

Inspection report for Folkestone Early Years Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	383933
Inspection dates	4–5 October 2012
Reporting inspector	David Scott

Centre leader	Sue Monckton
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Dover Road Folkestone Kent CT20 1QF
Telephone number	01303 212720
Fax number	01303 212721
Email address	susan.monckton@actionforchildren.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Honey Pot Nursery

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: October 2012



Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

361

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2012



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 manager and district manager of the centre and other staff, including representatives from the local authority and health service professionals. Inspectors talked to parents and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including evaluations of services, safeguarding arrangements, case studies, other records, development plans and local authority data.

Information about the centre

Folkestone Early Years Children's Centre opened to the public in October 2009 under phase two of the Sure Start programme. The centre is housed in a purpose-built building. The centre is managed by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. There is also an advisory group which provides additional direction to the leadership and management of the centre. The centre is open for 52 weeks a year from Monday to Friday, and some weekends.

The children's centre reach area serves the harbour district of east Folkestone. The population is increasingly ethnically and socially mixed. The largest groups are mainly from White British heritage. Furthermore, this centre is also used by families out of the reach area. A below average proportion of families speak English as an additional language.

Overall, levels of deprivation are much higher than average in the reach area. A high proportion of all families in the area are lone parents and an above average proportion of parents are young mothers. Almost 20 per cent of all children under five are from workless households. An above average proportion of households receive benefits in the reach area.

There are 835 children under 5 registered out of just under 900 families in the reach area. The centre meets all elements of the core purpose, which include health services, family support, and outreach activities to promote children's and parents' all-round development and well-being. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those expected 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

Folkestone Early Years Children's Centre provides a good and rapidly improving service that meets parents' and children's needs well, including those of the most vulnerable. Recent surveys show that parents are unanimous in their praise for the welcome that they receive, and enjoy attending. They identify that the centre enriches their lives because they gain confidence, friendship and new skills, including parenting skills which support their family life. This was summed up by a parent who commented, 'If it wasn't for the centre, a lot of people wouldn't get the support they need, particularly the emotional support from staff and meeting other people in similar situations.'

The centre works actively and successfully to enable all target groups to access its services. It very effectively meets the needs of those who have experienced domestic violence so that they are empowered to reshape their lives. The centre has already identified the need to increase the engagement of fathers still further, by providing more specific activities promoting positive male role models.

Staff have very good knowledge of the families who use the centre. In particular, the care, guidance and support offered are exemplary because they are well tailored to individual needs and help families exceptionally well in times of crisis. Support is sensitive and underpinned by an effective partnership with a wide range of services. Highly effective coordination of inter-agency work, together with robust child protection arrangements, result in effective safeguarding procedures. A common view was, 'Nothing is too much trouble for the children's centre staff. Everyone is very friendly and no one ever has an off-day.'

As a result of effective partnerships with health, education and social welfare agencies, most parents are enabled to improve their family lives, leading to good outcomes overall. A large majority of parents are delighted with the way that activities help them to learn positive behaviour management techniques, overcome stress and adopt healthy lives. Of note is the success the centre has had in encouraging volunteers to gain key skills to enable them to move on to opportunities in childcare and further education.

Case studies and anecdotal evidence demonstrate that most families are improving their economic well-being. The range of adult education courses is developing and specifically targeted at workless or low-income families. Well-resourced, attractively presented activities inspire children to explore and investigate the world around them.

The centre's capacity to sustain improvement is good. Aided by well-coordinated and focused governance, the district manager and centre manager work well in partnership to evaluate the centre's strengths and areas for development. Everyone is ambitious to make the centre outstanding, and they have already had considerable success in improving outcomes for families. However, self-evaluation, although accurate, does not make full use of all the available data to set challenging, measurable targets so that the outcomes for most families are the highest possible.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Embed systems of evaluation so that the centre can demonstrate the impact of services on families more effectively and, as a result, outcomes are evidenced even more clearly by using data as rigorously as possible to evaluate the success of the activities for users of the centre.
- Seek to engage fathers/male carers still further by planning activities that promote positive male role models.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The achievement of children and families is good overall because children make good progress from their starting points, and last year 56% of children achieved at least 78+ points and six points in communication, language and literacy, personal and social development. The centre remains focused on improving early language, communication and social skills for all children through good modelling from staff. 'Stay and play' sessions are very popular with parents. For example, during one session, parents were encouraged to understand how their child learns through play and exploring. The achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is steadily closing and has reduced in the last year by 4.1% to 30.4% in 2011–12.

