

Delce Children's Centre

Fleet Road, Rochester, Kent, ME1 2QA

Inspection date 25–26 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- The centre has established itself firmly within its community so that it is used regularly by the very large majority of families in the area, particularly those most in need of support, including fathers, lone parents, disabled children and those from minority ethnic groups.
- Parents speak very positively about the centre, and how its welcoming and inclusive atmosphere encourages them to seek and value the support available to them there.
- The centre plans its activities across a range of venues to address difficulties in transport from some parts of the reach area, so that access to services is good.
- The strong partnership with health services and local pre-school providers ensures that families are introduced to the centre's facilities and protected at the earliest possible stage.
- Centre staff consult parents well about its provision, and use this information to plan services that meet their needs well. Within three years, participation rates show a five-fold increase and a tripling of the number of families attending activities, helping parents and grandparents to support their children's development.
- Children are prepared well for school, and the proportion reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is rising quickly.
- The head of centre and staff are ambitious for the centre's impact and development. Staff work closely with local authority officers to keep a close check on how well the centre is doing.
- The governing body and advisory board are established and effective in giving good support, advice and challenge to staff, so that the centre is constantly improving.

It is not outstanding because:

- Leaders have not yet had time to implement all their plans for the development of the centre. This includes extending parental representation on the advisory board, setting up procedures with other schools to share information about children's skills levels on entry, encouraging a wider range of volunteering opportunities, and fully developing the centre outdoor area.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, the centre coordinator, the community liaison officer, and representatives from the local authority. They also met with partners from health services, parents, volunteers and members of the governing body and advisory board. Inspectors visited several activities, including Early Bird, Post Natal Group and Children and Young People Workforce Training, some jointly with centre staff. The head of centre attended the inspectors' team meetings. Inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, a sample of case studies, parental surveys, safeguarding policies and procedures, and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Ann Janssen	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Delce is a stand-alone, phase three centre which opened in September 2010. It delivers a range of services within the centre and other outreach venues, including health, groups for parents and children, family support, adult learning and volunteering opportunities. Midwifery and other health services are delivered directly within the centre. The centre has a particular focus on ensuring maximum participation of families in the most disadvantaged areas, fathers, lone parents, disabled children and families from minority ethnic backgrounds who take up its services.

The centre has approximately 950 children under the age of five in its reach area. It is open for 51 weeks a year, Monday to Friday from 8.30am until 4.30pm, with occasional activities at the weekend. The centre operates in purpose-built facilities in the grounds of Delce Infant School. It has the use of additional facilities in the school from time to time.

The centre serves a mixed area socially and economically, with pockets of deprivation. Within the areas it serves, two are within the 30% most deprived and one in each of the 30% and the 10% least deprived in the country. There is mixed housing which includes privately owned, privately rented and social housing. The unemployment rate within the area is low; 19% of children live in workless households; 12% of families are eligible for the childcare element of working tax credits. Most families are of White British heritage, with 12% from a range of other ethnic backgrounds, including some who speak English as an additional language. Children enter early years provision with skills generally lower than those expected for their age.

The centre is governed by the Delce Infant School governing body on behalf of the local authority. An advisory board includes representatives of the centre's partners and the local community, and a parent forum holds monthly sessions to canvas the views of parents and other centre users. The headteacher is the head of centre, with a centre coordinator having day-to-day operational responsibility. The school is subject to a separate inspection. The centre does not provide on-site childcare. The centre has three full-time staff and there have been significant staffing changes over the last six months.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Implement the next stage of planned actions by:
 - ensuring that there is stronger parental representation on the advisory board
 - finalising the arrangements with other hub schools to share information about children's skills on entry to school to support the centre's evaluation of its effectiveness
 - providing more opportunities for volunteering to support the ongoing work of the centre
 - completing the development of the outdoor area to extend children's learning and help adults to understand how to engage with their children in outdoor play.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Centre staff liaise very closely with health professionals. Clear arrangements with health services ensure staff are informed quickly of all new births in the area. Staff use this information well to make contact within a month and to understand the needs of individual families. Consequently, most families are registered with the centre, and a large majority use its services.
- Over 90% of families in the most deprived areas regularly attend activities organised by the centre, or in other centres closer to their homes, as do most families in the centre's target groups. This includes fathers, lone parents, disabled children and those from minority ethnic groups. While most fathers attend activities, including those provided by health services, the centre has identified that there is a growing number of male primary carers in the area and is considering how best to extend services to meet their particular needs.
- The centre uses all available information to plan activities to meet the changing needs of families as their children develop. This provides families with seamless care from antenatal services, through two-and-a-half-year-old progress reviews to transition activities to ensure that children move easily into school.
- Staff have an excellent understanding of the local area and its needs. They work well with other children's centres to avoid duplication of services and signpost families to other organisations when required to meet their needs. When needed, staff visit parents in their own homes to ensure that support is directly targeted, particularly in times of crisis.
- Staff place a strong emphasis on promoting families' physical and emotional health. This has led to a sharp increase in mothers sustaining breastfeeding and reductions in smoking rates at delivery, and a declining trend of obesity at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The centre acts as a hub for disabled children and those with disabled parents, so that the sensory room is in frequent use. All families are able to benefit from this facility and specialist professionals provide support for the physical development of children with additional needs.
- Staff explain carefully to parents the benefits of nursery places and help them to take advantage of available funding, so that there has been a 100% take-up of two-year-old free places for those eligible in pre-school settings.
- Parents have good opportunities to develop their English language, literacy, numeracy and other worthwhile skills, helping them to gain employment. Last year, two thirds of those starting accredited courses gained additional qualifications and skills, and have either gained employment or are enrolling on further courses of value to them. A few have received training as volunteers to give them experience for employment in the future.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Services are well thought out to ensure good quality experiences, targeted effectively to be relevant to the families in the area. For example, advice about issues of concern to parents, such as weaning or sleeping routines, is routinely addressed in centre activities. Additional support is readily available from experienced staff or volunteers, including breastfeeding support. There is a good balance between services available to all families and others targeted directly to those requiring more specialised support.
- While the quality of much of its work is excellent, the centre's impact is not yet outstanding because there is potential for more volunteers to support its work. Although being developed as a priority, the outdoor area does not provide sufficiently vibrant opportunities to extend children's learning and to help parents engage with their children in outdoor play.
- Staff are very strong role models in their everyday practice, signalling their commitment to challenging discrimination. Their calm and determined approach effectively promotes the safety and well-being of families. Case studies and conversations with parents indicate that the centre has had a significant impact on the lives of individuals and their families.
- The centre has successfully developed parents' confidence. As a result, a few volunteers who had previously sought help from the centre now support its work. Volunteers receive appropriate training

