

# Inspection report for Millmead Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	383704
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 November 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Helen Hutchings

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11 July 2006
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Meadow Nursery and Riverbank Out of School and Holiday Club EY330525

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 centre director, senior leaders, staff, representatives from the management board, parents and family members using the centre during the inspection, representatives from the centre's partners and the local authority.

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

## Information about the centre

The centre was built in 2003 to serve the local area of Millmead in Margate and in June 2004 it became a designated children's centre and extended its boundaries to the St Peter's area in Broadstairs. In 2005 it was incorporated as a Community Mutual, known as Millmead Children's Centre Partnership Ltd (MCCPL), a non-profit making organisation for the benefit of the community. It fulfils the full core offer of services under a service level agreement with the local authority and has additional service wings including childcare in Meadow Nursery and Riverbank Out of School and Holiday Club, a community café and the Windmill Community Allotment Project. The Meadow Nursery and Riverbank Club are subject to separate Ofsted inspections.

The centre is open for 51 weeks per year and runs regular weekend activities as special events and holiday activities. The centre operates in purpose-built premises, including health suites, nursery rooms, crèche facilities, a sensory room, a series of meeting and activity rooms, and an extensive outdoor garden and activity area. A number of other partners are co-located within the centre, including midwives and local health visitors, the adult speech and language service and a community paediatric clinic. Centre staff work across the core offer services and the service wings.

The management board, whose members comprise representatives from the community, partners and the local authority, oversees the running of the centre. Families within the community are entitled to become members of MCCPL on payment of a small fee which gives them voting rights and additional benefits at local facilities. Community representatives hold the majority of places and votes on the management board. Other consultative groups include service wing committees and a community action group.

There are 769 children aged under four years living within the centre’s reach area. Most families are from White British backgrounds, with a number of other heritages represented in small numbers. Very few families speak English as an additional language. Approximately 60% of families live in areas identified as being within the 20% most deprived areas in the country, including 45% who are in the top 10% most deprived areas. For the area as a whole, approximately 40% of families are dependent on workless benefits, which is well above the national average and those in work are often in low paid and insecure jobs. The proportion of lone and young parents is above that found across the local authority. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are typically below the levels expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**1**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**1**

## Main findings

Millmead Children’s Centre is highly effective in improving the lives of local families and children. The centre’s warm and inclusive welcome is apparent from the first point of contact, by telephone or directly at reception, and has helped it to become a focal point within its community. As such, the centre is a place where families from all target groups mix exceptionally well and have fun together, while valuing the outstanding services on offer. Families have strong confidence in the highly skilled advice and support of non-judgemental staff who have been very effective in breaking down barriers as ‘authority’ figures. Consequently, the centre has a profound impact on individual lives, particularly at times of personal difficulty. This is shown in parental comments such as: ‘They taught me how to trust people again’

and, 'The important thing here is that they (the staff) make bonds with everyone and make everyone welcome.'

Central to the centre's exceptional success is the inclusive way in which it involves the community in shaping and delivering services through its 'Community Mutual' model. For example, the community is very well represented on the centre's management board and many activities are organised and run by community volunteers. The centre is already used by most families with young children in the locality. Staff have an excellent understanding of the needs of the community because of close partnerships and take every possible opportunity to work alongside key partners, including health, education and police. For example, health workers and midwifery services reflect positively on how being located within the centre has significantly improved the quality and impact of their work on the outcomes for local families.

Outstanding leadership and management are reflected in the way centre staff involve parents and community members in evaluating services and considering long-term benefits. Staff use the information very well to organise a broad range of services which are very tightly matched to community needs. The centre taps into additional resources, such as lottery funding for the Windmill Community Allotment Project, which enables families to grow and sell fruit and vegetables.

The outstanding outcomes for families and children are shown in a number of ways, such as reduced crime rates, a fall in the numbers of children on child protection plans, and rapidly increasing health and educational outcomes. Although improving steadily, breastfeeding rates remain below average. Centre staff have planned further initiatives to regain an earlier momentum in challenging well-established attitudes within the locality that bottle feeding is the way to feed a baby. Activities which involve young children are firmly based on the revised Early Years Foundation Stage guidance, and adult learning has led many parents into additional education or training through the partnership with East Kent College.

There is an extremely strong focus on promoting safety and safeguarding children. The centre's procedures are clearly documented and implemented rigorously by staff, and understood by families. The centre's track record of carefully targeted support which improves family well-being indicates its outstanding capacity to continue to sustain the highest level of effectiveness.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Continue to challenge the negative perceptions about breastfeeding to increase the proportion of mothers who initiate and sustain breastfeeding by:
  - training more volunteer peer supporters
  - implementing the plan to work closely with the local maternity hospital to ensure that mothers have more information about the support offered by the centre.

