

Inspection report for Poppy Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Avenue Day Nursery – EY 386830

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 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

Poppy Children's Centre opened to the public in January 2009 under phase two of the Sure Start programme. The centre is housed in a purpose-built building, shared with the Youth Centre and the Avenue Day Nursery, and is open for 52 weeks a year from Monday to Friday and some weekends. It is part of a district network of nine children's centres and works in close partnership with Briary Children's Centre in the neighbouring village of Greenhill. The centre is currently managed by the district children's centre manager, pending the appointment of a permanent children's centre manager. Governance is provided by Kent County Council 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 covers the district of Herne Bay, and serves mainly the Heron ward, which is one of the most deprived wards in the county. A number of families are housed temporarily in bedsits located close to the centre before being moved elsewhere. The transient population is increasingly ethnically and socially mixed, with families from East European backgrounds beginning to access the centre. Most families are of 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.

The centre is situated in an area identified as having one of the highest levels of deprivation. Half of all the Super Output Areas are among the 30% most deprived in England, with two being in the top 20%. There is an above-average proportion of lone parents and young mothers in the area. Almost 20% 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 872 children under five years old registered with the centre, with just over two thirds regularly accessing services. The centre offers 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

Poppy's Children's Centre is good, with some outstanding features. This vibrant and welcoming centre utilises its location well to place itself at the heart of the community. The centre is led and managed well. Centre staff are passionate about improving the life chances of the local community. The district children's centre manager has a clear vision for the centre based on accurate and honest self-evaluation of the centre's strengths and areas for future priority. Families hold the centre in high regard and greatly appreciate the guidance and support on offer. The advisory board is well placed to both challenge the centre and drive improvement. The centre demonstrates a good capacity to make further improvements.

The care, guidance and support given to all families are outstanding. Staff utilise every opportunity to identify each family's individual need and support them with carefully tailored help and advice, particularly at times of crisis. Strategies to keep children and vulnerable families safe are effective. Staff have ensured that excellent

working arrangements with a wide range of partner agencies continue, so that services are extremely well integrated and cohesive. As a result, partnership working is outstanding.

The centre works actively to enable target groups to access its services. It meets the needs of those who have experienced domestic violence very well so that they are empowered to reshape their lives. The centre has already identified the need to reduce the rates of childhood obesity by helping young mothers to instil healthy eating and exercise habits in their children.

The centre provides good opportunities for families to help their children build skills for the future. Parents thoroughly enjoy and have access to an improving range of courses which help develop their basic knowledge and skills, with some going on to achieve examination success. Of particular note is the success the centre has in encouraging volunteers to gain key skills through the 'Purposeful Learning' programme which enables them to take up opportunities in childcare and further education. However, the number of adults from low income and workless backgrounds accessing accredited training and gaining employment is lower than that of other target groups. Also, the monitoring, tracking and impact of their progress when they access further education or training are not fully developed.

Children benefit from the excellent 'Cool for School' transition arrangements which help to prepare them for the next stage of their education, be it to the nursery or other nursery provision, or one of the local primary schools. This has been recognised nationally as being an example of good practice. Well-resourced activities to help children to learn and develop include pictures displayed at child-friendly height so that children can easily select the toys for themselves. They benefit from a well-designed outside area with its stimulating well-kept garden.

Provision to support the personal development of parents is good. Staff clearly understand the complex issues facing the local community and work tirelessly to reach families known to be hard to reach. Staff have worked sensitively with families to encourage and empower them to develop their confidence and build their self-esteem, in order to make positive changes to their lives.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the engagement of families living in the catchment area in centre services through:
 - increasing learning and development and training opportunities, particularly for workless and low-income families, in order to improve their economic and social well-being
 - refining 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.
- Reduce the levels of childhood obesity through the excellent partnership work with health professionals.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes for families, including those in most need of support, are good and improving. Partnerships with health professionals are strong. The proportion of mothers who continue breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has increased over the past three years but is below national averages. 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 have improved steadily and are now above national averages. Between 2009 and 2011 there was a steep decline in the percentage of children in the Reception Year who are recorded as obese, from 11.9% to 6.5%. However, in 2012 these rates rose sharply to 13.6%, which is above the national average of 9.4%. The district children's centre manager and staff have already highlighted this as an area for improvement.

