

Inspection report for Knockhall Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent County Council
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Reporting inspector	Jon Bowman HMI

Centre leader	Debbie Tolhurst
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, representatives of the local authority, members of the advisory board, local steering group, partners, parents, frontline staff and volunteers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Knockhall Children's Centre is a phase two centre situated in the grounds of Knockhall Primary School. The centre was designated in 2009 and delivers the full core purpose. It is one of seven children's centres in Dartford, overseen by a District Children's Centre Manager. Knockhall Children's Centre covers a relatively small geographical area of 3.75 miles that includes a mixture of private and social housing and pockets of deprivation.

The centre is managed directly by Kent County Council. Governance arrangements involve a multi-agency District Advisory Board, on which sit parents, partners and members of the specialist children's services management team. The centre has its own Steering Committee and a centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre.

The large majority of families in the centre's reach area are of White British heritage, and the rest are made up of a diverse range of Black, other minority ethnic and White European families. Data show that there are 1,232 children from birth to four-years-old in the reach area; of these 13.5% live in workless households. Children in the centre's reach area demonstrate skills, knowledge and abilities broadly in line with those expected for their age on entry to early years provision.

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

The centre provides good support for families and is used well by the local community. Staff ensure that the centre provides a safe and welcoming environment for all. As one parent said, 'The staff are lovely, friendly and make us all feel very welcome.' Another added, 'The centre's my second home and it's amazing here!' Groups are vibrant and well attended and provide good opportunities that support the development of children well.

Centre users value highly the groups they attend and the more specialised support that some receive. The centre is particularly effective at supporting parents and their children when they are vulnerable and experience crisis. As one parent put it, the help they receive is, 'Phenomenal!' This summed up the views of many parents who spoke to inspectors.

The success of the centre is to the credit of the staff team and centre manager. They know the parents and children who attend very well and tailor the provision so that it effectively meets the needs of the community it serves. Feedback from users helps staff adapt and improve the services and groups on offer. Over time parents and their children accrue useful skills and knowledge that help them in their daily lives.

The centre works well with partners to secure the good outcomes that families achieve. Services that are shared across children's centres in the district increase the capacity of the centre to meet the needs of the community. While users achieve good health outcomes overall, breastfeeding rates in the area at six to eight weeks have deteriorated and it is too early to judge the effectiveness of plans to address this decline.

The centre has a good track record of making improvements. Subsequently, the capacity of the centre to make further improvements is good. The centre has provided excellent support to 'Castle Tots', a local playgroup run by parents, that has improved the quality of the group and ensured a safer and more stimulating

environment for children and parents alike. The parents' forum 'Sure Talk' has been launched and plays an important role in helping shape the services on offer. 'My Special Book' has been developed and is used effectively to track the progress that children make. Parents recognise and appreciate the improvements that have been made.

The centre uses data and information reasonably well to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. However, these do not fully inform self-assessment or support improvement planning. While the District Advisory Board provides satisfactory oversight of the centre's development and scrutiny of its performance the data they scrutinise do not allow them to judge the performance of the centre over time or that of other centres.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Promote the health of new-born babies more effectively by increasing the breastfeeding rates of mothers at six to eight weeks.
- Review the use of data so that it better informs the District Advisory Board about the performance of the centre.
- Ensure that rigorous self-assessment fully informs service development.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

A good range of activities and services support parents and children to adopt healthy lifestyles. Healthy snacks and refreshments help parents encourage their children to eat healthily. Childhood obesity by the end of Reception in the reach area has reduced well from 8.9% in 2008–09 to 6.8% in 2010–11. Teenage pregnancy rates have declined significantly across the district by 19% since 2009–10 as a result of successful programmes such as 'Big Feet Little Feet' that target vulnerable young people and reduce the risks to them. Effective early intervention by the speech and language team prevents children from needing more intensive support at a later date and successfully builds the ability of parents to support their own children. While most health indicators show that the centre is doing a good job in promoting healthy lifestyles, breastfeeding rates in the area at six to eight weeks are lower than the district average. In recognition of this issue the centre has trained a good number of volunteers to support breastfeeding. However, the impact of this initiative is not yet evident on outcomes.

The centre and its partners are very effective in supporting children and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The centre contributes well to the safety of children on child protection plans and those in need. Wide-ranging and highly effective support is provided by the family support worker and centre staff

who advocate well on behalf of families and provide sound practical help to them. As a result, families are, for example, better able to manage their own finances, improve routines in the home and provide a safe home environment for their children. As one said, 'The support I have had has helped immensely in managing my home and family while I was feeling depressed and struggling to cope alone. I have continued to use the tools I learned on a daily basis and feel much more confident as a parent.' Staff are increasingly well engaged in using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and 'team around the family' approach to support children. Children with additional needs and those who are looked after receive the extra help that they need. Those families experiencing domestic violence are supported well by Women's Aid and access to local support groups.