Health outcomes are good. Centre services have begun to make a valuable contribution to increasing rates of breastfeeding. At 33%, the rates of sustained breastfeeding in the catchment area are improving, although they remain lower than

those found county-wide. The centre manager and staff have already highlighted this as an area for improvement in their development plan. Levels of childhood obesity have been falling for some time and at 8.9% are lower than local and national figures. All groups do well in widening their commitment to developing healthy lifestyles through projects such as the 'Walkie-talkie' and 'Food Champion' programmes. Evaluations of activities to improve dental health and increase smoking cessation indicate that the large majority of users benefit from the centre's courses. Immunisation rates are improving steadily, and are now above national averages.

The rate of admissions to hospital accident and emergency departments over the last three years for minor injuries, although fluctuating, is below the national average. The work of the centre makes a strong contribution through its popular first aid courses and taster sessions for both staff and parents. There is clear evidence that vulnerable families are very effectively supported through nurturing and parenting programmes. These ensure that parents are helped to manage their children with increasing success and this often helps keep families together or enables regular access to care by others.

A number of parents are routinely engaged in the governance of the centre through sitting on the advisory board and being a part of the forum, 'Parent Action Group'. As a result, most parents give their views on the centre and these ideas shape future services. The centre plays a positive role in the local community as a result of very effective partnerships and word-of-mouth recommendations. There is a strong ethos of friendly and mutual respect which is evident between families and staff. Families who speak English as an additional language receive translation support when needed, so that those families less confident in the use of English can access essential information in a language with which they are familiar.

Adult learning courses and referral for employment advice are helping improve the economic well-being of the majority of families. Case studies indicate good individual support and training where over half of adults gain qualifications or progress to training, education or 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

Parents describe provision as a very professional and personalised experience and agree that staff know them very well. As one parent commented, 'The people who work here are really smashing and super, super friendly.'

Parents, especially young mums, welcomed the visits and advice from the 'Food Champion' and the community chef on healthy eating. As one parent explained, 'My daughter now eats plums and drinks milk which she wouldn't do at home.' Further advice is offered on healthy lunch boxes and the centre provides nutritious snacks during sessions.

Parents greatly value the specifically targeted 'drop in' services, such as 'Baby-massage' for assisting in the bonding of baby and parent and promoting emotional health and well-being. These help to reassure parents about their children's development and offer guidance when additional help is needed.

The centre is focused on providing services for families with the greatest need and is successful in working with target groups such as workless families, teenage parents and those experiencing domestic violence. However, although data show that 34% of the fathers are joining in a range of activities, such as 'Baby Bears', others are proving more difficult to reach. The centre acknowledges that this is an area for further development.

Users' views and case studies reflect the excellent support and guidance which is well tailored to individual needs and the tremendous difference it has made to their lives. The engagement of isolated families, supported by the centre's outreach services, is excellent. Levels of care and support are very impressive, particularly in times of crisis and despair. This is demonstrated in the ways staff very skilfully in gaining parents' confidence to speak about domestic violence. The centre works very closely with local women's groups such as the 'Family Champion' to provide information and support. Women agree that they are empowered to make better relationships and feel good about themselves. As one parent said, 'Staff have helped me to build up my confidence and self-esteem. I am now a completely different person from the one I was a year ago.' Often, members of this group overcome their problems, return to work or go on to further training.