Families feel safe at the centre and learn how to keep themselves safe as they develop a good understanding of the dangers within the home. Their awareness about health and safety in the home is raised by providing families who meet the criteria with a free 15-piece home safety kit. Between 2009 and 2012 there was a reduction in the number of emergency hospital admissions for minor injuries of children under five years. The work of the centre is helping to keep families safe through home visits and first-aid courses for both staff and parents. The centre works closely with Kent's safeguarding unit to ensure children are safe and protected. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process effectively to ensure that children, including those subject to a child protection plan, are well protected. Referrals are assessed swiftly so that children in need and those in the care of the local authority receive the help they need.

Children make good progress and achieve well from their starting points. The attainment gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and others has narrowed from 24.6% to 23.4%. In 2012 65% of children at the end of the Reception Year across the reach area achieved 78+ points, including six points in communication, language and literacy and in their personal, social and emotional development. This represents an 11 percentage point increase on the previous year to just above the national average of 64%. The centre remains focused on improving children's early language, communication and social skills through well-planned activities and good role modelling by staff. The very popular 'Little Messy Makers' sessions encourage parents to understand how their child learns through play and exploring, and this extends their skills as co-educators.

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 achievements of adults who access further education. For example, case studies indicate good individual support and training, where around half of adults gain qualifications or progress to further training, education or paid employment. Three quarters of adults have attended some form of 'purposeful learning' activity, such as parenting skills. While the numbers engaged in personal development opportunities continue to increase, the number of parents from workless and low-

income households who progress to more formal training and future employment is lower, and the centre recognises this is an area of priority. Also, the monitoring and tracking of the progress adults make is less well developed. Families who speak English as an additional language receive translation support when needed, so that those less confident in speaking English can access essential information in a familiar language.

There are many opportunities for families to play and learn together, such as 'Sign Time', where music is used to support children's well-being and increase self-confidence. As a result, the centre helps children to behave well and form positive relationships. Parents make a very positive contribution to the development of the centre through the 'Parent Forum' and their representation on the advisory board. Staff frequently seek their views informally and through post-activity evaluations, and use these to help shape services. For example, the 'Herne Bay Issues' group gathers information and evidence from a variety of agencies in order to target support more effectively. As one parent commented, 'This was as a direct result of the inspiring work of the children's centre.' Volunteers working at the centre gain key skills that enable them to support the development of the centre before moving on to training 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

The large majority of families within the reach area access activities. The centre is located in a highly accessible position within the community. Through effective working with health partners and housing groups, centre staff have gained an insightful knowledge of their community. This has enabled them to ensure services are effectively tailored to meet their needs. For example, the 'Young Active Parent Support' (YAPS) group enables young parents to meet informally in order to promote good positive parenting and life skills.

Achievements are celebrated regularly as part of the centre's commitment to raising parents' belief in themselves. For many the centre is the first place where they feel they have not been judged for their lack of qualifications or because of their background. As one parent commented, 'As soon as you come in you feel at home. No one looks down on you and if you have any problems staff are on hand to help you.' Adult learning courses and referral for employment advice are helping to improve the economic well-being of some families. Case studies indicate some good individual support and training, leading to employment. However, the centre is not yet fully successful in enabling adults from workless and low-income backgrounds to access training or proceed to employment.

Parents and grandparents greatly value the specially targeted 'drop in' services, such as 'Baby Massage', to help the bonding of baby and mother and to promote emotional health and well-being. These help to reassure parents about their children's development and staff offer guidance when additional help is needed. Having initially registered at the centre through signposting by the midwife or health visitor, parents then take advantage of other provision. They explained how they like being able to meet professionals in a 'welcoming and warm environment'. Stay-and-play sessions are very popular with parents, who relish the opportunity to experience messy play without making a mess at home. Enjoying stories and role-play activities make a strong contribution to improving children's social and early language and communication skills.