## How good are outcomes for families?

1

Healthy living is actively promoted in almost all centre activities. The Windmill Community Allotment Project enables family members from several generations to keep themselves physically active and gain an excellent knowledge of how to live healthy lifestyles while tending the 13 allotment site market garden and running the market stall. Young children 'dig and plant' alongside adults, and other benefits, such as reduced swimming rates for MCCPL members, contribute very well to reducing obesity rates at the end of the Reception Year to below those of the local authority. The work of the 'Young Parent and Young Persons Groups' has been particularly effective, significantly reducing teenage pregnancy rates, previously high in the locality. There have been no second pregnancies within these groups over the last three years.

The strong partnership and co-ordinated approach by centre staff, health workers and midwives has resulted in a good improvement in breastfeeding rates beyond six to eight weeks from 13.3% to 31.2% over three years. However, this remains a high priority. New initiatives, such as working more closely with hospital staff and training more peer supporters, are being introduced to regain a momentum to increase the rate to be at least in line with the current local authority 40% average.

Case studies and discussion with parents indicate the strength of emotional support that centre staff have provided at times of difficulty. The many joint home visits with health workers have ensured that the needs of individual families, whether emotional or physical, are identified at the earliest possible stage. Safety packs, information on home safety equipment and the ongoing safety messages within centre activities are keeping emergency hospital admissions low. Kent Police awarded 'Certificates of Appreciation' to two members of staff in recognition of the impact of partnership work in significantly reducing crime and anti-social behaviour within the locality, enhancing safety within the community. Exemplary multi-agency work ensures that looked after children and those subject to a child protection plan, or involved with the Common Assessment Framework process, have personalised and highly effective support. As a result the number of children on child protection plans has reduced significantly in recent years.

The activities observed during the inspection showed just how much parents and children from all target groups enjoy the sessions and training on offer. Accredited courses such as 'Incredible Babies' and 'The Incredible Years' have developed parents' confidence and parenting skills very well, and been highly successful in introducing many who had not previously enjoyed their formal education to successful learning. As a result of this enjoyment and excellent partnership working with East Kent College, the proportion of parents taking first steps into further centre courses and adult education is high and is improving their economic stability and independence. Activities and learning opportunities for children are of high quality, including for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Children's progress is monitored carefully and recorded, and good liaison with primary schools

ensures that children are prepared well for school. The scores of children in the reach area at the end of their Reception Year have almost doubled in four years, bringing them close to the local authority average. The gap between the 20% lowest achieving children and the rest has narrowed at a faster rate than for the local authority as a whole and nationally.

Families have a strong sense of ownership of the centre, for example being represented at all interviews of new staff. There are always about 30 volunteers from the reach area and trained by the centre contributing in a variety of ways, such as running the allotment project and centre library, or contributing to delivering or shaping other activities alongside centre staff. The vast majority of families become MCCPL members, which gives them voting rights, for example for electing community members to the management board. Consequently, parents' contribution to governance and consultation groups is outstanding. The strong, positive relationships within the centre, consistently modelled by centre staff, help young children to learn and to behave well when they attend sessions.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for families*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>1</b>

**How good is the provision?**

**1**

The very high proportion of families in the reach area using centre services is testament to the high quality and excellent range of centre provision. Activities range from individual support by community workers to larger-scale community support for cultural events such as 'The Thanet Beside the Sea Festival.' The café is the hub of the children's centre and greatly missed for its healthy food at affordable prices and as an informal meeting place while a MCCPL new contract has been negotiated. This arrangement with East Kent College, involving work placements for adults with learning difficulties, is only one example of the centre's imaginative approach to working in partnership with other organisations to ensure full community use of its facilities by all target groups. Similarly the internet café, library and toy library are

greatly valued by families. Volunteer reading activities in the library effectively promote children’s early communication skills, an area of relative weakness within the area. Crèche facilities are trusted by parents and provide peace of mind when they undertake courses or further education training elsewhere.

The centre uses assessment extremely well to identify individual and local needs. The underpinning approach of partnership working and staff’s astute gathering of information lead to highly effective use of the Common Assessment Framework and contribution to the ‘Team around the Child’ or ‘Team around the Family’ interventions. The highly effective multi-agency working results in personalised care, guidance and support, which totally meets the needs of those in the most disadvantaged communities, or who are experiencing particular difficulty or acute crisis in their lives. As one parent commented, ‘Staff have made such a difference to my life and my children’s lives.’

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**1**

The inspirational centre director, skilled senior leaders and staff team are highly motivated and effective in promoting the centre’s vision ‘to develop a thriving local community where families are empowered to seek a positive future in which they are healthy, safe and achieve their full potential.’ There is a strong sense of teamwork and mutual support, underpinned by high expectations.

