

Inspection report for Sure Steps Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent County Council
Inspection number	383833
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Phoenix Community Primary School URN 133961
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.

Report published: July 2012



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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 network manager and staff, representatives from the local authority, and the Local and the District Early Years Advisory Boards. They also spoke to partner agencies, for example, health services and social care, parents and other users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's action plan.

Information about the centre

This phase two centre was designated in June 2008 and fulfils the full core purpose of services. It is managed by the Local Early Years Advisory Board on behalf of the local authority, Kent County Council. This board reports directly to the District Early Years Advisory Board which, in turn, reports to the local authority's Children's Trust. The centre is part of a cluster of eight children's centres known as the 'Ashford locality'. The manager is responsible for the management of Sure Steps Children's Centre and the Willows Children's Centre. Services are available from Monday to Saturday, 52 weeks of the year from the purpose-built premises located within the grounds of Phoenix Community Primary School, and from several other venues in the community, including Bockhanger community hall.

The centre's reach area is the Bockhanger, Bybrook, Kennington and Little Burton Farm wards of Ashford, and encompasses eight deprived areas, two of which are in the 20% to 30% most deprived nationally. The number of children from birth to four years living in workless households rose to 22% in 2010/2011, slightly above the

national figure. The number of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, at 18.2%, is similar to the national picture.

There are 818 children under the age of five living in the reach area. The population is largely made up of White British heritage families, with a mix of other ethnic groups, including Nepalese and Polish families. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are in line with those expected levels 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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

The centre makes outstanding provision for the very large majority of families in its area. There is an excellent depth of understanding of changing local needs and a highly proactive approach to tackling, often complex, individual needs. As a result, outcomes are outstanding across all aspects and families are unanimous in their positive views of the centre and about the excellent levels of support they receive. 'No other service could do what they did for us' was a common view.

The centre has been highly effective in helping a large majority of adults achieve significant goals and improve their economic well-being. There are many outstanding examples of how their lives have been changed dramatically. A large number of parents are very actively involved as volunteers or as part of the very effective parents' forum and local advisory board and so they make an excellent positive contribution to the governance of the centre.

Safeguarding families is at the heart of the centre's work and the care, guidance and support they receive are outstanding. The exemplary work of the staff member known as the Safeguarding Champion, linked with highly effective partnerships with professionals and partner agencies, ensures that swift well-targeted action is taken to meet the needs of families, especially the most vulnerable.

The centre is highly inclusive and welcoming. Outreach workers have been particularly successful in ensuring that the increasingly high numbers who register

initially, go on to access and benefit from services. As a result, effective contact with all target groups is excellent.

Children who access the centre make excellent progress, especially in their speech and language and personal development. Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes are excellent across the reach area as a whole and the centre can claim a significant contribution to this. However there are no formal systems in place to track the centre's impact on children's longer-term development.

Leadership and management roles and responsibilities are crystal clear and families benefit greatly from the range of services that the links with the Ashford locality as a whole offer. This gives excellent value for money as staff and resources are deployed extremely effectively.

Outcomes are already outstanding but there is no sense of complacency. Those who use the centre, partners and the advisory boards are fully involved in the centre's self-evaluation which is based on sophisticated analysis of data, and in challenging the centre to continue to improve. Consequently, there is an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement because of the constant pursuit of excellence seen at all levels.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The centre and local authority should monitor the centre's impact on children's longer-term development and use the information gained to make its services even better by:
 - developing a system to track children's progress between the centre and school.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The centre has been highly effective in improving families' understanding of how to lead healthy lives. This is reflected in greatly improving outcomes in the centre's reach area for childhood obesity rates, down from 13.8% to 9.6% in the past twelve months, and breastfeeding rates, up from 37.7% to 43.8% in the same period. Very high immunisation rates and excellent take up of childhood checks show that the very large majority of families are fully engaged with health services. Excellent links with health practitioners mean that there is regular support for breastfeeding mothers and there are specific drop-in sessions, such as the Bladder and Bowel clinic. Fortnightly Fun Walks and Toddler Energy sessions encourage all ages to get active, and the Let's Get Growing sessions and free fruit at reception focus on healthy eating. The centre has had a very big impact on families' emotional and mental health, with very high attendance at courses, for example, to help with postnatal depression. Outcomes are excellent.

All families spoken to during the inspection feel totally safe at the centre. The great majority have developed an excellent understanding of how to keep their children safe through the centre's structured parenting programmes and first aid courses such as Bumps and Bruises. The centre uses events such as Child Safety Week to highlight specific concerns, for example, an increase in trampoline accidents.

