

Haywards Heath Children and Family Centre

51 Penn Crescent, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 3HP

Inspection date

1–2 July 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 centre requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Not enough families from some priority groups are using the centre's services.
- A low proportion of two-year-olds are taking up their entitlement to funded early education and the centre does not understand the reasons for this.
- The planning, assessment and evaluation of 'Play and learn together' is not sharply focused on children's learning and progress. Some groups of children are not doing as well as their peers, especially those children from poorer families, and boys are not achieving as well as girls.
- The centre does not receive information from children's social care regarding children in need in the area, which hampers their ability to give this group priority and meet their needs.
- Links with adult training providers and colleges are underdeveloped, which limits the range of opportunities available for adult learning and their routes to employment.
- Leadership, management and governance of the centre are improving, particularly in the quality of information sharing, but this is not yet well-established for all partners. The centre partnership group has been refreshed recently and it is too soon to see the impact of its work in challenging and driving the centre's performance.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- The team manager is well qualified and highly regarded. She has continued to increase the number of families attending despite significant change and limited staff capacity.
- Data are becoming more precise and relevant. This is helping the centre to accurately target services for prospective parents and families in the area.
- The centre has made good progress in developing community links and breaking down barriers to access. There has been a rapid increase in the number of families engaging with services from the most deprived area that the centre serves.
- Families that have accessed parenting programmes value them highly and take pride in how they have made a positive difference to their lives. Family support work is improving safety outcomes for families that engage with the service.
- With the centre's encouragement, more parents are setting up groups and volunteering.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the centre partnership group engages all partners consistently well and provides the challenge needed to drive improvement.
- Narrow achievement gaps for boys and children from poorer backgrounds by increasing the take-up of funded nursery education for vulnerable two-year-olds and improving systems to plan, assess and evaluate children's learning and progress.
- Establish better links with colleges and training providers so there are more opportunities for adults to progress onto vocational courses, which can lead to employment.
- Increase the centre's engagement with lone parents, teenage and young parents, and those families from minority ethnic groups.
- Ensure children's social care services provide the centre with information about 'children in need' who live in the 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors had discussions with the centre manager, centre coordinators and temporary service manager. Inspectors spoke with health and education professionals, family outreach workers, family information service assistants, parents, volunteers and the chair and members of the centre partnership group for the district.

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

Inspection team

Penny Fisher	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Christine Davies	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dave Baber	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Haywards Heath Children and Family Centre serves the urban area of Haywards Heath. The centre was designated in October 2007 and operates part time. It is governed and managed by West Sussex County Council. The centre is one of eight children's centres in the Mid Sussex District, which comprises an urban cluster of five centres and rural cluster of three centres. The centre works collaboratively with Rural Haywards Heath Children and Family Centre, which was inspected at the same time and has a separate report. Published inspection reports for Rural Haywards Heath and other centres in the district can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre shares an advisory board (centre partnership group) with the Rural Haywards Heath centre, with representation from the family forum of each centre. The urban cluster team manager is supported by a centre coordinator, two family outreach workers and a family information service assistant, and the centre has the support of a volunteer coordinator who works across the urban cluster. The centre provides access to health, family support, child development, early education, and adult and family learning services. The centre does not provide registered early years provision.

There are approximately 1,150 children under the age of five living in the reach area. Mid Sussex is mostly rural and relatively affluent. Most families are economically active and the proportion of families claiming benefits is below national and regional averages. The proportion of children living in poverty is below the local authority average and significantly below the national average. However, there are some pockets of deprivation in the district, including the Bentswood ward, where the Haywards Heath centre is based. The very large majority of families are White British. Around 9% of the population are from a minority ethnic background; most of these families live in the town. At 11.6% in 2012, the proportion of children living in low-income households is higher in Haywards Heath than for the district as a whole, but still comparatively low. Overall, children enter early years provision with skills and experiences that are in line with expectations for their age.

The centre identifies its priority groups as teenage and young parents; lone parents; minority ethnic families, children with disabilities; and those from low-income families.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre identifies the need to increase the number of priority families that are engaging with services. Although the engagement of most priority groups has increased, not enough lone parents, teenage and young parents, and families from minority ethnic groups are taking up the opportunities offered by the centre.
- Not enough families that are entitled to funded early education for two-year-olds are taking up places and the reasons for this are not well understood. Those two-year-olds that do access early education are attending good-quality settings. The data for three- and four-year-olds is only available at a county-wide level. The majority of early education provision in the area is good.
- The centre continues to improve the quality of the data it collects. Intensive data cleansing is ongoing and means that the centre now has a much more accurate and useful picture of the number of families from priority groups that are accessing services. The large majority of children with a disability are accessing well-resourced services.
- Current registration rates have recently significantly improved; the centre knows the very large majority of families in the area, including those expecting children. Notably, there has been a significant increase in the number of families from the more deprived area who are registered and using the centre. Historical barriers to access for local families are being overcome.
- Attendance at group sessions, such as the parent-led multiple-birth group and the childminder drop-

in is variable. However, some services such as 'Play and learn together' and parenting programmes are very popular. The layout of the building limits the number of families that can attend sessions and staff capacity is stretched, which means that a few parents have to wait for access to these services.

