

# Wealden Children's Centre cluster

Uckfield Children's Centre, 1 Manor Close, Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 1DL

**Inspection date** 16-17 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Despite an improving trend in the overall registration rates within the centres, not enough priority families are using the services. Accessing services easily and regularly is difficult for some families due to the rural location and poor transport links, leaving them feeling isolated.
- Leaders have started to track the participation of families most in need of support, but systems are not yet sharp enough to enable them to see the difference that services make to these groups.
- Although there is a strong culture of safeguarding, case files and recorded assessments of need are not always of good enough quality and the monitoring of case files is incomplete.
- Professional supervision by managers takes place but the monitoring and management of staff performance does not currently focus on impact or development needs, particularly in relation to promoting equality and diversity, safeguarding and supporting parents' emotional health needs.
- Data provided by the local authority does not always help leaders to monitor and analyse the impact of the centres' work. This is because it is not broken down to show how many priority groups are accessing centre services.
- Parents do not have enough involvement in the centres' decision-making procedures.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Children benefit from positive play and learning experiences because staff are all well-trained and experienced early years practitioners. They help parents to support their children's learning at home.
- The new cluster coordinator and keywork team leader are highly committed, skilled, caring and approachable. They have supported staff well through a period of significant change over the last three months to ensure families do not feel the impact of changes on services.
- Health outcomes are good. Close partnership working with health and social care has enabled leaders to identify specific future improvements in the reach areas. This provides a firm foundation that will help the centres to move forward rapidly once reorganisation is completed.

### Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Uckfield, Heathfield and Crowborough.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and managers in the local authority, the centre co-ordinator, the keywork team leader, partner agencies, parents, keyworkers, community development workers, early years workers, volunteers and representatives from the local area group (LAG).

The inspectors visited the three centres in the group and a community venue used for activities.

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

### Inspection team

Denise Blackwell	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Gerard McGrath	Her Majesty's Inspector
Libby Dickson	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

The Wealden group of centres is run by the local authority and consists of three centres situated in Uckfield, Heathfield and Crowborough in East Sussex. They also provide services in community facilities such as schools and church halls. The group is managed by the children's centre cluster coordinator. The keywork team leader manages the three keyworkers in the Wealden Children's Centre Cluster in addition to a neighbouring cluster's keywork team within East Sussex. The Wealden group was previously part of a larger group of seven centres and changed to its present cluster on 1 April 2013, when the new coordinator and team leader took up their posts. The re-structuring of children's centre provision is still taking place and is due to be completed by the beginning of October 2013.

Each of the three centres has its own centre advisory group (CAG). These will eventually feed into the newly formed strategic local area group (LAG) with representation from each of the centres. The centres serve the rural area of Wealden, which is mainly made up of villages with a few small towns where the centres are situated. Although the area is not identified as being deprived overall, there are pockets of deprivation among areas considered to be very affluent.

Uckfield Children's Centre is the hub of the group and is situated on a housing estate. Crowborough Children's Centre is a purpose built centre situated alongside a private childcare provider on the site of Beacon Community College. Heathfield Children's Centre is located in a community centre but most of the services and activities are delivered in local community venues. All centres in the group are phase 3 centres and received designation in 2009, opening in June 2010 as part of the previous larger cluster of seven centres. There is no on-site registered childcare provision managed by the centres.

Levels of worklessness in the reach area are low overall. The locality area covered by the children's centre group is large and public transport systems do not enable families to access centres easily. Most of the local population is White British, with smaller than national average percentages of families from Black and minority ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. Most children in the area start early years provision with skills broadly in line with what is typical for their age, although communication and language skills are often weaker. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage is better than the East Sussex average and in line with national averages. The centres meet their core purpose by offering a range of services which include health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult learning and family support. Services are offered from the main children's centre buildings, a school site in Jarvis Brook and a range of community venues within outlying towns and villages. The total reach includes over 4,000 children aged under five years.

### What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- The local authority needs to provide the centres with comprehensive information about families living in the reach area that:
  - enables the centres to identify priority groups, such as fathers and male carers, and children living in workless households; report accurately the access and participation of these groups
  - includes numerical data as well as percentages, where appropriate, especially where numbers are low and can skew leaders' understanding of the impact of services
  - enables development plans to include measurable targets drawn from the data so that the success of the cluster is judged by how well these are met.
- Improve the analysis and use of data at operational levels to:
  - develop business planning so that it incorporates an evaluation of progress against targets and measurable impact of the centre's work
  - monitor and target provision and services to best meet the needs of local priority groups, particularly in ensuring all training opportunities meet local families' needs.
- Ensure the performance of staff is monitored more closely by leaders and helps them to:
  - undertake robust assessments of need and keep consistently good quality records about the support provided to the most vulnerable families
  - access relevant training which includes all aspects of safeguarding, emotional health issues and equality and diversity matters.
- Work more effectively in partnership with health, social care and other providers of early years and community services to increase the number of families most in need of support accessing centre services.
- Strengthen parents' role in the centres' decision-making process.