Currently staff are highly successful in encouraging a very high proportion of families in the reach area to engage with, and help to develop, its services, but staff will not be content until 100% of families are engaged. The centre has begun to implement a plan to further raise the profile of the services, for example for working parents, through its links with local primary schools. Leaders are clearly focused on providing the highest possible quality services and outstanding value for money. This is achieved through flexible working which complements core services required through the local authority service level agreement with innovative community work and shared resources across the centre’s partnerships and service wings.

Centre staff are outward looking, engaging in evaluation studies, such as an extended study of children’s centres under the Department for Education in conjunction with Oxford University and more locally with Christ Church University, to evaluate the centre’s effectiveness and to develop their own professional skills. Lines



of accountability are clear and regular professional supervision ensures that individuals have opportunities for self-reflection. The information from individual appraisals is used very effectively to ensure that staff skills are developed to meet changing centre priorities.

Business planning is based on a thorough audit of area needs involving the centre's partners so that priorities and challenging targets for improvement are shared. Where data and information are not readily available through the local authority, staff seek out local knowledge to ensure that they have the information they need to make informed decisions. Centre leaders are held to account by the management board and the local authority's advisory board annual conversation. Minutes of meetings show robust discussion and consideration of the centre's work.

Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust and meet statutory requirements. Procedures are well understood and when concerns are identified action is taken swiftly. Case files are kept meticulously, for example for children on child protection plans. Centre staff are currently working with 15 open targeted cases, of which six are 'children in need', a reduction from ten earlier in the year. Staff are vigilant in addressing the needs of families suffering emotional issues, addiction or domestic violence. They are astute in involving other agencies such as the Oasis Refuge in cases of potential danger.

The promotion of equality and tackling discrimination is central to the centre's work, often through its excellent links with partner organisations. Staff ensure that children and parents with particular needs, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, are fully included and supported in all activities. Achievement and diversity are celebrated, as shown in the images of activities displayed throughout the centre. The success of the centre's approach is reflected in no recent racist comments or inappropriate behaviour and rapidly improving year-on-year outcomes in educational achievement and reduction in teenage pregnancies.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>

<p><b>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</b></p>	<p><b>1</b></p>
<p><b>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</b></p>	<p><b>1</b></p>

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

The inspection report for Meadow Nursery and Riverbank Out of School and Holiday Club inspected in May 2012 was taken into account to inform the judgements made during this inspection.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Millmead Children’s Centre on 8 and 9 November 2012. During the inspection we looked at many of the centre’s documents and spoke with parents and a range of partner professionals. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

The centre provides you with a wide range of excellent activities which help families improve their lives. Many of you spoke openly with us during the inspection. This helped us considerably in finding out about the centre’s work. You have very positive views about how well centre staff support you, and are particularly appreciative of their non-judgemental help at times when you have particular difficulties. A comment typical of others illustrates this, ‘Staff have made such a difference to my life and my children’s lives.’ You are very pleased that the café is opening again this week which will again give you a place to purchase food at affordable prices and to taste your allotment produce.

The centre is popular and used by most families with children under five within the area. We could see how the Community Mutual model (MCCPL) helps you to be involved in offering your views and contributing to the centre’s work. Many of you help by volunteering your time and skills, while others gain skills of value to help you in the future by attending centre programmes or accessing further learning opportunities. Family members on the management board make an important contribution to the strategic leadership of the centre. Staff understand your needs exceptionally well because of their close partnership with you and other key partners, such as health, education and police. Health workers and midwives find that more

families attend appointments because you find it easy to get to the centre and enjoy its welcome atmosphere.

The information held by the centre shows how things are improving in the area, such as reduced crime rates and fewer children being subject to child protection plans. Health outcomes, such as immunisation and breastfeeding rates, are improving rapidly, although the proportion of mothers sustaining breastfeeding after six to eight weeks is below average. The centre's leaders are very aware of this and have strategies in place to help more mothers choose to breastfeed their babies. We have asked the centre's leaders to monitor this to ensure breastfeeding rates improve. Many of you spoke of how centre programmes have helped you to have more confidence in your parenting, and many of you have gone on to follow other courses in the centre or at East Kent College. You are helped to understand your child's development, recording this in learning journals which is preparing them very well for starting school.

The centre holds safeguarding of children as a high priority. You are confident to ask for help because you feel totally safe and secure in the centre and know that the highly skilled staff will support you in accessing the precise help you need. We found that staff leading the centre are doing an outstanding job, making sure that everything the centre does results in a genuine improvement within your area or to you and your families' lives. By attracting additional funding, such as for the Windmill Allotment, the centre clearly goes the extra mile to enhance the opportunities available to you.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful and wish you well in the future. We believe that the centre's track record places it in an exceptionally strong position to continue to help and support you.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).