

Inspection report for Hastings Town Children's Centre

Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	383953
Inspection dates	31 January – 1 February
Reporting inspector	David Scott

Centre leader	Tracey Rose
Date of previous inspection	No previous inspection
Centre address	Waterworks Road Hastings East Sussex TN34 1RT
Telephone number	01424 726453
Fax number	01424 726437
Email address	tracey.rose@eastsussex.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Greenway Nursery – EY 337266

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.

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 of the centre and other staff as well as a wide range of representatives from the local authority, and health service professionals. Inspectors talked to parents, carers 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 the centre's most recent annual conversation review report, together with local authority data.

Information about the centre

Hastings Town Children's Centre opened to the public in September 2006 under phase one of the Sure Start programme. The centre is housed in a purpose-built building and is open for 51 weeks a year from Monday to Friday and some weekends. The centre is managed by the area children's centre coordinator. Governance is provided by East Sussex local authority, in conjunction with an advisory board which comprises providers, delivery partners and members of the local community and users who attend the centre.

The children's centre reach area serves the district of West Hastings, and serves two wards, Braybrooke and Castle, which are the second most densely populated in the county. The population is increasingly becoming ethnically and socially mixed with families from Polish backgrounds who are beginning to access the centre. Most families are of White British heritage. A below average proportion of families speak English as an additional language.

The centre is situated in an area identified as having one of the highest levels of deprivation. All Super Output Areas are among the 30% most deprived in England with two being in the top 10%. There is an above average proportion of lone parents

in the area and an average proportion of young mothers. Almost half of all children under five years old are from workless households. An above average proportion of families living in the reach area receive out of work benefits.

There are 645 children under five years old registered with the centre and 70% regularly access services. 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 the levels 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

Hastings Town Children's Centre is effective in meeting local needs and achieves good outcomes. The exemplary care, guidance and support together with good safeguarding arrangements have a positive impact on the safety of families. Strong emphasis on healthy living supports the health and well-being of centre users. Parents feel valued and enjoy good relationships with staff which enable them to have the confidence to speak about many issues that worry them. One commented, 'We were a family torn apart, but from the day the children's centre staff became involved, it became positive again. A year later and we are so together now.'

Provision is well planned to support the needs of users. The assessment of children's needs, including the use of Team Around the Family (TAF) and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedures, is good. The centre provides a very welcoming and stimulating environment for children and parents who benefit from the wide range of activities available. Parents make a positive contribution to the development of the centre through the parents' forum and staff frequently seek their views. Excellent partnerships with a wide range of agencies and organisations enable the speedy identification of needs and fully integrated packages of support for target groups. Joint working with health colleagues aids the centre's very good early

intervention to prevent some difficult situations from escalating. The centre successfully engages with the majority of its key target groups. However, it recognises that although lone parents are welcome at all services, only a few regularly engage with the centre.

The centre provides excellent opportunities for families to help their children build skills for the future. Parents thoroughly enjoy and have access to a good range of courses which help develop their basic knowledge and skills, with many going on to achieve examination success in English and mathematics at GCSE level. Of particular note is the success the centre has in encouraging volunteers to gain key skills which enable them to take opportunities in childcare and further education. However, the monitoring and tracking of adults' progress when they access further education or training are not fully developed.

Leaders and managers are ambitious, dedicated and motivated to continue to improve the provision and reach families who are in most need of support. Aided by well-coordinated and focused governance, the children's centre area co-ordinator works well in partnership with her team to evaluate the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. They have a very good knowledge of the reach area and their target groups and factors influencing outcomes. As a result, self-evaluation and development planning are honest and accurate and make good use of all the available data to set targets and help the centre demonstrate the impact of its work on improving outcomes. The centre's capacity to sustain improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Refine tracking systems still further so that the centre has a very clear view of the progress adults make when they access further education or training and can use this to help shape future provision.
- Strengthen strategies to increase the engagement of lone parents.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre works very closely with health partners to address health issues at an early stage. Attendance at antenatal and baby clinics is high and has a positive effect in promoting parents' good understanding of child health and development. Centre services make a valuable contribution to reducing the incidence of obesity among young children. As a result, the level of childhood obesity in reception-age children has been falling for some time and at 5.6% is much lower than the local and national averages. The centre actively promotes the benefits of new mothers initiating breastfeeding through specific workshops and as a result there is a clear trend of improvement over time. 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 centre is sensitive to the needs of families whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable and does all it can to help them stay safe. Parents' awareness about health and safety in their homes is raised through the centre's useful practical help and advice, and as a result, they have become more self-assured and confident in managing risks. The rate of admissions to hospital accident and emergency departments over the last three years for minor injuries has been declining and is below the national average. The work of the centre makes a strong contribution to keeping families safe through its home visits and first-aid courses for both staff and parents. The highly effective use of TAF and CAF procedures ensure that children, including those subject to a child protection plan, are very well protected.

The achievement of children and families is good. There are many opportunities for families to play and learn together, for example Sound & Well, where music is used to support children's well-being and increase self-confidence. As a result, the centre makes an excellent contribution to helping children engage in appropriate behaviour and form positive relationships. Children make good progress from their starting points, and last year 60% achieved 78+ points, including six points in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. Although slightly below the national average of 64% it represents a 16 percentage point increase on the previous year. The centre remains focused on improving children's early language, communication and social skills through well-planned activities and the good role modelling by staff. Bump & You sessions are very popular with parents who are encouraged to understand how their child learns through play and exploring, and this extends their skills as co-educators as a result. Concerted efforts are made to help children in danger of falling behind achieve well, as reflected in the trend of improvement. However, last year saw a dip, with the achievement gap widening. The centre is working effectively with education partners to tackle this.