### Inspection judgements

#### Access to services by young children and families

#### Requires improvement

- Many families make good use of the services which are provided close to their homes and enjoy the range of activities offered. However, the numbers of fathers and male carers engaging with the centre are low and insufficient targeted activity is planned to increase their participation.
- Registration rates of those most in need of help are increasing but are still low for some of the most vulnerable families, such as children aged under five years living in workless households which ranges from 15% at Crowborough to 23% at Heathfield.
- The centre services are promoted well to women who attend peri-natal health appointments. The convenient sharing of sites with health services, and the support of centre staff at health clinics elsewhere encourages good engagement of expectant mothers and those with newborn babies.
- Some of the most deprived areas within the groups' reach are located some distance from the centres. As a result, some services are taken out to the areas of need by using community venues. Leaders have been forward thinking in gaining a recent agreement for the 'Fun Bus' to be involved in visiting areas from September to extend the hub and cluster centres' services.
- The cluster's information shows that children who have been supported by the centres are prepared well for starting school. The effective links with local schools and pre-schools support their positive transition.
- Sessions such as 'Come and Play' have been set up in a local primary school following a request from parents. This is helping to break down parents' barriers to education, and help with children's move into full-time education.

**The quality of practice and services****Requires improvement**

- An appropriate range of adult training and educational opportunities are offered. However, programmes do not currently help those who are unemployed to become ready for the employment vacancies in the area. For example, some level one information technology (IT) courses are not appropriately matched to address the learning needs of families. Insufficient emphasis is placed on tracking the progress of adults to measure the effectiveness of the opportunities provided.
- The centre has recently supported a very useful project working successfully with a small number of women with post-natal depression in partnership with local health workers and the University of Southampton. However, not all staff have had sufficient training in supporting families with emotional health needs to ensure that a greater proportion of the local population benefit from the available support.
- There are some examples of very effective one-to-one work with individual families which reduces inequalities and makes significant improvements in their lives. Families spoken to by inspectors were mostly aware that there had been changes in centre provision. However, they had not felt any individual impact on the support they received, due to the diligence and commitment of staff.
- Health outcomes are good. A high proportion of mothers successfully sustain breastfeeding, immunisation take-up rates are high and childhood obesity rates are low. Healthy eating is promoted well through cookery courses and useful advice on weaning babies onto solid foods. However, there is too little promotion of oral and dental health.
- Staff are good role models for parents and offer a friendly, professional environment where families feel welcomed. They provide good quality care, guidance and support that helps parents overcome difficulties. They help parents to access external support where appropriate and a number of parents gave examples of where a centre had provided specific support.
- Effective use of the language checker supports the identification of any emerging problems in children's speech and language development and appropriate services are provided. Good links with local health teams ensure that from an early age children's development is closely monitored. However, although a short term initiative is reducing the current waiting list for speech and language support the service is facing reducing capacity.
- Sessions such as 'Music and Rhyme' are of high quality and popular with children and families. All early years sessions are well planned and take account of the needs and interests of individual children. Effective evaluations enable practitioners to improve the services they offer to families.
- Increasing numbers of adults are volunteering in centres and other settings, improving their self-esteem and employability. Two volunteers have recently found employment.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Requires improvement**

- Leaders and managers have identified through data analysis and business planning that there are too few specific targets to measure the effectiveness of services or the impact they have on the reach area population. They have now begun to collect a range of useful information. However not all staff have the required knowledge to enable them to analyse and use data to support their monitoring and planning of provision or service developments.
- Safeguarding arrangements are generally satisfactory, with effective procedures in place to protect vulnerable children and families. Staff, volunteers and partners have appropriate vetting clearance. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities, although records of relevant staff training are incomplete.
- Records of individual keyworking cases are not complete; risk assessments have not all been reviewed and a small number of entries are impermanently recorded, having been made in pencil. Individual entries do not always contain sufficient detail to fully justify the planned interventions and to enable close monitoring of the impact of centre services on families.
- Partnership working with service providers is a strength of the group. All partners work well to

support those most in need, especially those who have formal intervention and support plans. Staff are responsive to the needs of the more vulnerable service users and skilfully help them to accurately identify their areas of needs and agree appropriate actions to help them.

- Keywork results in useful care pathways tailored to meet the needs of individual service users and families. Parents spoken to provided many examples of where centre staff have supported them and made a difference to their and their children's lives. 'They are brilliant here,' commented one parent and this was repeated across the three centres.
- Communication with partners has significantly improved in recent months through the recent agreement for a data-sharing protocol with health services. As a result much more information about live births is shared with the centre management team. The cluster management team is already making good use of the protocol to identify individual families most in need and ascertain whether they are engaging with centre services.
- The cluster management team have made a good impact on the development of the group since their arrival in April this year. They have already overcome some significant barriers to progress. They have made a strong start at identifying priority groups and areas and work is continuing to develop this further.
- Parents are able to influence services through discussions with staff, comments books, parents' voice meetings and the 'You said – We did' board. However, parents have too little awareness or understanding of governance of the centre. As a result they are not involved enough in decision-making processes for the group and are unable to challenge the group on its performance.
- The local authority has made some changes to the way in which they manage the performance of children's centres to enable them to have a clearer understanding of their impact and to provide appropriate challenge. However this is still in the very early stages and it is not yet possible to see the impact of the changes they have made.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

**Select details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80090
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	423595
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	4042
<b>Centre leader</b>	Andy Crosby
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01323 464380
<b>Email address</b>	andy.crosby@eastsussex.gov.uk

**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

- Uckfield Children's Centre
- Heathfield Children's Centre
- Crowborough Children's Centre



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