The centre has been particularly successful in keeping the most vulnerable families safe because of excellent links with social care and other agencies. Consequently, almost all children subject to child protection plans come off intensive supervision and do not require it again. The same applies to families supported through Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes. The centre's excellent work with women who have experienced domestic abuse, including those living in the women's refuge, means that substantial numbers now have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data for the reach area show that children make excellent progress from their starting points, with 68.7% achieving 78+ points, compared to a national figure of 59%. In addition, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest narrowed significantly to 26.7%, which is well below the national figure of 31.4%. The centre makes a significant contribution to this because it has a consistent focus on national guidance for children's development in the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, there are no formal systems to track children's progress when the children move on to various schools, which limits the centre's ability to evaluate its longer-term impact and so provide even better support for children when they are in the centre.

Children make excellent progress in their speech and language development because parents of all registered two-year-olds are offered reviews and almost all accept. This early intervention has had a very positive impact on children's progress. The Learning Journeys of children who access the crèche show that they make excellent progress. There are very high levels of enjoyment evident at all centre activities, such as Toddler Energy, and children behave extremely well copying the positive relationships consistently modelled by adults.

Most of the adults who access services develop their skills very well and move on to work or further training. Parents' Pathways supports parents when they access courses run elsewhere such as those at the K College for adult education. This helps ensure positive outcomes for all parents. Staff are diligent in helping families to aspire to even greater achievements, for example by participation in the excellent structured volunteer programme. Currently, ten volunteers from a wide range of target groups are working in the centre. The in-depth training they receive means that they make an excellent contribution to the running of the centre. 'We couldn't function without them,' was how one staff member summed up the volunteers' input. Since the programme started, 90% have gone on to work or further education, with a very positive impact on their economic and social well-being.

The very active parents' forum has representatives from most target groups and plays a significant role in shaping services, as does the You Said, We Did board. There are also representative parents on the local advisory board who play a full part in its activities.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

The centre has been particularly successful in meeting the needs of the very large majority of families in its reach area. This is mainly because of good reach data and the team leader's and community involvement workers' excellent understanding of the needs of families in the local area. The needs of teenage and lone parents have been met exceptionally well by the centre, using services across the Ashford locality, for example, the Young Parents Group held at another centre. A high number of fathers attend the monthly Chill with Dad sessions. Leavers' Day celebrations and certificate award ceremonies ensure adults' and children's achievements are celebrated very well.

Families are helped to access high-quality advice and guidance on benefit entitlement, housing and job vacancies from centre staff and partner agencies, and through events such as the well-attended 'What Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up?' job fair. Such events have led to a high number of individual successes, for example, in securing roles as teaching assistants or youth workers.

Outreach work, often done in conjunction with partners, is taking services out to the community with the Gazebo-and-Go pop-up service and through activities held in schools and community centres. Champion (specialist) roles ensure that staff's experience and specialist knowledge are focused very effectively on specific areas, such as safeguarding. This is one of the keys to the outstanding care, guidance and support that the most vulnerable families receive. The centre has very successfully

transformed the lives of many families in times of crisis, such as when there have been serious domestic incidents. The many positive outcomes from the work of the One Stop Shop, to which victims of domestic abuse are directed, are very clear. A sizeable number of parents use its excellent support and guidance, ranging from legal services to police support. The impact of the centre's work was highlighted by one beneficiary who stated, 'I was in a dark, dark place and they brought me through.'

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leadership and management at all levels are outstanding. Governance arrangements linking the centre with the local and district advisory boards are highly effective. There is robust, regular review and challenge based on excellent knowledge and use of data on the local area and the extent of the centre's reach to target groups. The district board has set an even more ambitious target to reduce childhood obesity than the centre originally suggested.

Partners are fully involved in the governance process and in evaluating their own input to services as well as overall outcomes for families. This means there is a highly-effective shared sense of purpose as well as clear, measurable and ambitious targets laid out in an action plan. As a result, outcomes for the large majority of families, including the most vulnerable, are exceptionally high.

Value for money is outstanding because the resources of the locality are shared. This means that a much wider range of services and highly skilled, experienced staff are accessible to families. However, the centre still maintains its identity and provides services that meet the needs of its specific families, such as lone parents and those in the most deprived areas. The environment is very conducive to learning, being well resourced both indoors and out.

