

# Inspection report for East Downlands Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	West Berkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	383755
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 July 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christine Field

<b>Centre leader</b>	Helen Lowney
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Pangbourne Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Pangbourne Valley Playgroup

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 report of this inspection is 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 manager, health professionals, benefits advisers, 'Homestart' and pre-school managers, speech and language specialists, family support workers, advisory board members, local authority representatives and parents. They also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation form and service delivery plan.

## Information about the centre

The centre was designated as a phase three centre in 2008 and delivers a full range of services to meet its core purpose. The centre is situated in Pangbourne and shares part of the co-located school's building. A separate pre-school also shares the same site. Much of the reach area is rural and incorporates the wards of Pangbourne, Basildon, Bucklebury and Compton. Most activities take place at the centre which is open Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 4.30pm all year round. A weekly session delivered in Compton Village Hall enables some of the most vulnerable families living in the west of the area to have easier access to services.

The centre's area includes 801 children aged from nought to four years, with 97% from White British backgrounds. The reach area comprises 10 lower super output areas with relatively low levels of multiple deprivation. Nearly three quarters of families in the area own their own homes and 11% live in social housing. There is no data available to identify the proportion of families living in workless households or eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision are typically at the levels expected for their age.

The centre employs four members of staff: a part-time manager (21 hours), a part-time administrator (18.5 hours) and two Family Support Workers (37 hours and 30 hours respectively). There have been significant staffing issues over the last year with three managers joining and leaving the staff. The current centre manager has been temporarily covering some aspects of the management of the centre since November 2011 alongside her family support work. The centre manager's post was made substantive three months prior to the inspection. The centre's work is overseen by a newly constituted advisory board which has met once. The local authority is the accountable body.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

The centre's effectiveness in meeting its core purpose is satisfactory. The last year has been difficult with considerable staff changes impeding the centre's performance. Governance by the local authority has been weak. There has been rapid improvement since the appointment of the centre manager and full complement of staff. Their work is resulting in increasing numbers of families engaging with the centre, especially at Compton which is the most disadvantaged community, although the lack of reach-specific data about the different target groups restricts the centre's ability to assess needs precisely. The quality of the services offered by the centre is good. However, despite being extended, the range is not yet sufficient to engage parents who are seeking further education or looking to get back into work.

The local authority recognises that the limited data available on the target groups living in the reach area and on Key Performance Indicators (KPI), for example sustained breastfeeding rates, is a barrier to shaping future provision based on local needs. It is working to provide the centre with the data it requires, including liaising with health partners at the strategic level to find a way forward, for example in accessing live birth data, but progress is slow.

Purposeful partnerships with health professionals at the centre level lead to dovetailed services, including shared home visits and health visitors attending Bumps and Babes sessions to provide advice about weaning, for example. Weekly weigh-ins at the centre are led by the community nurse who also provides babies' and young children's developmental checks. These arrangements enable the centre staff to meet parents at an early stage and respond appropriately to any concerns they may have. Outreach work with families most in need of support is very effective and leads to the vast majority being healthier, safer and happier. The achievement of children living in the reach area is better than seen nationally with over two-thirds attaining the expected 78+ scale points in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile at the end of Reception Year. Parents are unanimous in their view that the centre makes a positive difference to their families' lives: 'We have both loved coming to the centre over the last six months. Many thanks for making us so welcome and for your help and support', is a typical comment.

The newly established advisory board clearly understands its role to provide both support and challenge. Its first meeting was well attended by a range of partners who held useful discussions about shaping future provision and targeting resources to better meet needs. Although in the pipeline, parents are not represented on the board but they do contribute to decision making in other ways, for example when evaluating activities or giving their views through surveys.

The centre's self-evaluation is accurate and staff know the families using the centre well. The centre manager has already pinpointed the most pressing priorities and the actions being taken are moving things forward. The current service delivery plan usefully includes the main aspects that require more work although the absence of measurable targets makes it difficult to evaluate the full impact of the centre's actions. Everyone connected to the centre is upbeat and committed to meeting the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Staff are working effectively to eradicate the remaining inadequacies. These features confirm the centre's satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Work with the local authority and health partners, to move swiftly to establish specific reach area data to enable the centre to measure its performance in relation to KPI and to assess the impact of its services on improving the outcomes for target groups.
- Establish robust governance and improve accountability, especially by the local authority, and ensure that parents are represented on the newly constituted advisory board as soon as possible.
- Sharpen action planning by including measurable targets that enable robust checks on the impact of centre activities, particularly on families' future

economic well-being.

