed to improving outcomes for families and work well together to achieve this aim. The Centre Advisory Group holds the centre to account and is involved in target setting. Data provided by the local authority are shared with the advisory group and this contributes to assessing the impact of the centre on improving outcomes.

The centre's business plan is fully integrated with the community centre's plan; there

is a strong commitment to working closely together and staff have begun looking at how they can do this more effectively. The children's centre's self-evaluation provides an accurate picture of the centre. Service evaluations are used to ensure that there are consistent improvements in outcomes; however, some targets are not sufficiently clear and this limits the centre's ability to assess and drive improvement further. Commissioned services are effectively held to account and changes made to services as a result. Data are closely analysed to look at take-up rates and unit cost per child and family of the different groups. Therefore, the centre provides good value for money.

Recruitment procedures for staff and volunteers are thorough. Effective screening ensures that adults working with children are suitable to do so. There are good opportunities for adults working with children to keep up to date with information relating to safeguarding. The Family Outreach Service has good links with partner agencies and is effective in bringing about improvements for families most in need of intervention and support.

Families effectively contribute to the work of the centre and staff are proactive in obtaining their views. Staff attend many community events and use these as an opportunity to obtain feedback from families, including those who may be hard to reach and who may not be accessing the centre's services.

The centre knows its target groups well and has worked hard at engaging them in their work. Equality and diversity are well promoted with information and resources reflecting the wider community. Staff understand the value of involving parents in planning activities, for example involving some families in planning activities relevant to Black History Month. Parents with disabled children or with special educational needs feel supported in accessing services at the centre. As one parent told inspectors, 'You are not judged.'

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| 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 | 3 |
| 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 |

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| 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 | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Bridge Children’s Centre on 14 and 15 June 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who took the opportunity to meet with us during the inspection and to share with us your views and opinions about the centre. It was a pleasure to meet you all and to hear your stories and about how the centre has made a difference to your lives and those of your families.

We were struck by how the centre is seen as such an important part of the community and many of you echoed this during your discussions with us.

The centre provides a welcoming environment which is accessible to all parts of the community. Those of you from target groups are well supported in accessing the centre services. A number of activities run in the community and this is very effective in engaging some of you and we saw that you and your children enjoyed them. Group sessions are well attended and provide an extensive range of services which you and your families enjoy. Activities for young children are based around the Early Years Foundation Stage and take into account different themes and include good ideas from parents. Centre staff work really well with an early years’ teacher to ensure that activities cover all areas of children’s learning and development. Good links have been established with local schools and these help your children prepare confidently for school.

Outcomes for families are good overall. Strategies to promote healthy lifestyles are effective and you benefit from fruit and vegetable bags and healthy snacks provided at the community café. Breastfeeding rates are good and improving and many of you benefit from guidance from the breastfeeding peer supporters. You are encouraged to take an active role in the work of the centre, with some of you becoming volunteers there. A range of learning and development opportunities is provided and take-up rates are good. We have asked the centre to consider how it can improve

your economic and social well-being and support more of you in accessing skills training that helps you find paid employment.

There is a very strong commitment by all those at the centre to provide high quality services. Staff have high aspirations for families and are committed to providing a range of services which are improving outcomes for all families. Sometimes information about the various activities you have been involved in is not shared with the children's centre. We have asked the centre to work more closely with partner organisations to share information about services so that they can see the full range of services which you are accessing. This additional information will strengthen the centre's self-evaluation and business plan and enable them to more effectively target services where they will bring about the most impact for families.

Many services offered in the community successfully engage those of you who face barriers to accessing the centre. For example, some families attend the group at Egremont Place. This gives you and your children the opportunity to enjoy activities and meet other people. Centre staff sensitively and supportively encourage you to access additional services provided, for example by meeting you in the community café and introducing you to other families. At times of crisis you told us you feel well supported by the staff. Families in need of additional support benefit from working with the Family Outreach Service that offers practical support and advice on a one-to-one basis.

You are frequently asked for your views about the centre and staff regularly review the services available to you and your families based on the feedback you provide. Many of you may have taken part in their annual satisfaction survey. The centre also effectively uses data to analyse the services that it provides to see whether they are making a difference to your lives. In going forward we have asked the centre to develop its evaluation of services so that they can be even more targeted to have the most impact on improving your lives.

Recruitment and selection procedures are good and ensure that adults at the centre, whether staff or volunteers, are suitable to work with children. They also keep their knowledge of safeguarding up to date through attending relevant training. Risk assessments are completed throughout the centre and mean that any potential risks are minimised, making the environment a safe place for you to enjoy attending.

We wish you continuing success at the centre and with your families.

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