- Families are well supported to attend services. For example, transport is provided so that families can access the teenage parent groups and parenting programmes, and a crèche is provided to support parents' attendance at family forum meetings.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- 'Play and learn together' sessions are enjoyed and valued by children and parents who attend. Many parents complete the learning journals with enthusiasm. Children have access to a wide range of good-quality resources, and parents are encouraged to interact and play with their children. Children's safety is well promoted. However, planning, assessment and evaluation are not sharply focused on children's learning and progress.
- Overall, children from the area achieve well at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, for some children, there are wide achievement gaps. For example, boys do not do as well as girls, and those children from poorer families do far less well than those from more affluent backgrounds. The centre is beginning to target activities to help close these gaps; for example, joint work with early years settings and health partners has informed the development of a targeted support programme for children and parents to improve school readiness and ease transition. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these measures.
- Although only a small number of parents from the area have attended recent parenting programmes, those that complete these courses speak passionately about the difference it has made to their lives. A parent said: 'Back then, if I could have seen a video of me now, I would not have recognised myself.' Evaluations of these programmes show that all parents gained confidence in their understanding of their child's development and behaviour.
- Information-sharing agreements with health partners are in place and ensure that centres know most new families in the area. Health visitors are making good use of the centre's services for those families that require additional support with parenting. Recently introduced case liaison meetings ensure the families are accessing appropriate support and making progress.
- The healthy children's centre programme ensures that targets are set to improve health outcomes. Data show that breastfeeding, obesity and maternal smoking rates are better than found across the local authority and the country as a whole, which is good. The setting contributes to healthy lifestyles, for example through the provision of information, advice and guidance, and providing healthy snacks at 'Play and learn together' sessions. Joint work with health partners is promoting immunisations for two-year-olds in the area as performance in this aspect is below target.
- A valuable work readiness programme aimed at providing parents with the necessary skills to gain employment has been successful with several positive outcomes. However, overall, the centre lacks firm links with an adequate number of training providers and colleges. This restricts the choice of vocational courses and progression opportunities for those wishing to continue study.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Governance arrangements are clear. The centre partnership group has been refreshed. An enthusiastic parent chair is now in place and terms of reference have been agreed. However, it is too soon to see if the new arrangements are sustainable or if they will provide robust challenge to help drive the centre's improvement.
- An overarching early childhood services safeguarding policy is being introduced to replace the current document, which does require some updating. Direct work with families and the delivery of effective parenting programmes are contributing to the safety and well-being of vulnerable children and families. Family outreach workers work alongside other agencies, as requested, to support

children where common assessments have been undertaken or where child protection plans are in place. However, the centre is not receiving information regarding children in need living in the area.

- The centre has tried several different ways to ensure parents contribute to the design and delivery of services. The Family Forum has been reintroduced and is supported by a crèche. Improvements, including a toy recycling facility and provision of hats and sun cream for children playing outside, have been made following feedback from parents.
- The centre manager is highly qualified and has worked hard to develop a strong senior management team. Staff are encouraged to attend a wide range of relevant training when staffing capacity allows. All staff have attended mandatory training, including child protection and safer recruitment.
- Performance development reviews are undertaken regularly and reflect the priorities of the centre well. Case supervision is appropriately prioritised and additional group supervision to support practitioners delivering parenting programmes is valued by staff. However, there has been some slippage in personal supervision, which does not always take place within the centre's own timescales.
- The recent improvements in the number of families registered and using the centre are impressive, especially when set within a context of stretched resources, a recruitment freeze and further restructuring. The centre's self-evaluation is accurate, reflecting a manager who knows well the strengths of the centre, and those areas that require further improvement. However, outcomes for some adults in key target groups as they move on from the centre's services to employment, or for children as they move into school, are not tracked to help the centre measure all areas of its effectiveness in depth.
- Some effective partnerships have been established, including close working links with the local community. Effective work has taken place to ensure that the centre is welcoming and accessible to those families that need it most. The manager continues to monitor the balance between universal, targeted and specialist services. The excellent outside play area is universally available. The centre is making best use of stretched resources by developing parent-led groups, and the number of volunteers contributing to services is growing.
- The local authority is providing data which are increasingly accurate and useful to centre leaders. Better-quality data are helping the centre to sharpen its priorities according to the needs of the area. For example, a detailed analysis of children's achievements in the Early Years Foundation Stage is clearly presented to ensure the centre is able to focus on those areas of learning where children need more support.
- The local authority implements a systematic performance management cycle, linking coherently to the centre's self-evaluation and development plan. The centre is on track to meet most of the targets for improvement in the area and a review is due in July 2014.

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	21421
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	444739
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,150
Centre leader	Paloma King
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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