

Hamstel Children and Family Centre

Hamstel Road, Southend on Sea, SS2 4PQ

Inspection dates	24–25 June 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

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 children's centre is good.

- Effective partnerships, especially with health services and other local children's centres, ensure that an increasing number of families are known to the centre. As a result, the large majority of young children are registered, access and engage with centre's good quality services. There is very good access to early childhood services for families expecting children.
- Staff have an excellent understanding of the local area and its needs, especially in relation to the parts that are most disadvantaged. Their proactive response, use of volunteers and successful outreach work is helping to engage families from these areas and iron out inequalities in outcomes.
- The quality of care, guidance and support that the centre provide is good.
- Parents have very wide-ranging opportunities to develop their parenting skills particularly in helping their children live healthy lives. Well-delivered sessions such as 'Cook 4 Life' and good quality support for breastfeeding are having a positive impact on health outcomes.
- Leaders, governors and managers have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. The steering group's wide range of partners, with parents as joint-chair, is supportive and clear about the aims of the centre. As a result, there is good capacity for the centre to improve further.

It is not outstanding because:

- Services are not finely tuned enough to ensure that the large majority of disabled children, one of the centre's priority groups, are using services often enough.
- Planning for sessions is not focused enough on supporting children's early development in the weakest areas highlighted by Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes in the local area that are below national averages.
- Leaders and managers at all levels are not using information well enough to monitor priority families' use of the centre or to track outcomes for adults who are signposted elsewhere.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve the access and engagement of disabled children by evaluating their specific needs and how best they can be met by the centre and its partners.
- Improve outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - ensuring planning for sessions, including those open to all, has a clear focus on the weakest areas of learning such as children's reading, writing and speaking skills
 - developing links with the adjacent infant school especially in relation to utilising the expertise of the nursery manager and tracking children
 - monitor the progress of more children especially those from the priority groups.
- Ensure that leaders, governors and managers at all levels have a clear understanding of the information and data that are available. Make consistent use of this information to monitor priority families' use of the centre and to track the progress of adults into other aspects of learning and on to employment.

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 centre manager, a representative of the commissioned provider, South Essex Partnership Trust (SEPT), and representatives from the steering group. They spoke to a wide range of partners from health services, voluntary organisations and education. They also met with parents and volunteers.

The inspectors visited sessions and activities taking place during the inspection such as the baby clinic and Cook 4 Life session. The First Steps group was observed jointly with the centre manager.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's development and action plan, self-evaluation, a sample of case studies and safeguarding policies and procedures. The centre manager and SEPT lead attended all meetings of the inspection team.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Towner

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Hamstel Children and Family Centre (HCFC) is a stand alone centre that was first designated in June 2009. The official launch of the centre was in December 2010 when it moved to the current purpose-built site next to Hamstel Infant and Junior Schools. The schools are subject to separate inspection and the latest reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

South Essex Partnership Trust (SEPT) is commissioned to manage the centre on behalf of the local authority. Governance arrangements are the responsibility of the HCFC steering group. The centre offers a wide range of services for families with young children including health services as well as providing or facilitating access to services for adults via the other eight Southend children's centres and other key partners.

In February 2013, the local authority undertook a review of all the children's centres' areas. As a result the number of children under five in the area served by this centre increased from 575 to 621 from April 2014. The area includes six separate defined localities, two of which are considered to be in the top 30% most disadvantaged compared to the rest of the country. Most children are from white British heritage families. The percentage of children under five living in workless households is 35% which is well above national averages. The percentage of children living in poverty in the area is 33%. Children generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at levels in line with those expected for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: families living in the least advantaged areas in the Longbow and Bewley districts; teenage parents; pregnant mothers; and disabled children.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- Despite the number of children in the centre's area increasing recently and a long period of uncertainty that included the threat of closure, the large majority of most of the centre's priority groups access and engage with services. However, although the majority of disabled children are registered with the centre, only about half are effectively engaging thereafter.
- Strong links with health services through the centre's commissioned provider, with midwife and child health clinics held at the centre and close ties with the Family Nurse Partnership, ensure that teenage parents and pregnant mothers have good access to early childhood services.
- Taking services out into the community has been very effective in reaching families in the Longbow and Bewley Road estates. The weekly attendance by family support workers in that area, ably supported by a local volunteer, plus holiday activities and trips specifically for priority families has a big impact on the numbers accessing and engaging with the centre's services.
- Staff are proactive in responding to parents' needs such as putting on groups for different ages of children and providing a full programme of events during the school holidays. This has encouraged more families, especially from the centre's priority groups and those less likely to do so, to continue to engage with services.
- Most children who are eligible for two-year old funded early education access good quality provision. Nearly all three and four year olds take up their entitlement to free education.
- The centre does not consistently monitor the attendance of priority families' at sessions that are open to all such as the 'First Steps' group. However a new method of recording families'