- Extend the range of services geared towards supporting adults' further education or training and supporting employability.

## How good are outcomes for families?

3

The strong partnership with the local health team results in some good quality services operating from the centre weekly that help families keep healthy. Bumps and Babes sessions are well attended and involve new mums sharing experiences and tapping into the advice from the well-informed centre staff. Health professionals are on hand at sessions to provide specific guidance on breastfeeding for example, as well as offering regular developmental checks for children. The centre has recently introduced a baby massage programme to help new parents bond with their baby as well as assisting with worries about colic or sleeping patterns. Well-organised information signposts parents to services concerned with sexual health, giving up smoking and drugs counselling, although the centre has no system in place for checking these services are taken up.

Staff foster parents' trust so that they share welfare concerns. As a result, the centre is proactive in taking appropriate steps to tackle these. Case studies show that the centre's involvement with families helps build their resilience and take responsibility for their own safety and well-being. Parents identify how effective the centre is in raising their awareness about home safety, for example in using cupboard locks to stop toddlers opening kitchen-unit doors. Everyone was keen to let inspectors know how welcomed and respected they feel when they use the centre and how safe they feel as a result. 'Lovely staff who welcome you with open arms and always there to give support', was a typical comment. Staff are effectively trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework although its initiation is minimal. The very small number of children subject to a child protection plan in contact with the centre benefit from the multi-agency network of support as demonstrated by the speedy downgrading to 'child in need' status.

Courses, such as Parents as First Teachers (PAFT), promote positive parenting skills and empower parents to deal with challenging behaviour safely. They also focus on helping children build confident social skills. Opportunities, for example Stay and Play sessions run at the centre and Compton Village Hall, enable children to socialise and take part in lots of fun activities. Data for the reach area show that 66% of children achieve 78+ scale points in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, including at least six points in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. At 28%, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is narrower than seen nationally but is 4% above the local average. The centre is building closer links with pre-school settings to help it play a stronger role in promoting the learning and development of the most vulnerable young children in the area. The positive partnership with speech and language therapists who attend Stay and Play sessions supports children's improving communication and skills for the

future.

Parents' views contribute to shaping services, such as extending the opening time of the Monday Stay and Play session. The centre has recently recruited a volunteer from a minority ethnic background who sees this opportunity as helping build workplace skills in readiness for future paid employment. The centre has received three more expressions of interest following its publicity drive. However, there are currently no centre-led activities available to support parents' educational achievement or their future employment. Nevertheless, in spite of this remaining weakness, outcomes are improving and are satisfactory overall.

*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>3</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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>4</b>

## How good is the provision?

**3**

Centre staff know the families who use the centre well and, through referrals from health partners, are making progress with meeting specific needs. The provision of extended services at Compton is leading to increased engagement of those most requiring support. The quality of activities led by centre staff is good and evaluations show how valuable parents find them.

The lack of data about the proportion of different target groups in the areas means the centre is restricted in knowing whether it is engaging sufficiently well with all groups. This results in services being developed in response to referrals and, as such, the current range is fairly narrow as it comprises mainly baby groups, post-natal support, outreach and home visits.

The centre promotes the purposeful learning of children well, as reflected in their good achievement by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Activities such as Boost and Story-craft involve parents in building personal confidence and assertiveness. Good use is made of the toy library which includes multicultural

resources for parents to borrow. The provision for enabling adults' educational development is a shortcoming as there is not enough assessment of personalised learning needs.

Parents identify how valuable the centre's services are in helping them through times of acute crisis, for example domestic abuse. The partnership with the Benefits Information Service, including joint home visits, makes a discernible difference to some parents who have secured financial stability and better housing. Family support work is a strength and results in families who are most in need of support improving their lives, for example in coping with post-natal depression. One parent's comment is typical: 'The centre kept my sanity, getting me out of the house into a larger social circle. The staff have taught me many things such as songs to sing with my child.'

