

Inspection report for Harmony Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	383823
Inspection dates	26–27 June 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	St Paul's Primary School
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/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is 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 manager of the centre and other staff, representatives from a range of partner agencies, the local authority, health service professionals, frontline staff and members of the local advisory group. Meetings were held with the headteacher of the adjoining primary school and the manager of the local nursery. Inspectors talked to parents and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including evaluations of services, safeguarding arrangements, case studies, other records, development plans and the centre's most recent review report together with local authority data.

Information about the centre

Harmony Children's Centre is one of seven centres in the Tunbridge Wells district in Kent. It is a phase two centre which was designated in March 2008. The centre is in the village of Rusthall and it serves the surrounding community in Rusthall, St Paul's and St John's Wards. Some services operate within the centre's building which is based on the St Paul's Primary School site. Many other services operate within the community at local venues and at other local children's centres. Residential areas consist of a mix of privately-owned and social housing homes. The reach area of the centre is diverse in terms of deprivation. Harmony has an average Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score of 70%. Rusthall Ward has two areas of higher deprivation under an IMD score of 50% and St John's Ward has one ward with an IMD of 47%. The other four wards are between the 83% to 95% deprivation indices.

The majority of families in the reach area are White British. A very small percentage are from minority ethnic heritages, with the largest groups from Any Other White and undeclared. Around 10% of families claim out-of-work benefits and 94 children aged 0 to 4 live in workless households. A few children and parents have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Children enter early years provision with a wide range of skills and abilities but with much lower than expected levels than typically found for their age in communication, language and literacy.

There are 935 children, aged 0 to 4, known to be living within the catchment area of which 51% are registered and 65% have been reached through centre-based and outreach activities. The centre meets all elements of the core purpose, which include, partnership with a range of agencies including health services, family support and outreach and activities to promote children's and parents' all-round development and well-being. St John's Ward families have been accessing the Southborough Centre which is closer and easier to access. The families have access to Harmony's sister centres, The Ark, Southborough and the four other centres in the district. The governance of the centre is through the local authority and an advisory board 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 centre makes a good contribution to improving the lives of the large majority of families it serves. The centre's newly developed 'Be Healthy' services in Rusthall and in the reach area have secured good quality access to health and social care for families. Strong partnerships with a wide range of professionals ensure integrated, comprehensive and tailored support. Adult cookery courses, for example Make and Bake, encourage parents to provide healthy, nutritious meals on a budget. Activities, such as Make and Do and Stay and Play, enable children and families to express themselves creatively and develop physical skills, while having lots of fun together. The large majority of families using the centre develop their skills, including parenting skills, well. The impact of the centre is securing good improvement in families' personal and educational development. The dedicated staff are supportive and provide good, inclusive confidential care, guidance and advice. Parents value this

and the time taken to help them overcome difficulties they encounter. Outreach services provide effective bespoke packages of support for families that, alongside signposting to a wide range of services, make a discernible difference to families' lives.

Effective safeguarding, policies and procedures underpin the centre's work and, as a result, parents say they feel safe at the centre. Resources are managed well and are shared across the reach area to maximise their use. Difficulties in securing permanent staff, including an early years practitioner, due to financial and other constraints, has meant that the centre has had to commission some services to agency staff and has supported volunteers in running activities to try and ensure continuity of services.

Self-evaluation procedures are effective and resulting outcomes for families, provision, leadership and management are all good, demonstrating the centre's good capacity for improvement. Members of the advisory board and steering group understand their role and challenge the centre's performance. Parent voice is valued, but only a few parents contribute more formally in the decision-making processes of the centre on the advisory board. Registrations at the centre are rising quickly for most target groups in the reach area, but the engagement of some hard to reach families, especially lone parents in the St John's Ward, is not as marked. Leaders are now more focused on seeking ways to involve and engage this group in the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of hard to reach families especially lone parents accessing the centre from the St John's Ward that are currently under-represented and extend parental involvement on the advisory board.
- Secure appropriate staff, including an early years qualified practitioner, to maintain consistency and develop services for vulnerable groups.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes are improving well because the centre ensures good access for the majority of families to integrated services, professionals, support and advice. Over 318 children and 344 parents accessed midwifery services and health visitors through the weekly Child Health Clinic. The Healthy Child programme ensured 100% of all new mothers and babies received a new birth visit. Over 70 parents have accessed ante-and post-natal groups providing weaning advice, sleep, attachment and parenting support. These, and volunteer breastfeeding buddies, have contributed to the 62%, and rising, rates for sustained breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. In Time 2 Talk, parents can access support for their children's emotional health and well-being, and two-year-old health developmental checks pick up any delays triggering targeted support. In activities, such as Jumping Beans,

