

Kestrels Children's Centre

Marden Lodge School, Croydon Road, Caterham, Surrey, CR3 6QH

Inspection date 11–12 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
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 is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The centre does not provide enough high quality support, advice and guidance for adults wishing to improve their education, personal skills and employability chances.
- The proportions of lone parents, fathers and workless families who regularly access children's centre services are not high enough.
- The centre's systems for assessing and tracking the impact of services for both children and adults are relatively new and are not yet fully effective in enabling leaders, governors and the advisory board to evaluate how well the centre is meeting families' needs.
- The local authority does not have a clear enough picture of how many families living in the reach area are using each of the children's centres in the locality. Leaders therefore do not have a sufficiently accurate picture of which families are yet to engage with services.
- Partnership arrangements, and in particular lines of communication, with adult education providers, social care, Jobcentre Plus and childminder groups are not effective enough in promoting high quality provision for adults and children in the locality.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The provision of early childhood services and partnerships with midwives and health workers are very effective, ensuring children have the best possible start in life.
- Support for the significant number of families who live outside the reach area but use the centre is highly effective.
- The inspirational centre manager and all staff are positive role models who provide good quality care and support, especially for families during times of crisis.
- Parents are fully involved in providing their views on centre activities, and also helping to influence centre priorities, through the successfully run parents forum, advisory group and board of governors.
- Safeguarding is given high priority. All users of the centre said they felt welcome, valued and safe when attending centre activities.

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 senior leaders and managers in the local authority, health, education and social care partners, parents, outreach workers, early years practitioners, volunteers and representatives from the governing board.

The inspectors visited the centre and linked nursery. They observed the centre's work, such as 'Two's Company' and 'Kickers and Crawlers' and looked at a range of relevant documentation. One observation was undertaken jointly with centre staff. The inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation, action planning, a sample of case files, safeguarding practice, policy and procedures and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Alan Comerford-Dunbar, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Sarah McDermott	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Kestrel's Children's Centre is a phase two stand-alone centre designated in 2007. The centre is co-located with Kestrels Day Nursery (URN 278272) and Marden Lodge Primary School (URN 125114), both of which are subject to separate inspection arrangements.

The school is responsible for governance on behalf of Surrey County Council. The centre's advisory board works in partnership with the school to manage the centre's service delivery and includes representatives from the community, professional agencies and parents.

Centre staff provide a range of services including 'Bumps and Beyond', 'Kickers and Crawlers' and 'Two's Company'. Target families are those families who are referred to the centre or families living in more deprived housing areas. Because of the close proximity of three other centres to Kestrels Children's Centre, the majority of families using the centre live outside its reach area. Conversely, a significant number of families from within the reach area access other centres in Surrey and also Kent, which borders the reach area.

The reach is an area of extremes, with areas of great wealth and other areas of significant social need. Currently 710 children under the age of 5 years live in the reach area. The large majority of families are of White British heritage (84%). Some 14% of families live in workless households and 12% of families are claiming the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. Most children enter Reception classes with a range of skills and knowledge that are above the expected standard for their age.

Surrey County Council has recently concluded a review of its children's centre provision and plans to merge Kestrel Children's Centre with nearby Hillcroft Children's Centre on 1 May 2014.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of workless families, lone parents and fathers who attend centre activities, and use the range of information available to ensure these and other priority groups are followed up to find out why they are not fully accessing services.
- Improve the consistency and efficiency of the procedures for recording and tracking the impact of services for both children and adults, and use the information gained to adapt and improve the centre's services.
- Improve links with adult education providers and Jobcentre Plus to better promote, advise and guide adults who wish to improve their education and skills.
- At a strategic level, establish a system that gathers information from all children's centres in the area to clarify which and how many families are engaging with each centre and use the data gathered to ensure the centre is meeting the needs of all families who are in greatest need.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre has engaged with the majority of families from deprived areas within its reach area. However, families from specific target groups, such as lone parents, workless families and fathers, do not access services frequently enough or in sufficient numbers. The centre responds well to the needs of families that do access services but does not routinely conduct research to establish why some families are not engaging with the centre.
- The children's centre provides a good local service. However, the centre is not sufficiently aware of families from the reach area who are registered elsewhere. Consequently, there may be families who are in need but who may not be receiving help. However, positive work with the police in visiting local social housing estates has increased the number of less affluent families who are

benefiting from the centre's support.

