

Inspection report for Lydd'le Stars Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	384000
Inspection dates	31 October–1 November 2012
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Temporary Network Manager	Julia Easton
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Lydd Primary School (URN): 118560
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 the centre management team, the local authority, health professionals, representatives from the advisory board and steering group, frontline staff, parents and partner agencies. They observed the centre's work, completed a tour of the reach area and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Lydd'le Stars Children's Centre is one of eight centres in the Shepway district of Kent. It is a phase two centre which was designated in February 2008 and serves a very rural community in the Romney Marsh area of Kent. Lydd is in the top 1% of areas in the country with a significant lack of access to services. There are approximately 330 children aged under five years living in the area. Current data indicate that the centre has registered, and regularly reaches, 93% of families living in the area. The nearest towns are over a 30-mile round trip away and transport links are some of the poorest in Kent with some areas of the community only served by one bus a week. The reach area is exceptionally diverse in terms of deprivation with some coastal areas ranked in the top 30% areas of deprivation. The main forms of local employment are through small and medium enterprises. Lydd is also home to a large military training centre, an airport and various industries, including agriculture. One of the major employers, Dungeness nuclear power station, is currently being decommissioned. Around 11% of families are claiming out-of-work benefits. This is a significant reduction on the previous year's figure of 29.3%.

Services operate from within the centre's building, located on the site of Lydd Primary School, and through outreach services and home visits within the local area. Shepway is less ethnically diverse than other parts of Kent, with the majority of families of White British heritage. Children's levels of skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally below those expected for their age. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2012, around 59% of children achieved at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of services, which include antenatal, and postnatal clinics, breastfeeding support, drop-in groups for parents and children and adult learning provision. The centre has links with a range of partners, including health visitors, midwives, the community warden, adult learning providers and speech therapists. The centre opens Monday to Friday, throughout the year, from 9.00am to 5.00pm. Some activities are also provided in the evenings and at weekends to suit local needs.

Governance arrangements are provided by the local authority. A district advisory board oversees the work of the centres in Shepway and is a sub-group of the Local Children’s Trust board. The advisory board is chaired by a manager of a local charity and includes representation from health services, community partners and other stakeholders. There is a multi-agency steering group at centre level which includes full representation of parents, partner agencies and centre users. At the time of the inspection, following significant changes in leadership structure, a temporary network manager was overseeing the management of the centre. This arrangement has only been in place for three weeks. However, this manager was on annual leave for the duration of the inspection. The centre’s team leader and the local authority’s District Children’s Centre Manager were both fully involved in, and present for, both days of the inspection.

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

Lydd’le Stars Children’s Centre provides outstanding provision which leads to good, and rapidly improving, outcomes for some of the most vulnerable families. The centre has recently experienced some significant management changes and staff must be commended for the excellent way in which they have continued to operate services to ensure the quality of provision has not been adversely affected. The team leader, centre administrator and family support worker have worked tirelessly to overcome issues and deliver high quality services. This demonstrates each staff member’s professionalism, dedication and total commitment towards supporting local families.

The local authority acted quickly regarding the management concerns and an immediate review and restructure were implemented. This has resulted in comprehensive action plans being drawn up to address issues which had slipped under the former management arrangements. These mainly relate to the manager's role in consistently obtaining data from all partners and using these to track the long term impact of the centre's services. Procedures for self-evaluation have not been sufficiently rigorous and this has prevented the centre's staff and the local authority from consistently monitoring and measuring the centre's performance. The District Children's Centre Manager has only been in post for several months yet significant improvements have already been seen in monitoring procedures, the strategic links with partner agencies and the strengthening of governance arrangements. However, the local authority acknowledges that further development is necessary to ensure governance procedures are highly effective in consistently challenging the centre through the robust use of data and target setting.

Many partners interviewed by inspectors praised the work of the staff, especially the team leader and the District Children's Centre Manager, in quickly recognising what was not happening under the former management arrangements, and rapidly bringing about significant improvements, particularly in monitoring and governance. The centre demonstrates good capacity for sustained improvement.

Services are consistently adapted to meet the changing needs of the community. Staff use innovative strategies to enable families to access professional support. The rural location of the centre and the limited transport links prevent many families from attending appointments outside of Lydd. Therefore, staff have worked exceptionally well with an extensive range of partners to bring services to the centre. For example, speech and language services are now delivered from the centre and play a significant part in improving children's communication skills in preparation for school.

The range and quality of services provided by the centre are exceptional. Parents access considerable amounts of training, parenting support and high quality crèche provision. Parents clearly recognise the positive impact the centre has on family welfare. During the inspection, over 30 parents waited to speak with inspectors and praised the work of the centre and its staff. An overwhelming number of parents told inspectors how the centre had changed their lives, empowered them to seek professional help, developed their skills and raised their aspirations. Typical feedback from parents included, 'If it wasn't for the centre, I don't know what I would do,' and, 'I wouldn't be who I am today without the centre.'