babies and toddlers engage in inquisitive play, independence is promoted and parents successfully develop their parenting skills through effective parenting programmes. Families develop healthy lifestyles through various projects, including a Healthy Passport scheme, developed in partnership with the school and local community shops to encourage healthy eating. Families visit allotments to see how vegetables grow, make and try healthy snacks. Evaluation of activities and data show reduced risks in pregnancy, with low obesity rates at 6%, improved dental health and increased smoking cessation. Consequently, the centre is successful in promoting sustained changes to the healthy lives of its families.

Increasing numbers of vulnerable families are effectively supported through a comprehensive package of support and Family Allocation Meetings linked with social and health services. Parents say they feel safe. Robust safeguarding procedures, case studies and other evidence confirm arrangements for the use of the Common Assessment Framework result in good-quality safeguarding support. Children subject to child protection plans and looked after children are supported well. Outreach work is tailored to the individual needs of the family. Parents especially value the training in developing positive behaviour and routines helping to reduce family stress. Admission rates to hospital accident and emergency departments over the last three years in Tunbridge Wells for minor injuries are rising. However, the centre is successfully raising parent awareness through preventative measures by providing discounted home safety equipment for purchase, to make families homes safe. Further measures include home checks, advice on home safety in partnership with the fire brigade, road safety activities and first-aid courses. These contribute to most families showing that they understand dangers and how to stay safe.

Parental involvement and contribution to the centre are good. Families have created a fabulous community art mural of what Harmony means to them. Local mums run Crafty Kids and Mini Movers sessions. These, and art and craft activities, enable families to learn creative skills. Parents learn about play and development through observation and good modelling by staff in Discovery Play for babies aged 6 to 18 months. Photographic evidence shows over 100 families enjoying a visit to a hop farm. The large majority of families using the centre show good improvement in their personal and social development and educational skills. Over a third are engaged in training, adult learning or relevant activities including literacy, numeracy and childcare courses leading to either National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at level 2 or GCSE qualifications. Employment support from Jobcentre Plus, volunteering and signposting to adult learning support the majority of families to gain further skills and employment, improving their economic stability and independence. While parental views have resulted in improvements to the facilities, timings and courses offered, few parents and carers are members of the advisory board.

The centre's work is focused well on narrowing the achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest. Those benefiting from early years provision, including attending the children's centre, are catching up. Children make good progress from their starting points so that by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, their

skills and levels of ability are above age-related expectations. Because of some weaknesses in speech and language, the centre manager is developing speech and language services across the reach to further improve children's outcomes.

Lone and isolated parents benefit from one-to-one family time that develops their parenting and work skills and raises their self-esteem so that they may join the centre when they are more confident. Parents say they enjoy the calm, safe atmosphere and over two thirds of families with young children, within the reach, engage with the centre.

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	3
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

A strength of the centre is the quality of support provided for families. Staff have a good knowledge of the local community and assess their specific needs carefully. Services are tailored to support families in their health, safety, well-being and achievement. The centre has established good links with an extensive range of partners from both statutory and voluntary sectors. Parent satisfaction surveys and evaluations of activities are all positive and they are keen to access more courses, from budgeting to anger management.

The uptake of services is increasing and the centre provides a good range of courses, support and expertise for the majority of families in the reach and most target groups. However, it has experienced difficulties in engaging some of the targeted hard-to-reach groups, especially lone parents. Outreach services are delivered successfully. Signposting and a good range of information are used well to alert families of services offered at both Harmony, other centres and in the community. The centre works closely with health and social services and provides additional 'family time' for vulnerable families to access prior to starting any community groups. Childminders use the centre, its resources and promote their services. Parents are

well supported in business enterprises from providing a venue for mediating services to help with setting up a group in the village in partnership and support with risk assessments, business plans and funding.

