

Inspection report for Newlands Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent County Council
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Newlands Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Hand in Hand Nursery EY336529

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.

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 advisory board. 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 business plan.

Information about the centre

This phase one centre was designated in October 2006 and fulfils the full core purpose of services. The centre is part of a cluster of nine children's centres known as the Thanet locality. It is managed on behalf of the local authority, by the Thanet district advisory board, to which the steering group reports. The network manager is responsible for the management of Newlands Children's Centre and Callis Grange Children's Centre. Services are available from Monday to Saturday from 8.00am until 6.00pm, 49 weeks of the year from the purpose-built premises located within the grounds of Newlands School, and from several other venues in the community including other schools. Daycare is offered at The Hand in Hand Nursery on the children's centre site and is a commissioned service provided by the Thanet Early Years Project. This facility was not inspected at the same time as the children's centre inspection.

The centre's reach area includes part of the town centre, high-rise buildings, two housing estates and multi-occupancy housing adjacent to the sea front. Thanet is Kent's most deprived local authority district and the second most deprived in the south east of England. One of the eight Lower Super Output Areas in the reach area is within the top 1.99% of the deprivation index. The number of children aged from

birth to four years living in workless households is 25% and the number of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit is 18.3%.

There are 1,010 children aged under five years in the reach area, with 63% considered to be living in the top 30% most deprived areas of the country. The population is largely made up of White British Heritage families, estimated at 90%. There is no single other particularly large ethnic community, but the majority of minority ethnic families are of Eastern European origin. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below 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

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 good provision for the majority of families in its area and outcomes are good. There are outstanding levels of care, guidance and support because highly-effective safeguarding procedures ensure the most vulnerable families are protected and supported exceptionally well. A very common view voiced during the inspection was, ‘I cannot imagine what would have happened if the centre staff hadn’t been there.’ Key to this work is the centre’s highly effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) at an early stage so that the most vulnerable are supported by the most appropriate services. This has led to the majority of children subject to child protection plans being supported to ‘step down’ to less intensive intervention.

Over the past two years, the proportion of children and adults who are benefiting from a wide range of high quality services has grown substantially due to the network manager’s good organisation and motivation of staff, and very effective team and outreach work. Consequently, most families from the area of highest deprivation are registered and the large majority accesses services through the centre. Families from all target groups feel strongly that they have a voice in shaping centre services and the active Friends of Newlands (parent forum) are a key part of this. However, the number of parents who represent the centre on the steering group and Thanet Advisory Board has recently been affected by absences at

meetings that have not been able to be filled at short notice.

Strong partnerships with a large number of agencies, such as health services and the adjacent nursery and school, are based on mutual professional respect and frequent sharing of information. This is helping increasing numbers of children and adults across all target groups understand how to lead healthy lives, keep safe and to make good progress in a wide range of achievements, as well as build positive relationships. Over half the adults attend some form of training or adult learning and there are examples of where they have then gone on to employment. However, the centre is not yet tracking the longer term impact of adults' economic well-being after having laid the foundations to enable so many to be 'work ready'.

The centre is very welcoming and is strongly committed to promoting equality and diversity. Literature is available in the most commonly spoken languages, such as Polish, and posters promote understanding of different life choices. The building is easily accessible by disabled families adding to its inclusive ethos.

Good outcomes for the majority of families have already been secured. Concerted action is being undertaken to overcome any specific aspects identified from the accurate self-evaluation, as areas for further development. The action plan has a sensible number of priorities with challenging, measurable targets that make good use of available data, as well as staff's extensive local knowledge, to target resources at the most vulnerable. Leadership and management at all levels are good and the network manager has had a significant impact in her two years at the centre. Consequently, there is a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Widen the pool of parents available to attend steering group and advisory board meetings so that more are regularly involved in the strategic management and governance of the centre.
- Develop a consistent method to track the medium- and long-term progress and achievements of adults who have accessed centre services and measure the centre's impact in getting families back to work and securing their economic well-being.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre has a strong focus on helping families' understanding of how to be healthy through regular healthy walks attended by high numbers, free fruit available in the reception and during activities, and courses such as Food is Fun where children become absorbed in making healthy meals. This focus is in response to fluctuating childhood obesity rates which fell substantially in 2010, but rose again to 12% in 2011, slightly above the local level. Breastfeeding rates have improved dramatically from very low levels to approximately 35%, above the district average,

as a result of the strong links with health services, high numbers accessing support groups and the work of numerous peer breastfeeding helpers. Immunisation rates are very high indicating good levels of engagement from the very large majority of families. Outcomes for those with emotional or mental health issues are good because of close links with a range of voluntary and statutory services. As a result, the large majority of families feel they have much healthier lifestyles.

