

Inspection report for Sunflower Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
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Reporting inspector	Steve Nelson

Centre leader	Leanne Watson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Adelaide Road, Eythorne, Dover, Kent CT15 4AN
Telephone number	01304 831793
Fax number	01304 831795
Email address	leanne.watson@kent.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

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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 centre staff, the centre manager and the chair of the advisory board. They met with a number of representatives of services who work with the children's centre, including health visitors and outreach workers. Inspectors spoke to groups of parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, action plan, users' evaluations and case study information.

Information about the centre

The Sunflower Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre which was established in 2008 and serves a rural area covering the wards of Eythorne and Elvington, Eastry, Shepherdswell and part of Sandwich. It provides full core purpose provision through the range of activities offered. The centre opens 50 weeks each year on weekdays from 9am until 5pm, and every Saturday morning each month for working parents.

The centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre. The local authority oversees the centre's work with support for governance provided by the advisory board consisting of representatives from partner organisations and key stakeholders that work with the children's centre and parents.

Most of the families who use the centre are from White British backgrounds. Data for the area place the user base in the 40% least deprived nationally. The children's centre has 659 children under five years old living in its reach area. About 17% of children and adults who use the centre come from homes that are dependent on benefits and where no-one is in work. When they start early years' provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are above 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The Sunflower Children’s Centre provides a satisfactory service within a warm, welcoming and safe environment for families. Children are eager to be there and have fun while learning. Parents appreciate the centre’s support and value the positive impact this has on their lives. A typical view expressed by a parent is: ‘It’s a great place to come to talk with other parents and for the children to have fun. The staff can’t do enough for you.’ Families and volunteers make positive contributions to the life and development of the centre and the local community.

The centre’s management provides sound leadership and demonstrates effective organisational and communication skills so that the centre runs effectively on a day-to-day basis. Satisfactory outcomes for children and families are underpinned by the provision which is satisfactory overall. Care, guidance and support are good. The centre is doing good work with individual families. It ensures that the various services operating from the centre are brought together to support families and their children in a timely manner. Parents speak highly of how sensitively staff help them to improve their lives through well-planned activities, effective individual support and good quality guidance.

The centre promotes purposeful learning well. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development the Early Years Foundation Stage is increasing over time but the gap between the highest and lowest achieving children is widening. The progress being made by children who access centre services is not yet routinely assessed or tracked against the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance to identify individual needs or personal achievements.

Safeguarding is given a high priority. There are good arrangements for multi-agency work to protect children and ensure good outcomes for their safety. Families feel well protected in the centre and are comfortable to talk to staff about any issues or concerns. The centre offers a variety services, activities and opportunities to meet the needs of the majority of families in the area.

Regular partnership meetings are arranged, which ensures services are integrated to deliver organised provision to families in the area that has a positive impact on their lives. Nevertheless, the centre's work with health partners is not sufficiently developed to deliver a fully integrated breastfeeding service. Families using the centre are improving their economic stability and independence and increasing numbers are engaged in training and adult learning. However, there are limited opportunities for adults to develop their basic skills, participate in adult learning programmes, or for tracking their progress.

The centre refines its programme continually. Parents contribute routinely to evaluation of the centre's work. Generally the centre's self-evaluation process is satisfactory and accurately identifies key priorities for improvement. As a result, managers and the advisory board understand what they need to do to improve the centre, and their development plans are well targeted on moving things forward. These features demonstrate the centre's satisfactory capacity to further improve outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the assessment of children's learning and development needs and ensure that all session planning is securely linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance, so that effective action can be taken to narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest.
- Increase the proportion of mothers continuing to breastfeed at six to eight weeks by working more closely with health partners to promote the benefits of breastfeeding.
- Extend opportunities for adults to improve their economic independence and stability by:
 - increasing the opportunities for more adults to develop their literacy, numeracy and computing skills
 - strengthening links with training providers so that adults access appropriate adult learning, training and skills programmes and keep check on their progress.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Health outcomes for families are satisfactory and beginning to improve. Interim data supplied by the centre indicate that the historic declining trend in mothers' breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is beginning to be reversed but it remains below average. The centre provides a broad range of activities to promote healthy lifestyles that are beginning to make a positive difference. For example, a parent who attended the 'Baby Food and Fun' sessions commented, 'I now know about the different food labels, had some very healthy recipes that I will definitely try at home.' The centre's smoking cessation programme has been successful in helping pregnant mothers stop smoking.

Families feel safe and well supported in the centre. The centre is good at making sure families keep themselves and their children safe and free from harm. A parent who completed the 'Save a Baby's Life' course said, 'I have never carried out first-aid training so this has given me knowledge to save my baby if something happened.' Children behave in ways to keep themselves and others safe. For example, they help tidy up toys in play areas. Case studies show good impact and improved well-being and welfare for children subject to child protection plans. Effective working with partner agencies ensures that families who may be at risk of harm and children assessed under the Common Assessment Framework, including looked after children, are closely monitored and kept safe.

Early Years Foundation Stage data indicate children make satisfactory progress in developing the skills that will help them in the future. Increasing numbers of children are achieving 78 scale points or more on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and are above average. However, the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest has risen in recent years. Playroom facilities are varied and create an exciting environment for children to enjoy their time at the centre. Parents improve their parenting skills and develop their self-confidence and self-esteem through programmes offered by the centre. A parent attending the 'Keeping up with the Children' sessions said, 'I have a much better understanding of what to expect now and have loads of ideas on how to improve my child's development.'