Assessment methods are effective and outcomes are analysed in depth. Children's achievements are carefully recorded. Home visiting contributes to most children's and families' health and social needs. This is reinforced by the work of other partners, such as health visitors, midwifery, speech and language and oral health services and teams. For those in crisis, advice and support are speedy and effective, and much preventative work is undertaken to avoid family crises. Parents value the opportunity to use the facilities, advice and support of the centre. Typical comments are: 'It's great for the whole family...'; and, 'It's so inclusive and has a real community feel.' The centre provides a mix of universal and targeted services and is successful in meeting the needs of most groups in the reach and wider community.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The manager's drive, enthusiasm and focus on improvement are shared by leaders and managers at all levels, staff and parents. This, combined with the good support and challenge from the local authority, ensures good-quality provision and outcomes. The centre runs smoothly. The large, stimulating playroom and exciting outside play area are used successfully for a variety of activities. Resources are shared across the district to meet the needs of the reach and wider community. All these factors ensure good value for money. Staff have a good knowledge of the challenges facing families and work hard to remove barriers, such as low self-esteem and gaps in education and parenting skills, and so successfully promote inclusion and equality of opportunity. Diversity is celebrated well through leaflets in different languages and the recruitment of volunteers from the local community.

Development planning is focused on improving the lives of all families, including target groups. Data, including e-start outcomes, are analysed in depth to check that services meet the needs of groups and that outcomes are improving. Safeguarding, including child protection, safe vetting and recruitment, is rigorous. Criminal Records Bureau checks are secure. A joint safeguarding workshop with health visitors led to increased interventions and referrals of families to social services and improved information sharing and reporting systems. The centre facilitates private and

voluntary groups and has good links with local pre-school settings and primary schools.

Access for some of the most vulnerable, including disabled children and disabled parents, is met through early support services and signposting to specialist provision at Ravensdale Centre (Barnardo's pre-school for disabled children). The centre provides targeted family support services and links multi-agency teams to deliver advice and support on autism, speech and language. It successfully meets the needs of teenage parents, and some lone parents, through a variety of bespoke sessions. Outreach work at a local refuge has supported those subjected to domestic violence.

Re-organisation, redundancies and recruitment of permanent staff have presented significant challenges for the effective deployment of staff. The last 18 months have involved supporting several inductions, in-house team training and the development of the team to try and maintain consistency and delivery of activities. The centre has commissioned outside partner agencies to deliver specific services and agency staff to meet the community needs. The centre has yet to appoint an early years qualified practitioner and some permanent staff. Parents attend interview panels and parent voice is valued and acted upon, for example a new outdoor play area was developed and is shared with the school aiding transition. The established advisory board and steering committee effectively monitor performance, review progress and contribute to planning with a view to increasing registrations so enabling more parents and children to access the services. Last year, the centre exceeded all of the local authority targets set.

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	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	2

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Harmony Centre on 26 and 27 June 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited. We enjoyed talking with you and observing all the different activities that take place in the centre. You told us that the centre was a very welcoming, safe and inclusive for families. We agree. Most of you benefit from the activities that the centre provides and supports in the local community. Children who access the different services receive good support. Registrations are increasing at the centre, although fewer families take up activities from the St John's Ward. We have asked the centre to ensure their services are targeted to engage more families from this area. Many of you told us how much you valued the centre staff and how helpful and supportive they are. The good leadership and skilled staff provide you and your children with a good range of services that they adapt to meet your needs. They have done this despite difficulties in appointing permanent staff. We have asked the advisory board to rectify this by appointing permanent staff including an early years practitioner.

You told us how much you enjoyed the activities and how much you have gained from your involvement, making new friends, becoming volunteers or attending adult learning courses. You make an important contribution through the parent voice and through your evaluations of activities, but only a very few of you are involved in the steering group or are members of the advisory board.

Most of you know a great deal about keeping your families safe and healthy and we saw some of you attending the paediatric first-aid course. The different activities help develop children's communications skills, and the speech and language therapy advice sessions are valued by you. Children who have attended the children's centre get off to a good start at school. Activities, such as Jumping Beans and Stay and Play, enable you to access creative and physical classes for your children and babies. Most of you take advantage of the parenting classes, midwifery clinics and health visitor sessions. Discovery Play lets babies and toddlers explore learn and grow through messy sensory play and helps you to understand how children learn through

play. Opportunities to develop your personal, social and educational skills have led to many of you engaging in a range of adult learning opportunities on offer, for example childcare, literacy and numeracy. For many of you, this has led to full-time employment and or good take up of further learning and training.

The care, guidance and support that you and your children receive are good. Staff are knowledgeable about the range of services and people who could best help you to access the right services and support. They work alongside you, and help you to decide how you would like to change or improve your lives. We are grateful to you all and wish you, your families and the centre the very best for the future.

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