Families using the centre, especially those in often highly stressful circumstances, are unanimous that the staff have their trust to provide the support they need to keep their families safe. The centre's early intervention with CAFs, support for looked after children and assisting a very large number of families to access funded childcare for two-year-olds, has been pivotal in safeguarding the most vulnerable families. A very wide range of structured parenting classes has equipped parents with the knowledge and understanding of how to deal with their children's behaviour or medical needs. A slight increase in the actual numbers of emergency hospital admissions in the reach area was immediately analysed and responded to by the centre. Picking up that the main reasons were falls and accidental poisoning, Child Safety Week focused on educating parents on keeping toxic fluids safe. Home visits resulted in free safety equipment, such as stair gates and smoke alarms, being provided for the most vulnerable.

The very strong links with Newlands School and The Hand in Hand Nursery, situated in the centre's building, ensure that children's early learning and development are at the core of the centre's work. Children settle very quickly when they move on to other settings as a result. The impact has been very strong, with greatly improving Early Years Foundation Stage results in 2011, showing good and sometimes exceptional progress from starting points below age expected levels. Preliminary results for this year from the school to which the highest proportion of children transfer indicate that many children have far exceeded expectations. At 26.6%, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is reducing more quickly than seen nationally. The centre's work with speech and language therapists and courses focusing on boys' development have a positive impact on children's achievement.

Children and adults show high levels of enjoyment at activities such as baby massage and English language classes and this helps a large number of those most in need of intervention and support to build new skills. A very wide range of courses for adults has been offered over the past two years in particular. Adults say they have benefited greatly from expanding their knowledge and skills, such as cake decoration, as well as accredited courses and taster sessions, for example, the introduction to childcare. One comment succinctly sums up many, 'It's a gateway into activity, socialising and development; it's like a magic door.' The majority of adults' confidence levels have increased substantially and there are examples where individuals have progressed to work or further education, but the centre is not systematically following up those who do.

Children behave well in the centre and strong relationships are formed amongst adults too. Families' views canvassed by members of the parent forum, and through

regular evaluations, the suggestions box and 'talking postcards', shape services very effectively. Parents do sit on the steering group and advisory board but their attendance is variable. The work of the two volunteers is much valued by the centre and this role has been an effective stepping stone in the past for moving on to employment.

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	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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The large majority of children under five are registered with the centre, with particularly high numbers from workless households, teenage parents and those from minority ethnic groups. Fathers are engaging well with services through active birth classes, baby massage and a specific weekly group meeting on Saturdays. Because the centre takes families' views into account, the activities meet their needs well and retention and participation rates are high.

Personal development and achievement are celebrated well through awarding certificates and highlighting individual 'journeys' with photographs in the reception area. Children's communication and language skills and their personal development are enhanced greatly by the well-planned activities and widening their experiences, such as an organised walk to see the Olympic torch relay. The centre's work in supporting a substantial number of families to access funded two-year-old daycare and high-quality crèche facilities have had a very positive impact. This has not only improved children's learning and development but has also provided adults, including those most in need of support, with the opportunity to develop their own achievements. 'I couldn't have done a fraction of this without the children's centre,' is a commonly held view.

Families from all backgrounds are unanimous in feeling that they receive excellent, bespoke levels of care, guidance and support across many aspects of their lives, but

especially in times of crisis, such as serious domestic violence incidents or child protection issues. Very wide ranging advice and guidance are available for smoking, alcohol or drug misuse and sexual health, leaving families much better equipped to deal with problems. Highly effective links with agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau ensure timely access to legal advice or about benefits. Targeted provision and groups for families with specific need, such as children on the autistic spectrum, ensure the excellent levels of care, guidance and support meet the needs of all target groups.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership, management and governance at all levels are good and there are very clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The network manager provides excellent day-to-day management and leads by example, creating a very strong team ethos. Accurate self-evaluation, linked with good use of data, is enabling the centre to target the groups and aspects that most need support. There is a consistent focus on improving the numbers accessing services, especially from the most vulnerable groups, and in showing sustained improvement in outcomes, with very rapid progress made in more recent times.

Resources are managed well and staff deployment across the network is managed very effectively. Enterprising activities, such as the £1 book sales and clothes swap, are self-funding and do much to improve outcomes and circumstances for families including those most in need of support. The building is well used by families and the high-quality resources, including the crèche facility, encourage families to engage well. As a result, the centre gives good value for money.

