

Inspection report for Gillingham Children's Centre

Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	407004
Inspection dates	15–16 August 2012
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

Centre leader	Amanda Davis
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff and representatives of partner agencies. They also met with managers, members of the advisory board, and a representative of the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Gillingham Children's Centre opened in October 2008. It was designated to provide a range of services for the local community, including family support, adult learning, and sessions for children. It is located within walking distance of the town centre. The centre shares premises with the local youth centre and delivers most of its services from community sites in the local area. The local authority provides the centre's overall governance.

In April 2011, children's centres in the local area began a period of review which resulted in cluster arrangements being established. As a result, Gillingham Children's Centre is one of four centres that share the same overall manager, although it remains designated as an individual centre.

The centre's reach area comprises a broad range of economic circumstance: some areas are very affluent whilst others are in the most 20% nationally deprived areas. The proportion of families who live in workless households is 14%, which is below national and local averages. There are 18% of families who are currently on benefits. Children living in the centre's catchment area enter early years provision with levels of development that are variable, with some above and some below national expectations.

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

Gillingham Children's Centre provides a good service for families who live within its catchment area. It has managed the local re-organisation of 2011 well and works effectively with the majority of families who live in the local area. Services are targeted effectively to reach those groups most in need, and almost all families identified as economically most in need have regular engagement with the centre through outreach, groups and individual support. Good-quality provision allows families to enjoy outcomes that are at least good in all aspects. Parents describe services as, 'Where staff go above and beyond what is expected,' and, 'Staff are always on duty to give coping strategies.' Safety of children and families is given particularly high regard at the centre, and outcomes for staying safe are excellent. The centre's safeguarding procedures are outstanding. Exemplary procedures and expert knowledge focus wholly on improving outcomes for children to keep them safe. Partner agencies prioritise safeguarding very well and work collaboratively with the centre to keep children safe. The provision for care, guidance and support of children and their families is outstanding.

There is strong governance by managers and the local authority. This is underpinned by accurate evaluation and analysis of the areas' needs, and challenging targets are set for future development. The centre has good capacity for sustained improvement. Some parents are involved in governance through activity on the advisory board and parents' forum. Almost all parents contribute to evaluation of services and their ideas clearly help shape future provision. For example, the recent re-organisation led to a discontinuation of a popular 'drop-in' group in favour of more targeted services. Parents have expressed their need for this service, and it has been re-instated on a monthly basis as a result.

Partnership working with other agencies is outstanding. The services available to families are significantly enhanced by fully integrated and high-quality services that contribute towards all outcomes on strategic and frontline levels. The centre is highly proactive in developing and maintaining highly positive working relationships with a wide range of partners that bring their expertise to meet an exceptionally broad

range of needs, including benefits advice, postnatal care, and early years provision for vulnerable families.

Collaboration with early years providers in the area is very good and the provision of two-year-old funded places yields excellent outcomes for many of those children involved. At the centre, provision for children's learning and development is good. Staff plan activities that support children's learning and development well, although some activities are not linked well enough to the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework. This means that opportunities for improving learning outcomes for all children are somewhat limited.

The proportion of registrations and levels of attendance have increased for almost all groups in recent years, despite some slight slowing of this trend as a result of the 2011 re-organisation. The leadership team targeted the most 'hard pressed' members of their local area and has sustained engagement with 97.6% of this group, which represents 23% of the catchment area. The centre has had less success engaging the 9.5% of families identified as of 'moderate means' living in levels of deprivation that are less severe than those 'hard pressed' families. It has already made engagement with this group a development priority for the coming months.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase levels of engagement of those families living in areas identified as of 'moderate means' so the majority of this group enjoy sustained improvement in their outcomes.
- Develop provision for children who attend centre services by strengthening links between learning opportunities and the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework in all relevant activities to support children's progress better.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The lives of children and their families improve significantly as a result of their use of centre services and outcomes are good. The extent to which children and families are safe is outstanding. Children subject to a child protection plan have excellent outcomes because staff have expert knowledge. They constantly evaluate progress on the basis of how much positive change for the child is evident. They are highly reactive to crisis moments to keep children safe, and this work is significantly enhanced by superb partnership working with the social care team. Similarly, the implementation of early intervention strategies is highly effective and prevents escalation of concerns through diligent onward monitoring. The Common Assessment Framework process supports vulnerable children extremely well. Furthermore, the centre supports a number of other agencies in use of the Common Assessment Framework so children in the area are safeguarded very effectively.

Health outcomes are good. Data for the area show that all aspects, including rates of breastfeeding (66%) and levels of childhood obesity (7.61%), are better than county and national averages. Centre needs analysis indicates some families need support to improve their health. Staff work very well with health professionals and have been successful in improving rates of breastfeeding and cessation of smoking, for example. Emotional health has improved for many vulnerable parents and women who suffer from postnatal depression. Individual support and groups such as Start Art, which builds self-confidence, the Under Ones group and parenting sessions make a positive difference. Children who live and attend early years provision in the area make generally good progress overall. Schools believe children are well prepared for their transition to school through concerted collaborative provision to help families prepare for this.