Children's' learning and development are effectively promoted by the centre. They learn social skills quickly and are better able to play with each other cooperatively. They listen and follow instructions well. Parents develop a better understanding of the importance of learning through playing with their children and as a result provide an increased range of positive play activities in the home. Staff are attuned well to the specific needs of individual children and parents and adapt programmes effectively to meet their individual needs. Children are well prepared for their transition to nursery or primary school; they make good progress from their starting points. The numbers of children reaching a good level of attainment by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased well from 45% in 2009 to 69% in 2011. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest in the Early Years Foundation Stage reduced by 19% over the same period.

The centre ensures that parents feel valued and respected. As one said, 'I am not judged here.' Their views are routinely sought and used well to improve the groups and activities on offer and develop new groups such as 'Giggle and Sign'. They are represented well on the local steering group and District Advisory Board. Children develop positive behaviours and interact well with each other and staff. The economic well-being of users is promoted well by the centre and the employment and community engagement worker. Users develop their aspirations and career goals with many taking up volunteering opportunities both within and outside the centre. The centre successfully supports many parents to participate in learning opportunities outside the centre and has developed a local programme that supports users who speak English as an additional language to develop their language skills.

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	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 centre is well established in the local community. As a result the large majority of children in the reach area are registered with the centre and most of these actively participate in the centre's activities. The needs of the community are understood well and the centre adapts its programmes in response to these. Target groups are engaged effectively. Assessment is used well to identify the needs of individual families and partners share information routinely to ensure that these needs are met.

Through the qualified teacher and children's centre workers the quality of local provision is enhanced. Staff and parents have been trained to better understand the development needs of their children and planning for groups reflects well the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. This and the carefully tailored individual support and tracking of children underpins the good progress that they make.

The care, guidance and support that families receive are good and well integrated between services. All of the parents who spoke to inspectors highlighted the impact of the help they receive. One stated, 'Attending the centre has strengthened our family and I am a lot more confident in dealing with my children.' Another said, 'It brings the family together for special time which we are all really benefiting from.'

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The good range of agencies represented on the District Advisory Board provide satisfactory support and challenge in helping the centre develop its work. They have a good knowledge of the local area and have ensured that the centre has a good focus on supporting the most vulnerable members of the community. However, the regular reports that the board receives on the performance of the centre do not contain sufficient information to easily allow it to judge how well the centre is delivering services.

Despite this and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, leaders and managers have a sufficient understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and have a good track record of improving outcomes for families in the area. The centre is in the early stages of using self-assessment to drive improvement. The quality of written plans to ensure improvements are secured does not reflect the effectiveness of the action taken by leaders and managers in making improvements.

The centre is led well on a day-to-day basis by the centre manager. All groups are routinely evaluated and adapted effectively to better meet the needs of users. The centre provides good value for money. The available space is used well by centre staff and other agencies. Groups are very well attended and a good proportion of the community are engaged in these and other services offered by the centre.

Equality and diversity are promoted effectively. Activities are free to users. This ensures easy access for those on low incomes. Multicultural toys and resources are available to children during sessions. The portage service is located at the centre providing support to children with additional needs. A high proportion of users from minority ethnic groups attend the centre and achieve good outcomes. The centre uses discretionary funding well to support families who need short-term help that they cannot access elsewhere, such as transport to parenting groups.

The policies and practices at the centre effectively safeguard users. All staff undergo appropriate pre-employment checks and are trained well to promote the safety of all users. Detailed risk assessments of all sessions effectively mitigate any risks to users. Should staff have concerns about the welfare of children, they know well what steps to take. When the centre's safeguarding policy was recently tested staff acted appropriately and in accordance with the policy.

The centre and partners work well together to extend the range of services available to the community. The early intervention team is providing good support and guidance to the centre staff on use of the CAF. Local partnerships such as with the community warden effectively promote the centre's work locally. The annual parents' survey shows high levels of satisfaction among parents who use the centre, reflecting the good services that are provided.

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	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	2
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 Knockhall Children's Centre on 27 and 28 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

We very much enjoyed our visit to your children's centre and would like to thank all of you who gave your time to speak to us and tell us about your experiences of using the centre. Your views have helped inform us of how well the centre is doing and we have mentioned some of your comments in the report.

Knockhall Children's Centre is a good centre that enables you and your children to achieve good outcomes. The centre provides a safe, welcoming and stimulating environment for everyone. It is used well and the facilities available are maximised to good effect. It is well established in the local community and provides a good range of services with the help of its partners. Staff provide good care, guidance and support, and are particularly good at supporting you and your families in times of crises. Safe practices are followed that ensure you and your children are well protected. Your children enjoy attending sessions and successfully develop their skills and confidence. Many of you gain many benefits from attending the centre. However, support to help mothers breastfeed their children has not resulted in enough of them doing so for a prolonged period.

Leadership and management of the centre are good overall. Given its successful track record and based on previous achievements the centre has good capacity to make further gains. The District Advisory Board provides reasonable scrutiny of the centre's work. However, the information it receives from the centre is not sufficient for the board to be fully informed of how well the centre is performing. While the strengths and weaknesses of the centre are known by leaders and managers these are not brought together well to help plan improvements. In those areas where we have identified weaknesses we have made recommendations so that the centre can make improvements.

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