attendance and following up those who fail to participate regularly has been introduced.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The quality, range and relevance of services provided by the centre or its partners are good. This is because the nine children's centres in Southend work as a supportive group, avoiding duplication of services and providing expertise in different fields. This enables HCFC to signpost families for aspects such as adult education. However, it is not using information well enough to track the long term outcomes for those families.
- The 15 active volunteers in the centre, from all sectors of the community, provide highly valuable support and have also benefit personally through increased confidence and improved opportunities to gain employment. Parents are very supportive of each other, helping to make the centre the warm, inclusive place it is.
- Families who receive one to one support from the centre show good outcomes reflected by the comment of one parent stating: 'Since I started coming here, it has just transformed my life'. Health staff are the lead professionals for families with specific needs and a shared information system means that centre staff are kept fully aware and involved with families who are referred to them.
- This centre has a strong focus on providing health services and developing parenting skills. Parents feel that they have a greater understanding of how to lead healthy lives and give their children a good start through support for breastfeeding provided by the 'Milky Mondays' sessions. Baby-led weaning groups, 'Cook 4 Life' and easy access to health professionals have supported the improvement of health outcomes in the local area. A commonly voiced view was: 'This centre has completely changed how I eat and feed my children'.
- In 2013, the number of children in the local area who achieved a good level of development at the end of the reception year was below the national level although in line with the Southend average. Although practitioners do provide good quality sessions that encourage parents to engage with their children, session planning is not detailed enough to hone in on the weakest outcome areas, nor to reflect sufficiently on the particular needs of the centre's priority groups.
- The progress of children is tracked to some extent while they are at the centre but this is not followed up consistently when children move on.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The local authority, the commissioned provider and the steering group have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. They recognise that information and data that are available are not always used as regularly and effectively as they could be to monitor the centre's impact and have already begun to address this.
- Targets set for the centre by the local authority and the commissioned provider, and included in the development plan, are concise and relevant, although not always precisely measurable.
- The steering group is clear about its role and plays an active part in supporting and challenging the centre. It has good representation from parents as well as key partners.
- The centre puts safeguarding children and families at the core of its work. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and thorough. Because the commissioned provider is a health trust, health visitors are fully aware of children who are looked after, subject to child protection plans, deemed a child in need or being supported through Early Help Assessments. Centre staff can access this

information through a shared computer system enabling them to be fully informed when they have families referred to them for one-to-one support.

- Resources are used very effectively and efficiently. The centre has had to cope with a large reduction in staff and budget following a lengthy, unsettling consultation and review process. They have done so in a spirited manner ensuring services to families, especially priority groups, have been maintained and are effectively reducing inequalities for children and families.
- Strategic partnerships for example with adult education providers have been pivotal in ensuring families have access to a full range of services such as family learning. However tracking the impact on families of any signposting to those partners is an area for development.
- Staff are well qualified and experienced and the training plan, regular performance management and staff supervision all link to the centre's key priorities of developing parenting skills and encouraging healthy lifestyles.
- Parents and children are regularly consulted about their needs. They contribute well to decision making and played a key role in lobbying for the centre not to be closed. They have very high levels of satisfaction, feel warmly welcome at the centre they describe as a 'second home', and are very appreciative of the good work it does and the opportunities it offers them and their children.

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

Unique reference number	21363
Local authority	Southend-On-Sea
Inspection number	442881
Managed by	South Essex Partnership Trust on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	621
Centre manager	Imelda Callowhill
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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