The centre plays an active role within the community. Families enthusiastically participate in a broad range of fund raising events for charities such as Red Nose Day and Children in Need. Children's behaviour is good and they form positive relationships within the centre. The volunteer programme is a strength of the centre's engagement and support for families. A number of volunteers have completed the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 in childcare and progressed into sustained paid employment. Parents are appreciative of the information and advice given to manage their household budgets, as well as the help to assist with the increasing housing needs of families. Young parents are effectively guided to support groups to access their options for employment and education. Although the centre has taken action to increase the number of parents who access adult education programmes to develop their basic and work skills, there are not yet enough involved.

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	3
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	3

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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre works effectively with other services, for example health visitors and Jobcentre Plus, to ensure provision for targeted groups of families, such as those with disabled children or parents, meets their needs. Outreach services have successfully engaged with priority groups such as lone parents and teenage parents. The centre offers a variety of services and activities which demonstrate impact that is satisfactory or better in all outcome areas. A parent who completed a children's behaviour course said, 'My child has much better behaviour now.' The centre is developing a method to measure the progress of children against the development stages of Early Years Foundation Stage requirements; however, it is too early to assess its impact. The centre's systems to record the progress of adults involved in further learning are underdeveloped.

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage at the centre satisfactorily meets their needs. Children are provided with a variety of activities and learning opportunities from birth that aptly supports their development. For example, a parent said, 'It's good to make up new words to familiar tunes and learn everyone's names by putting them in songs.' Resources are age-appropriate, interesting and encourage children's engagement well. However, not all session plans are linked to development stages in order to meet the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements. The centre recognises the achievements of families well through celebrations of their work. Children are appropriately prepared for transfer to nursery.

Care, guidance and support arrangements are effective. Good tailored support improves families' well-being effectively. Families express high levels of satisfaction with the good level of care, guidance and support offered by centre. They report that their lives are better for having had the help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives. One parent commented, 'It's a comfort to know that there is a service I can turn to for help, advice and professional practitioners on a virtually walk-in basis.' The centre works well with the specialist family support services for vulnerable children and their families to ensure their particular needs are met. Good quality information, advice and guidance mean families are signposted effectively to the appropriate support services.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and accountable. The advisory board appropriately monitors performance and reviews progress. Links between strategic planning and service provision are clear so that overall outcomes are satisfactory. Managers and staff are enthusiastic, motivated and committed to improvement. Self-evaluation is satisfactory and accurately identifies the centre's strengths and weaknesses. There is an appropriate development plan with clear action plans and targets. However, it is too early to fully assess the impact of these planned improvements. Evaluation has resulted in changes to the provision that meets the needs of most families in regular contact.

The centre promotes the inclusion of children and their families and diversity effectively, for example, by celebrating different faiths such as the Chinese New Year. The centre's actions to promote greater equality for different groups are satisfactory with actions being taken to narrow the achievement gap in the area in place. It is effective in removing barriers for disabled children and those who have special educational needs to have full access to services.

The centre's arrangements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults are good and staff are well trained in child protection matters. The highest priority is given to safeguarding and all policies and procedures meet requirements and are consistently implemented. Effective risk assessment procedures are followed and there are good recruitment and vetting procedures for staff. Criminal Record Bureau checks are recorded accurately and well maintained. The centre is proactive and collaborates effectively with other key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Families experiencing crisis, including domestic violence, are provided with a place of safety and centre staff are instrumental in ensuring they access appropriate services swiftly.

The centre has been effective with engaging with the majority of the families in the area and reaching out to engage with target groups and uses their views to help shape provision. Relationships between key partners are effective in securing improving outcomes. However, the centre's partnership working with health partners is not sufficiently developed to ensure a fully integrated delivery of breastfeeding services. Its link with training providers is not yet fully developed. Satisfactory outcomes and provision that engages increasing numbers of families indicate that the

centre's resources are adequately managed. This represents satisfactory value for money.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	3
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 the Sunflower Children's Centre on 20–21 February 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to speak to inspectors. We enjoyed talking to you and found your comments very helpful. Your children's centre is a welcoming place and provides you and your children with good facilities. Comments such as, 'Staff are very friendly and supportive' and 'My children love coming to the centre.'

There are lots of fun play activities for the children, are typical of the views you communicated to us.

Staff have worked hard to build a positive relationship with you and others in the local community. The groups run by the centre encourage children to be healthy, to have fun playing and learning and to cooperate with each other. The centre gives you advice on the best way to prepare healthy meals for your children, and how to stimulate them at home and keep them safe.

Children's learning and development are improved by attending the centre. You told us that you enjoy coming to the centre and in particular letting your children take part in messy play, arts and crafts and singing activities and discovering new ways to help them learn. 'Baby Massage' sessions are popular and help you learn the positive value of physical stimulation, including holding, movement, touch and relaxation techniques. Your children behave well at the centre and benefit from playing with other children and from using the good quality toys and other resources. Staff understand your needs well and are very good at providing individual support and advice if you need them. You told us how much you value their support and guidance and how this has made a difference to your lives. The centre staff help families who are dealing with difficult circumstances well.

Those of you who use the centre are much better now at staying safe and looking after your families. We know this because many of you told us of what you had learnt. Staff have worked hard to make it very safe for you and your children. The centre works effectively with other agencies, such as the health service and social services in particular, to help vulnerable children and families.

We have found a few areas that require improvement and the centre's management is already aware of these. We have recommended that the centre makes more accurate assessments of children's starting points to increase the progress they make in developing new skills, to help narrow the achievement gap between the highest and lowest achievers. We have asked managers to work more closely with health partners to promote the benefits of breastfeeding. We are also asking managers to increase the opportunities for you to take up adult education programmes and to develop your basic skills in literacy, numeracy and the use of computers.

We wish you every success for the future.

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