*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>4</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

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

**3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The centre is highly regarded by centre users and its partners, and staff are identified as 'dedicated, welcoming, flexible, responsive and keen to build together for better effectiveness'. The centre has come through a period of significant instability and, under the effective leadership of the centre manager, is firmly on an improving course with the right set of core priorities guiding its development.

The local authority is providing more data but there is still work to do to provide the centre with information on the target groups in its area together with the percentages achieving KPI so that it can benchmark its performance and achieve better outcomes. The local authority's oversight of the centre's work has usefully been informed by the centre manager's evaluation as part of the annual conversation. However, the local authority did not complete the process and monitoring arrangements to ensure full accountability still lack rigour. The reinstatement of a structured approach to the professional supervision of the centre manager and staff is a step in the right direction.

Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and result in families being safe. Staff appointments are vetted carefully and the centre is rigorous in making health and safety checks. Staff are alert to child protection matters and regular training helps keep their knowledge up to date. Their work with health partners, social care and



Homestart staff results in timely interventions and a secure safety net of support, especially for the most vulnerable.

Close attention is paid to equality and diversity and including everyone in activities. Families speak highly of how well the centre has helped remove barriers to their well-being, for example social isolation. Personal achievements are celebrated through the award of certificates, for example when a group of adults completed the first-aid course.

The centre manager organised a lunch for the new advisory board members to meet and share expectations. Inspector's discussions with board members show their clear grasp of responsibilities but they do not provide challenge to the centre. Parents are not represented on the board and have a restricted role in governance matters. The centre's self-evaluation provides an accurate audit of where strengths lie and what needs to be improved; however, the absence of targets in development planning curtails leaders' ability to fully evaluate the impact of the actions being taken.

Staff are working effectively to eradicate the remaining inadequacies and are already targeting resources more effectively as reflected in the increase in user engagement, particularly at Compton. This, together with the satisfactory outcomes, means that value for money is satisfactory.

*These are the grades for leadership and management.*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</b>

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

Findings from the concurrent Pangbourne Primary School inspection in relation to attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage and partnerships were taken into consideration.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected East Downlands Children's Centre on the 10 and 11 July 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We looked at evaluations of the centre's work and a range of documents and very much enjoyed chatting to you during activities. Thank you for your contribution to the inspection.

It was great to see such very new babies enjoying being at the centre's Bumps and Babes session and to hear mums share their experiences. It was also interesting to find out about the additional services you feel the centre could put on, for example childminder training, Story-craft sessions and adult-learning opportunities. We have asked the centre manager to encourage more families to use the centre and extend its services. It would be good if you could tell others to get in touch with the centre so that staff can respond to their needs too, especially those who are aiming to get back into work and would like some training courses or other support.

The strong partnership with the local health team results in some good quality services operating from the centre every week that help you to lead healthier lives. Having health professionals on hand at sessions to provide you with specific guidance on breastfeeding for example is a real asset. You told us that the staff foster your trust so that you are able to confide any concerns. We found out that the centre's interventions, support and guidance help to build families' resilience and ability to take responsibility for their own safety and well-being, particularly in times of personal crisis.

Courses, such as PAFT, empower parents to deal with any challenging behaviour positively. The Stay and Play sessions run at the centre and Compton Village Hall enable your children to socialise and take part in lots of fun activities. The centre is building closer links with pre-school settings to help it play a stronger role in promoting the learning and development of the most vulnerable young children in the area so that they can achieve as well as others as they get older. The links will also help children to transfer to school smoothly.

Parents make a positive contribution to the running of the centre, for example as volunteers, but no parents serve on the very new advisory board and we have asked the centre to address this. It is good to see how happy you are with services from your responses to the survey and in your evaluations following activities. It is important that you tell the centre how it can improve, as the centre manager is looking to make things even better. A plan is in place to direct future resources more precisely and meet assessed rather than perceived needs. It is important for clear priorities to be set given the level of staffing and we have asked the centre to set specific targets to help with this and also for the local authority to provide reach-specific data and to hold the centre's performance to account more rigorously.

You can support the centre by making sure your views are known and getting involved as an advisory board member or thinking about setting up a parents' forum if you have the time. We wish you every success for the future.

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