The centre has been very successful in narrowing the achievement gap between different groups by supporting families to improve their economic circumstances and to promote children's well-being, illustrated by the high number who have accessed Free for Two funded places for two-year-olds. Crèche facilities ensure that families who need support most can access courses. Excellent resources and buildings that are easily accessible mean that the great majority of disabled children and parents

are able to come to all activities as well as benefit from special resources, such as a sensory room.

The centre is very much a part of the local community. Involvement in regeneration projects and local events, such as the Kennington Summer Fair, as well as ensuring the oldest local resident was involved in the centre's Jubilee celebrations, ensures all feel welcome. The centre is also extremely inclusive as a result of the services it provides for different groups. For example, translators are available for Polish and Nepalese families using the centre and English language and numeracy classes are provided.

Exemplary safeguarding practices in the centre are overseen rigorously by the Safeguarding Champion. In the wider community, very wide-ranging training of all staff and the excellent relationships with a multitude of partners through regular link lunches and families' concerns meetings mean that the most vulnerable children and families are very well protected. Community involvement workers have been very successful in engaging families who may be reluctant to access services, but are most in need of support, and this has had a dramatic impact on many of their lives.

Excellent links with health services, voluntary organisations such as Homestart, Ashford Borough Council and local schools in the area also do much to enhance the opportunities and support available to all families.

Families are unanimous in their praise and confidence in the centre, as reflected in the very large majority expressing high levels of satisfaction in the most recent local authority survey. Their views are sought routinely by a number of methods and they are very eager to contribute at many levels.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to	1

meet its core purpose	
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	1

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sure Steps Children's Centre on 11 and 12 July 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

During our visit, we looked at your centre's action plan and numerous other documents. We spoke to a wide range of partner agencies working with the centre, such as from the health services and social care, as well as staff and members of the Local and the District Early Years Advisory Boards. We also visited all the centre activities taking place during the inspection, for example Toddler Energy and Baby Bouncers, and spoke to a substantial number of families using the centre.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. It was very helpful to hear how very positive you all feel about the centre, especially the commitment and support of the staff and how well you and your children are cared for, safeguarded and supported. Typical comments made to us were, 'No other service could do what they did for us,' and, 'Staff are brilliant, very open and approachable.'

The work of the various Champions across all the centres in the area, such as for breastfeeding and safeguarding, is especially effective. This, combined with the dedicated work of the community involvement workers, ensures you all feel extremely safe and secure and have complete confidence in staff to help you even in the most traumatic situations. One person summed up the views of many by saying, 'I was in a dark, dark place and they brought me through.'

You are given a great deal of support to lead healthy lives with opportunities for 'fun' walks and much help with breastfeeding and healthy eating tips for children. Your emotional health is also catered for very well through structured courses and individual support and guidance. Parenting courses and sessions, such as Bumps and

Bruises, and a strong focus on keeping your children safe, such as during Child Safety Week, mean that a very high number of you have a much better understanding of how to protect your children. Most of you have made use of the wide range of courses available to you across the various children's centres in the area, as well as at the local college, and this has had a very positive impact on outcomes for a great number of you. Improving your numeracy or English language skills, for example, and having access to excellent advice in relation to accessing the benefits of returning to work have made a great difference to your economic and social well-being.

Children who attend the centre make excellent progress and very many benefit from early support from specialist services such as speech and language therapy and the Bladder and Bowel sessions. The Early Years Foundation Stage results in the local area are excellent overall. However, there are no systems to monitor progress when the children move on to various schools; this would help the centre to improve its services for children even more. We have asked the centre and the local authority to work together to find a solution.

The centre is very welcoming and inclusive for families from all walks of life, especially as some activities take place out in the community, and so all the different groups feel welcome and are accessing services extremely well. This includes from all ethnic groups, fathers, teenage parents, those of you who are single parents. You all show each other high levels of respect and there is a strong sense that the centre is very much a part of the local community, such as through the centre's involvement in the Kennington Summer Fair.

You are often asked for your views, both formally and informally, and the parents' forum and You Said, We Did board ensure that these views are used very well to shape the services and meet your needs. It was particularly impressive to see how many of you are involved on the parents' forum and volunteer programme and what a positive impact this is having, not only to your confidence but also to the running of the centre. One member of staff said, 'We couldn't function without our volunteers.'

The very strong commitment from all those involved with the Sure Steps Children's Centre, the excellent expertise of staff and the huge impact they have had on outcomes for many families, coupled with exemplary leadership and management, mean that there is an outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

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