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 energised leadership and management of the centre have had a positive impact on outcomes. The centre leader and her team have created a welcoming and friendly setting where relationships are warm and positive. Equality and diversity are promoted well, and there is a strong culture of respect and inclusion. The centre staff are proactive in ensuring that parents are empowered to tackle any discrimination. They plan regular events to develop families' understanding of differing cultures and they are sensitive in removing any barriers to engagement. Families with disabled children and those with special educational needs are well supported through universal services and access to a sensory room. As a result, the centre is closing the achievement gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest of the community by removing barriers such as low self-esteem, gaps in knowledge and understanding, low levels of education and poor parenting skills so that they can thrive educationally and socially and lead healthier lives. The centre provides good value for money, runs extremely smoothly and uses its resources effectively to meet the needs of the reach area and wider community. As a result, the needs of families are met well, leading to good outcomes. Families using the centre express high levels of satisfaction and state that provision and support are good and make a strong contribution to their families' well-being.

Staff and partners share high expectations and ambitions, and their drive has improved services for families. Professionals from a range of agencies make an effective commitment to partnership working and to improving the life chances of children and families, which results in good and increasingly successful outcomes. The centre actively seeks and welcomes the views of all families and uses them well to develop the provision. For example, the 'Parents Action Group' raised funds to refurbish the Parents' Room – a place where parents and friends can meet together for mutual support, and where children have the opportunity to socialise and engage in positive play.

Governance and accountability arrangements are well defined. There are clear links between strategic planning and service provision, leading to improvements. These, together with multi-agency partnership, ensure that services are well integrated and reflective so that there is a good flow of information between the centre and partners. Outcomes for families are good because the centre monitors the quality

and impact of services and identifies how it can improve them.

Arrangements for the use of the Common Assessment Framework result in high quality safeguarding support. This includes a very strong partnership between social and health workers. The centre has effective procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet government guidelines and include high quality checks on adults and a carefully planned approach to child protection. Well-trained staff ensure that through effective multi-agency cooperation, the safeguarding of children is given a high priority. They also equip parents with the skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure that safety arrangements are implemented within the home.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

The Honey Pot Nursery, which operates within the Folkestone Early Years Children's Centre, was inspected on 16 March 2012 and was judged to be outstanding overall.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected Folkestone Early Years Children's Centre on 4 and 5 October 2012. We judged the centre to be good and rapidly improving.

Thank you very much for speaking with us and letting us come into your sessions. The information you gave us helped us to make our judgements. Many of you commented on how 'Staff are so professional and very friendly and welcoming'. Someone said, 'My week is built around the activities of the centre and it is a fantastic place to be.' Like you, we were very impressed by the warmth of support and welcome provided by the manager, staff and members of the advisory board. Everyone works together to make sure that your individual needs are well met because partnerships with different organisations are good. You often spoke about the fantastic help that you receive and how the centre is a lifeline to you. The excellent care, guidance and support work of the centre reduces depression and loneliness, and enables you to overcome problems and have fun. Workless households and teenage parents benefit considerably from the high quality support of the centre. We were especially impressed in the way that the centre supports families facing domestic violence.

The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities they offer. They change how and when they do some things because of what you say. A common view was, 'The centre provides approachable, friendly services that offer advice on essential things but you can also get support for small personal issues.' This ensures that you and your children are safe and develop important life skills and emotional well-being.

We enjoyed seeing many of the activities and looking at your comments following evaluations. These clearly show how you gain much from the parenting courses, such as first aid and healthy living activities. There are good opportunities for you to learn life-changing skills linked to getting back to work. You spoke about having interesting activities to do and plenty of help with the challenges of running a home and child development.

You enjoy the sessions with your children such as 'Baby massage' and 'Stay and Play' which contribute much to your children's development. You are helped to understand how your children learn. Everyone seems to get on well together at the centre and there are good opportunities to volunteer. We found out you have learnt new things and developed new skills. For example, we were delighted to learn that several of you have become volunteers and members of the 'Parents' Action Group' and make an increasingly positive contribution to the life of the centre. Most adults gain qualifications, go on to further training or find work. The centre is successful at engaging with the large majority of families that really need some help and support but it still needs to find ways to attract more fathers/male carers from local families.

Leadership is good. Leaders are always looking at ways to improve. The centre collects much information from you, the local authority and its partners. We have

asked staff to use this information more effectively so that they can more accurately show how the centre is making a difference to you and your families.

Your contributions to the inspection were greatly appreciated and we would like to thank those of you who took the time to meet with us. Thank you for your willingness to talk with us about some of your personal experiences.

Best wishes to you and your families.

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