Exemplary partnership working and the excellent range of personalised services ensure the rapidly improving outcomes of key target groups. The numbers of parents inspired to undertake accredited training and be successful in returning to employment are outstanding. The enjoyment and achievement of families and their learning and development, the care, guidance and support provided, partnership arrangements between all agencies and the range of services available are also outstanding.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Parents were unequivocal in their views confirming how safe they feel at the centre and they appreciate the strong relationships they form with staff. The promotion of equality and diversity is also good and the centre works tirelessly to ensure all target groups are consistently reached. Access to fathers has been lower than other key groups and the centre is working hard to address this.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further embed the systems for evaluating the centre's work by:
 - systematically using data provided by all key partners to track the long term impact of the centre's services on improving outcomes across all target groups
 - monitoring the systems in place to increase the reach to fathers
 - strengthening procedures to use data even more efficiently to measure performance towards agreed targets
 - ensuring governance arrangements continue to be robust and there are clear procedures in place for the centre to be held account for its performance.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families develop healthy lifestyles through the use of the centre's allotment, cookery classes and physical activities. This has led to no children in the reach area recorded as being obese in Reception Year. Strong links with local doctors' surgeries and the close monitoring of immunisation take-up rates resulted in 100% of children aged under five years receiving all childhood immunisations. Breastfeeding is strongly promoted and take-up rates are continually increasing, although these are still slightly below the local authority average. Parents report how much the centre has helped them to overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation. Particularly good support is given to military families. One parent expressed the view of many by stating, 'I'm so much more confident now, before I would have just hidden away.'

The community warden plays a key part in keeping families safe and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. He is a regular visitor to the centre and holds weekly surgeries for families to seek advice about safety issues. As an experienced chef, he is also a strong role model for parents and children. He regularly works with them at the allotment and helps parents understand how to cook simple, nutritious meals using fresh ingredients.

Comprehensive safety assessments within the home help parents develop a stronger awareness of protecting children from hazards. Organised safety weeks and a recent community safety event involving all emergency services resulted in over 290 people attending and receiving expert advice on safety. Vulnerable children are protected as the centre has excellent partnerships in place with children's services. The recent

management restructure has significantly strengthened links with social workers and the centre regularly receives information about families in the area who may require additional support. Early preventative strategies and close intervention have resulted in no children living in the area being subject to a child protection plan. Looked after children, and those requiring additional support, are closely monitored through effective use of the Common Assessment Framework process. As a result, children identified as being potentially at risk are supported very well.

Children and parents make exceptional progress in their learning. Families enjoy attending the centre and make full use of its facilities. A total of 126 parents have attended training in the last year, including courses in numeracy and literacy, paediatric first aid, family learning and food hygiene. In addition, 115 parents have signed up for National Vocational Qualifications. To date, 42 have successfully achieved accredited qualifications. Two parents have completed qualifications in play work and two more parents are currently completing the course. A total of 15 parents successfully completed accredited childcare qualifications and many of these have moved into employment. Seven volunteers are currently working within the centre and have accessed an extensive range of training and professional development opportunities. The provision to improve the economic stability of families is outstanding and the numbers of children living in workless households has reduced by 18.3% since last year.

Children benefit from outstanding early years provision within the centre's groups. Strong focus is placed on developing communication and language development and this plays a key role in improving children's readiness for school. Consequently, children make outstanding progress in their learning at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage from their initial starting points. The gap between the most disadvantaged children and the rest is closing year-on-year and is now at 22.7%, which is below the national average.

Children behave very well in the centre and form positive relationships with their peers. Families regard the centre as a focal part of the community and many more families are now beginning to become involved in the governance arrangements. Parents are keen to share their views and play a key part in shaping future services.

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	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups,	2

contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	
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's assessment of need is outstanding. The vast majority of parents significantly gain in confidence as a result of their progression through the courses and training made available to them. Children's needs are assessed scrupulously and excellent support is provided for those who require additional services. The centre has an extremely high level of contact with targeted groups within the area and reach and registration data are consistently improving. Good use of data indicates that services are continually targeted at those most in need and the centre is aware that there are only 17 children living in the area not yet being reached, and the centre knows these are not key target families.

The team leader, centre administrator and family support worker have an exceptional knowledge of the local community and consistently provide services which are responsive to changing needs. Outreach work with partner agencies ensures families receive outstanding levels of support and guidance, particularly at times of crisis. Services work together seamlessly to offer support to families most in need and this has a very positive impact on improving outcomes.

Parents confirm that staff have assessed their needs accurately and enabled them to fulfil lifelong ambitions they thought they would never achieve, for example securing employment. The centre's data indicate that 85 parents completed courses in English literature and adult numeracy, 20 of whom have special educational needs. At least 10 of these parents are now in employment. All parents confirmed that staff build their confidence and inspire them to make positive changes to their lives.

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?

2

The local authority has high aspirations for the centre and the community it serves and has taken swift action to address the shortfalls identified from the previous

management. The centre’s team leader is a strong manager who is highly respected by all families and partners. Parents, stakeholders and partner agencies are fully represented on the district advisory board and steering groups, and these forums are effective in driving the centre forward. Although, more could be done to strengthen the systems for consistently holding the centre to account through the regular analysis of data and the evaluation procedures. These sometimes lack detail and do not consistently track the long-term impact of the centre’s services.