- Early childhood activities and other services designed to meet the needs of the wider community are appropriately advertised and well attended by families living both within and outside the centre's reach area. Ante-natal classes are popular with parents and centre staff work well with health colleagues to ensure that babies have the best start in life. A large majority of funded two-year-old places are taken up.
- Support for the large majority of families who live outside the reach area but choose to use the centre, is highly effective, but increases the demands made on the centre's resources. However, staff remain positive and keen to support all families that engage with the centre and provide the best service they can for all users.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre knows from its tracking records that children who transfer from the children's centre to the attached nursery, and then on to the adjacent school, make good progress because of the early support it has given to them. The gap between the lowest attaining children and their peers is narrowing year on year and is well below the national average at 24%. However, the centre is not able to gauge the full impact of its services on children who transfer to other nurseries and primary schools because the processes to track the impact of its service have only recently been introduced.
- The support adults receive about employment or education opportunities does not fully meet their needs. Adults are signposted to adult education providers and/or Jobcentre Plus for specialist advice about personal skills and opportunities in education and employment. However, there are too few posters on display for adults within the centre and staff are less confident when offering advice and guidance about opportunities for adults. Also, the collection and analysis of data to check the impact of the centre's actions on improving the lives of families across target groups, following referrals, are not yet fully developed.
- The quality and range of services are appropriate to meet the needs of the majority of families. Good links with the midwifery and health visiting services help to sustain high breastfeeding rates and ensure the centre is providing good ante- and post-natal support for mothers. In addition, obesity rates in the area have fallen to well below national figures. Parents talked enthusiastically about the impact that advice and guidance on healthy eating has had on their families, through workshops such as 'Crafty Cooks'.
- Families who attend the children's centre invariably receive good support and guidance. Staff work particularly well with vulnerable families who need specialist support and attention in areas such as behaviour management and parenting skills. The centre has focused on improving children's early language, communication and social skills through well-planned activities and good role modelling by staff. Services such as 'Two's Company' and 'Kickers and Crawlers' are popular with parents who spoke positively about how attendance on these courses helps them to increase their confidence and improve their ability to communicate with their children and others.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have accurate knowledge of families within the reach area who access the centre. This information clearly shows that most families from deprived areas near to the centre are making good use of its activities. Leaders are also aware that the majority of centre users come from outside of its reach area. However, a significant minority of families from within the reach area use other children's centres, both within and outside Surrey, and leaders are only just gathering information to determine how many families are yet to engage with any of the centres in the area.
- The centre's systems for tracking and measuring the impact of its work on improving the lives of families and reducing inequalities are not robust enough to provide a clear picture of the benefits arising from families' involvement with the centre. As a result, leaders find it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of support provided for both children and adults. An appropriate system has recently been introduced to track children's progress, although it is too early to judge the impact of this

process.

- Partnership working varies considerably. Relationships with housing, midwives, health workers, police and other children's centres are strong. For example, the centre cooperates well with neighbouring centres to provide a range of activities for local parents, ensuring activities are not duplicated and avoiding gaps in provision. However, the centre's partnerships with adult education providers, Jobcentre Plus, social care and childminder groups are not effective enough in ensuring high quality support, advice and guidance for adults.
- Governance of the centre is good with suitable arrangements in place to monitor the centre's work, evaluate its performance and ensure that it runs smoothly. The process works well, and reports to the advisory board, school governors and local authority are detailed and lead to clear challenge and support for the centre. Engagement with parents is highly effective. An active parents' forum is instrumental in helping centre staff to make decisions about activities and parents are well represented on the advisory group and governance board.
- The children's centre manager is a very supportive leader who nurtures staff very well. She leads a cohesive and happy staff team whose positive attitudes are appreciated by all who visit, as parents spoken to during the inspection confirmed. The children's centre works seamlessly with the attached nursery and primary school, enabling staff to share expertise and resources so families using the centre are well supported.
- Resources and services are evaluated effectively to ensure the needs of targeted children are met. The centre manager is held to account for the centre's performance and is supported effectively by the school governing body and the local authority. Sound professional supervision and management arrangements are in place to check on the performance of staff, ensure their safety and well-being and assist their training and development.
- Safeguarding arrangements are appropriately robust. Staff are vigilant and parents understand the importance of adopting safe practices. Staff's good knowledge and detailed record-keeping play an important role in meetings with other professionals about children who are subject to the common assessment framework arrangements or child protection plans. Case studies demonstrate that children who are subject to child protection plans, those deemed to be children in need and looked after children are supported well through close working with children's social care services.

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.

Centre details

Unique reference number	21654
Local authority	Surrey County Council
Inspection number	430223
Managed by	Marden Lodge Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	710
Centre leader	Linda Smith
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01883348641
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