The centre provides excellent care, guidance and support for families. Staff and partners work skilfully and sensitively to meet the needs of families who often face many complex issues, including housing problems, domestic violence and isolation. Superb multi-agency working with families in crisis, through the 'Freedom Programme', results in well-coordinated services with impressive levels of care and support. As a result, families feel exceptionally well supported. For example, centre staff skilfully gain parents' confidence to speak about domestic violence. The centre works very closely with local women's groups to provide very informative and supportive courses. Women agree that they are empowered to make better relationships and feel good about themselves. Often members of this group overcome their problems, return to work or go on to further training. Clear information about smoking, alcohol, substance misuse and sexual health is readily available.

Centre staff understand well the barriers faced by families with circumstances that make them the most vulnerable. Case studies and discussions with families demonstrate the successful impact of the personalised support, including that of the speech and language service, for parents with disabled children and those with special educational needs.

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

All staff have high aspirations for the centre and a shared vision of how these will be achieved. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and the work of staff is monitored on a regular basis. The day-to-day management of the centre is currently being undertaken by an experienced centre manager. Staff are highly committed, work well together and feel supported. Parents share their views through the Parent Forum and have an impact on how to improve services. However, a few were unaware of the opportunities available for parents to become involved in the governance of the centre. Nevertheless, the vast majority of parents who responded to the satisfaction survey say that they are very happy with the service the centre provides.

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 child protection training and, as a result, protocols and practices for sharing information between agencies are increasingly effective. Risks are checked to ensure the environment is safe. Referrals to the most appropriate agencies, particularly in relation to high incidence of domestic violence in the area and especially through the 'One Stop-Shop', are timely and effective in protecting families.

The district children's centre manager, staff and partners know the strengths and future priorities of the centre. The self-evaluation process identifies ambitious targets which are linked to the centre's priorities. Resources are used well to respond swiftly to need, particularly when families are in crisis. When users lack the confidence to access services in the centre, individual support is provided in the home. Although space within the centre is limited, good use is made of nearby 'satellite' venues. Shared costs between the centre, youth service and Nursery help with sustainability and ensure that the centre provides good value for money.

The centre plays a significant role in the life of the community and the promotion of equality and diversity is given a high priority. Staff have a good understanding of the needs of families they support and know who the most vulnerable groups are. Crèche facilities enable families to attend activities and the dads' group meets at the weekends to accommodate their needs. The centre promotes the inclusion of disabled children and those with special educational needs through very effective

liaison with outside agencies.

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 Eastern European communities.

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 Avenue Nursery, which operates within Poppy Children's Centre, was inspected in July 2009 and was judged to be outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Poppy Children's Centre on 18 and 19 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you very much for speaking with us and letting us come in to 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; as one of you commented, 'The support I have received has been brilliant. I don't know what I would have done if it were not for the children's centre. It is such a big part of my life and that of my child.' 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, such as health and social care services, 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 provided by the centre helps to reduce depression and loneliness and enables you to overcome problems. Teenage parents benefit considerably from the high quality support of the centre, particularly through the YAPS sessions. We were especially impressed by the way 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 staff are friendly and approachable, and are very receptive to suggestions and keen on working together.' 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 about them. These clearly show how you gain much from the parenting courses, such as first aid and home safety 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' which contribute much to your children's development. The centre helps you 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 'Parent 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 improving the health of the large majority of families but it has yet to find ways to ensure that rates of obesity fall below county and national averages, 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 adults are making so that the centre can more accurately show how it is making a difference to you and your families. We have also asked staff to find more ways to ensure that adults, particularly those from workless and low-income families, gain worthwhile accredited qualifications, further training and employment.

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.