Everyone is made to feel very welcome at the centre as soon as they are greeted by the receptionist. 'Staff are not 'us and them'; we're a real community,' was how the centre's ethos was described by one parent. There is zero tolerance of discrimination in any form and the mix of families accessing the centre reflects the make up of the community. Many families spoke about how they have made long-lasting friendships with an eclectic group that they may otherwise not have had the benefit of meeting and this is contributing well to community cohesion.

Safeguarding families permeates all the centre's work. Excellent procedures and very

high levels of staff training ensure that where there are any possible concerns, such as domestic violence or child protection matters, staff act immediately. Clear protocols to make and respond to referrals from a wide range of services, such as health and Play and Learning Support (PALS), combined with frequent exchanges of information with the nursery and adjoining school, result in the correct level of multi-agency support being called into force. This has a very positive impact on the care and support the most vulnerable families receive. Risk assessments are rigorous and the systems for vetting and recruiting staff fully meet requirements.

Strong partnerships including adult education, childminders and voluntary organisations all contribute to the good, and improving, outcomes for families, including the most vulnerable. Tailor-made solutions and quick responses to families' requests, such as for specific courses in literacy and numeracy, are facilitated because of those strong relationships. Families' good engagement with the centre results from their very high levels of satisfaction. As a consequence of very effective outreach work, more and more families are being encouraged to benefit from the good provision, 'I'd recommend it to anyone,' sums up families' feelings.

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	1
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

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

Newlands Primary School was last inspected on 21 and 22 March 2011 and The Hand

in Hand Nursery was inspected on 25 March 2011.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Newlands Children's Centre on 18 and 19 July 2012. We judged the centre as good 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, The Hand in Hand Nursery and Newlands School, as well as staff and members of the advisory board. We also visited all the centre activities taking place during the inspection, for example the English language course and baby massage, 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, 'I cannot imagine what would have happened to me if the centre staff hadn't been there,' and, 'I would recommend it to anyone.'

The centre is doing a good job in helping you to understand how to keep yourselves and your children healthy and safe. This is through providing many opportunities to learn about healthy eating and exercise and focusing on home safety. Many of you said how much your children enjoy the free fruit available in reception and they now see it as a treat rather than having sweets. The centre's strong links with health services mean that many of you attend baby clinics or breastfeeding support groups and this is having an impact on your children's health too. Where you have emotional needs, such as postnatal depression, you have a lot of confidence in staff to help and support you. For a high number of you the centre has been a lifeline. The early preventative work that the centre does to support children, by working effectively with other agencies, means that the outcomes for those children are nearly always good.

Everyone enjoys their time at the centre a great deal and children are making good, and sometimes outstanding, progress in their early learning and development. Courses such as boys' development and other parenting sessions and the chance to buy books at very low cost to support reading all add to the positive outcomes in children's achievement. Because there are very good links with the school and the nursery through the work of the qualified teacher, staff there know the children well and how best to support them and so children settle quickly.

Many of you spoke very highly about the range of courses that adults can attend such as improving your English, learning a new craft or finding out what it would be like to be a childminder. As one person put it, 'It doesn't matter what you need, they'll run courses if they can.' These courses have done much to raise your confidence and self-esteem and for some of you have led to employment. However, the centre is not yet checking to see what the longer-term benefits of attending the courses are for many of you and this is something we have asked it to now improve.

There are many ways for you to express your views about the centre, such as through the suggestions box, talking postcards and evaluations. The parent forum does a good job canvassing views which the centre is quick to respond to, such as setting up a gardening group. However, there are fewer of you who formally represent the centre on the steering group and the advisory board and it would be good if more of you were willing to do this to enable you to take a more formal role in the centre's governance.

In-depth knowledge about the local area and where there are specific needs, combined with the effective work of community involvement workers and the team leader, has been effective in attracting more and more families to the centre to benefit from the services it offers. This is especially so for some groups such as those who are not working and for young parents. The centre is also very welcoming and friendly and everyone is included and this encourages families to keep coming back and to try different courses and services. A common view was, 'Staff are not 'us and them'; we're a real community.'

There is a strong commitment from staff to support as many families as possible and especially those who need it most; this has already had a big impact on the lives of many of you. Leadership, management and governance at all levels are good and the network manager provides excellent day-to-day leadership and has overseen many improvements in her two years in post. As a result, the centre is well placed to continue to improve.

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