Children attending centre groups enjoy good provision that supports their learning and development well, especially their personal, social and emotional development and communication skills. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from the inclusive provision to enjoy tailored care. However, planning for some activities does not provide enough challenge to help them learn more. Adults achieve well, most notably in their parenting skills and personal development. Adults with Eastern European heritage access English courses at the centre or others in the cluster. This adult learning improves families' economic and social well-being effectively, as does a range of expert and close partnership working with agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Family Learning. For example, the Citizens Advice Bureau has worked with parents to give benefit advice. As a result, families have gained thousands of pounds overall that were previously not claimed.

Adults express high levels of satisfaction with centre services. Positive relationships between staff and parents are highly evident and the centre has a very happy atmosphere. Parents say it is an enjoyable place to be and everyone treats one another with great respect. The volunteer programme is well organised and recruitment procedures prepare adults for seeking employment in the future. Several adults have moved from being volunteers 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	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	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	2

parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment

How good is the provision?

2

Managers accurately assess need in the area and have a clear understanding of those not yet involved with the centre. They competently use data and good local knowledge to do this, together with partner liaison. Services meet the needs of the large majority of families who use the centre. Continuous evaluation ensures changing needs are met. For example, the Ready, Steady, School programme was developed to support an identified need and is targeted effectively to aid successful transition to school. A strength of the centre's provision is outstanding care, guidance and support. Excellent and personalised outreach work supports families most in need of support exceptionally well and empowers them to improve their overall well-being. Parents are respected and fully involved in their own support planning through honest communication that works towards improving their outcomes. In all provision, high emphasis is given to parents taking ownership to improve their family circumstances. This means that improvements are sustainable over time.

Learning and development provision is enjoyable for parents and children. Adult services are better than those provided by the centre for children. Targeted groups enjoy Exploring Together which covers all outcomes and includes cooking healthy foods and safety advice. The centre celebrates achievement well. Certificates and events recognise participation, effort and success and these raise adults' self-esteem. Children's sessions are good, but activities do not link well enough to the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre has already identified this as a development priority and staff training is booked to take place next month. Groups are delivered at venues located throughout the local area which means they are accessible to a wide range of centre users. For example, parents and children greatly enjoyed an interactive story session delivered by centre staff at the library.

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

The centre delivers effective services that are rigorously evaluated against clear success criteria. The senior leadership team provides appropriate services and

improved outcomes, especially for those most in need. Leadership is given strong support and challenge from the local authority and the authority performs its governance role well, driving further improvement through frequent communication and a thorough annual conversation process. The advisory board fulfils its duties, and is in the process of being re-organised to suit the needs of the area more accurately. Development planning and performance management link to the evaluation of services. Managers are rigorous in their accounting to provide a wide range of services. They make good use of partners and additional community venues and the centre provides good value for money.

Managers make good use of data and know precisely which groups of the area are most engaged with services. They plan effectively to attract interest from all groups in the community through targeted outreach and special events that advertise the centre. This has led to a very large increase in the number of families attending from those areas defined as 'hard pressed'. Provision for families with disabilities and those who have children with additional needs is inclusive. Parents say staff 'never judge' them or their children and they always feel welcome and well served. Premises have accessible areas available for the delivery of services. The use of additional premises in the local area means groups are within easy reach of many families. Those children in receipt of two-year-old funding make outstanding progress overall, and this contributes to effective narrowing of the achievement gap in the centre's catchment area. The centre has already identified the need to engage more with households in areas of moderate deprivation, and planning is well underway to address this.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. All staff make these their top priority in all aspects of their work. All adults who work with families are properly checked. Child protection procedures are clearly written and wholly robust. Early intervention is given exceptionally high emphasis to prevent situations occurring where possible and this is highly successful in supporting vulnerable families. Staff are tenacious in referral and support processes to achieve the best outcomes for children. All centre services teach positive strategies for managing children's behaviour and give high regard to developing adults' self-esteem to help families stay safe in the future. These include parenting sessions and courses for those who have experienced domestic abuse. This work is greatly enhanced by superb partner work with a broad range of highly relevant agencies including health and social care.

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	1
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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Gillingham Centre on 15 and 16 August 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

There are many good aspects of the centre, and a few of the best are listed below.

- Managers are good at understanding the local area and what families need most. They listen to your views, and they make changes in services when they are able so groups meet your needs as well as possible.
- All staff work hard to make sure you and your children are safe. Procedures for safeguarding and staying safe are outstanding. Staff make sure that premises are safe to use, and that people working at the centre are checked properly. Many of you told us how much you trust staff to help you improve your family life. When children are at risk, staff work quickly and expertly to make sure they are protected.
- The centre is a happy environment where everyone receives a warm welcome and everyone is respected.
- Services run by the centre and with partner agencies, such as health services and Citizens Advice Bureau, make a positive difference to your well-being and economic circumstances. The centre's work with these partner agencies is

outstanding because they work very well together to provide highly relevant and high quality services.

- The level of care, guidance and support given to families is outstanding. All staff give a very high level of care to families, especially when there are difficulties and challenges. The outreach workers are particularly effective in their roles.

As part of the usual inspection process, we have asked the centre to develop their services further. Activities for children are enjoyable and they help children develop their confidence and communication skills well. We have asked the centre to make better use of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework so your children can achieve even more than they do at present. We have also asked the centre to carry on increasing the numbers of families who know about, and use, the centre. The managers have already planned how they are going to achieve our points for development.

We enjoyed visiting your centre in Gillingham. Thank you to those of you who took time to meet with us. It was very helpful to hear your opinions of the centre.

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