Partnership arrangements between all agencies are outstanding and many partners praise the work of the team leader and staff as ‘exceptional’. Strategic planning is fully linked between all services. Fully integrated services, targeted at those most in need, ensure consistently improving outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Resources are continually deployed effectively and attendance levels at all groups are exceptionally good. The centre is making a significantly positive difference to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families, lifting them out of poverty, raising parents’ aspirations, improving children’s health and their readiness for school. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data confirm a 20% rise in children’s attainment since the centre opened. Therefore, the centre provides good value for money.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff are highly trained and fully understand their responsibilities in keeping families safe. Recruitment procedures are robust and ensure the suitability of all adults working with children. Early intervention strategies, scrupulous assessment and highly effective outreach work ensure children’s welfare, and any families experiencing issues such as domestic violence are very closely supported.

There is strong support in place for children with disabilities and disabled parents. The centre works in partnership with the group, Includes Us 2, which promotes the voice of parents of children with disabilities within the community. The Marsh Support Group provides specialist advice and a multi-agency ‘one-stop-shop’ within the area enables families to access an extensive range of services. Promoting inclusion is at the heart of the centre’s work and all staff work tirelessly to welcome all families and support individual need. All target groups access services and targeted work is now in place to increase the numbers of fathers who regularly attend the centre, which is currently slightly less than other groups.

Families using the centre have good opportunities to share their views and contribute towards the decision-making process. For example, parent feedback requested a contraceptive clinic to be held at the centre. This is now held on a monthly basis. The vast majority of parents are very happy with the centre and this is reflected in their considerable praise for its services.

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
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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	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 Lydd'le Stars Children's Centre on 31 October and 1 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall with some outstanding aspects. We would like to thank all of you who spent time talking with inspectors and sharing your views about the centre. We really enjoyed meeting you and found your comments very useful. It was very apparent to inspectors how much you value the centre and you respect the staff who work there, namely the team leader, family support worker and the centre administrator. We agree with you. We feel they deliver an outstanding range of services which are adapted to meet your personal needs. It was very obvious how well the staff know the local area and the issues affecting local families, and they work very hard to enable you to access as many services as possible.

We know there have been some changes to the management arrangements recently. We are aware that some of the procedures for ensuring the centre reviews the services it provides to ensure they continually make a difference to all families may not have been done as often as they should. The local authority has addressed this.

There is a new senior manager in place and he is working hard with the centre staff to make improvements which are already being seen. However, we have asked the local authority to ensure that the centre consistently reviews its work to ensure it uses information from other services to track the impact of the centre's work on families over a long term period and develops the systems for checking the centre's performance. We have also asked the local authority to ensure that the senior managers who oversee the work of the children's centre regularly ask questions to see how the centre is performing and to determine whether there is anything else the staff can do to make it even better for you.

We were really impressed with the high numbers of you who have accessed and successfully completed training. This is outstanding and has clearly made a very positive difference to your lives. We know that for some of you this has meant you have been successful in returning to employment and many of you told us completing courses and being involved with the centre have really boosted your confidence, prevented you from feeling isolated and have helped you to make friends. We also noted the outstanding achievements children make in their learning and development. They benefit from excellent early years provision within the centre and this has a very positive impact when they start school.

It was evident during the inspection how well different services and professionals work together. They clearly understand what local families need and deliver services highly effectively. This means you receive expert advice, guidance and support, particularly when you need it the most. All partners were keen to speak to inspectors and praise the work of the centre. We agree, we think that all services are linked together exceptionally well and this has a very positive impact on improving family welfare.

We learnt about the work of the community warden and what he does within the town and at the centre to help you to feel safe. Many of you told us how much you had learnt from the warden by working with him at the children's centre allotment and by benefiting from cookery classes with him. We think this is very positive. We also noted the wide range of activities available which help children to be active and healthy. These are very good and mean that no children are recorded as having an unhealthy weight when they start at school. We are also aware that the children's centre works closely with the local doctors' surgeries and this means you receive plenty of information about children's immunisation times. As a result, all of the children living in the centre's area have had all of their immunisations by the time they reach five years old. This has a very positive impact in keeping children healthy.

We noted how well families get on with each other within the centre. Children behave well and parents make friends with one another. Particularly good support is provided for parents who may feel alone and staff offer sensitive advice which helps parents to feel more confident. The centre welcomes all families and is committed to addressing each family's individual need. We noted that although some fathers and male carers attend the centre, it is not as many as other groups. The centre already knows this and is looking at other ways to introduce more fathers into the centre.

We have asked the centre to continue to monitor this to ensure a greater number of fathers are fully involved.

It was very apparent through talking with many of you that you feel very confident and comfortable at the centre. It offers a very homely, safe environment and staff are highly committed to ensuring family welfare. Good support is available to ensure that all children and adults can attend and particularly good programmes and services are available for disabled children and adults.

We would like to thank you very much again for your involvement in the inspection and wish you and your families the very best for the future.

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