to support their work and to develop employability skills. Other forms of volunteering, such as developing community aspects of the centre's activities, are less well developed.

- Young children have good quality learning experiences because of the emphasis given to their physical development and their communication skills. The library in the reception area is well used as a result of the work undertaken to promote parents' understanding of early learning skills, for example, in the Grow Together programme run jointly by health visitors and centre staff, Bookstart activities supported by local authority staff, and Trendy Totz sessions commissioned by the centre.
- Parents speak highly of how centre activities help them to grow in confidence in their parenting skills, for example in the practical advice on ensuring the safety of babies and young children. They value that 'sessions are age appropriate and a great service'.
- The centre's emphasis on reducing inequalities is reflected in its partnership with local pre-schools, infant and primary schools. Joint activities ensure a smooth transition into Nursery or Reception classes, and their success is reflected in children's rapidly improving attainment and a reduction in the gap between the lowest attaining and others. The centre is currently making arrangements to share information on the development of children when they enter school, so that it can further assess its effectiveness.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The head of centre leads a strong, caring staff team with passion aimed at ensuring that all do their best for the community. Teamwork is central to the centre's work.
- The local authority has agreed how information is shared between children's centres, health and social services and Jobcentre Plus. This means that key information and approaches are shared effectively to support the centre's work. Staff use this information and their in-depth knowledge of the locality very well to plan how to support families most effectively. Their evaluation of the centre's impact is accurate and informs its planning well.
- The governing body has well-developed structures to ensure it knows the centre's strengths and where it could be improved. Governors, including many from within the community, challenge staff about how effectively the centre is meeting the targets within its improvement plan.
- The advisory board is represented effectively on the governing body and considers carefully the information from parent forum meetings. The wide representation of local partners on the advisory board means that developments are based on a broad range of views and opinions.
- The recent increased emphasis on the role of the parent forum is developing the capacity for stronger parental representation on the advisory board, but currently parents are under represented on this group. Centre staff receive regular feedback from parents during, and immediately after, activities. They follow up with additional surveys at a later date to measure the impact of the centre's work over a longer period of time.
- The local authority effectively challenges the centre through an annual conversation. Its expectations of the centre are high and ambitious, but realistic targets are set and reviewed at regular intervals throughout the year.
- Staff supervision is regular and effectively ensures that staff feel valued and their training needs met. Those working directly with families have appropriate childcare or early years qualifications. Staff come from varied backgrounds which means that there is a range of complementary skills to guide the centre's improvement.
- Staff work well in support of other local providers. For example, the centre has provided training for pre-schools to keep them informed about new national guidance about children's development.. Regular sessions for childminders help to reduce isolation and keep childminders up to date with changed expectations nationally.
- Safeguarding is given a high priority so that families are looked after well. Staff and volunteers are vetted to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Centre staff are consistent in their use of the protocols established with other agencies to use the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child processes. Consequently, there is a coordinated approach to improving family circumstances.

- Resources are of good quality and are maintained well. Available funds are used very effectively because activities are planned in partnership with other centres, and outreach venues have been chosen within easy reach of the most vulnerable families.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
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.

Unique reference number	20937
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	421456
Managed by	The governing body of Delce Infant School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	950
Centre leader	Donna Atkinson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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