Adult learning courses and referral for employment advice help improve the economic well-being of the majority of families. The centre holds some information about the outcomes of adults that access further education. For example, case studies indicate good individual support and training where over half of adults gain qualifications or progress to further training, education or paid employment. Additionally, most adults who attend courses in basic skills achieve some form of entry level qualification, with 75% of adults being awarded a high-level pass at GCSE. However, the monitoring and tracking of the progress adults make relative to their starting points are less well developed. Families who speak English as an additional language, for example Polish speakers, receive translation support when needed, so that those less confident in the use of English can access essential information in a familiar language.

There are good opportunities for grandparents, parents and children to play and

learn together through different innovative projects which support children's well-being, increase their self-confidence and help them build skills for the future. Parents make a very positive contribution to the development of the centre through the parents' forum and their representation on the advisory board. Staff frequently seek their views informally and through post-activity evaluations and use them to help shape services. Volunteers working at the centre gain key skills that enable them to support the life and development of the centre before moving on in life.

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	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The population within the area served by the centre is highly transient and the centre effectively uses its good links with a range of other services to maintain a good knowledge of the community and provide support to meet all assessed needs. Good links with various community groups are used well to promote the services of the centre and to locate families not yet engaging with centre activities. Participation by target groups is good, but some lone parents do not regularly engage with the centre. Centre staff have a good understanding of TAF and CAF processes and use them well to support children. Consequently, many parents have been able to overcome their difficulties and make sustained improvements to their families' health, safety and well-being.

The centre is very welcoming, providing both parents and children with a positive and enjoyable environment and giving a sense of pride and belonging in the centre. The celebration of achievement is good and this motivates users to enter into other activities. The achievement of adults in accredited provision is steadily improving and progression to further training or employment is good. The centre's effective support for developing the communication and language needs of children is helping them build good skills for the future. Sessions provide good quality learning opportunities for parents and children and also help them to socialise.

Comprehensive and tailor-made packages of support are given to parents and families in times of crisis. One parent commented that, 'I can't tell you how brilliant the centre staff have been. When I arrived at the centre I could barely look at my baby, but now I'm running groups and seeking funding for my charity.' Another stated that, 'The children's centre staff kept me sane. I felt so isolated when I had post-natal depression. But the centre was a real lifeline.' In the centre, noticeboards and a wide range of leaflets and other resources provide users with good information about the range of provision and support available. Families have good access to laptop computers and internet access to support them during training or while completing job applications and CVs. The centre also makes good use of social media accounts to communicate with users living in the reach area.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the centre is excellent. The centre is focused on providing services for families with the greatest need and is highly successful in working with target groups, for example workless families, teenage parents and those experiencing mental health issues, to help them overcome personal challenges in their lives. Domestic violence is a particular issue in the area and outstanding partnerships have been forged, including with a local women's refuge, to ensure that women experiencing domestic violence can safely access the activities and receive timely and effective support.

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 is led and managed well by skilled staff who are passionate about their work and morale is high. The centre runs smoothly and day-to-day management is effective. The advisory board is made up of a range of community members, centre users and partners who appropriately support and challenge the cluster of centres it serves. As a result governance and accountability arrangements are clear. 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.

Excellent partnerships have been established with a wide range of professionals ensuring that services are integrated well and cohesive. The centre has seen a significant rise in the number of referrals received for centre services, particularly

from health and social care. This demonstrates an increased confidence in the exemplary care, support and guidance provided through centre services that result in families being healthier and safer. A good proportion of families are engaged in centre services and the achievement gap between families from all key target groups has been narrowing. The centre is also successfully breaking down cultural and religious barriers to access, for example with the Polish community.

Safer recruitment procedures are followed and all relevant checks are made to ensure that all staff, partners and volunteers are suitable and safe to work with children. All staff receive good quality child protection training and are very confident in their role to safeguard children. Protocols and practices for sharing information between agencies are very effective. Risks are thoroughly assessed and minimised, ensuring that the environment is safe. The centre equips parents with the skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure that safety measures are implemented within the home.

Staff work very well together as a team and feel supported and valued by leaders and managers. Good professional supervision and management arrangements are in place to monitor the performance of staff and ensure their safety, well-being and training. Reflective practice is embedded among the team and staff are fully aware of the need to demonstrate the impact they are having on the outcomes for families. Parents' views usefully help the centre plan its services. The local authority provides excellent analysis of data which the centre uses well to ensure resources are targeted to deliver good value for money and help those most in need. The area coordinator is held to account on the centre's performance and is supported well by the local authority. The centre's priorities for improvement are appropriate, challenging and realistic. Everyone is ambitious to make the centre outstanding, and centre staff have already had considerable success in improving outcomes for families.

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	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

The Greenway Nursery, which operates within the Hastings Town Children's Centre, was inspected on 24 June 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 the Hastings Town Children's Centre on 31 January and 1 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

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 you had been helped in times of crisis: 'The support I have received has been fantastic and if it wasn't for the staff at the children's centre, I think I would have given up.' 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 excellent. 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, loneliness and enables you to overcome problems. 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 staff listen to you and ask 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 Bump & You, 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' forum 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 help and support but it has yet to find ways to attract more lone parents and we have asked them to look at this.

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 gather even more information on how much difference courses for adult users make so that it 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