

Thanet South Children's Centre Group

Priory Children's Centre, Cannon Road, Ramsgate, Kent, CT11 9SQ

Inspection dates	7–9 October 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Good	2
		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 group is good.

- Despite periods of significant change, staff have worked tirelessly to continue to run groups and ensure families are not affected. This has meant the vast majority of families regularly access services, and registration rates for all priority families have continued to increase.
- Children benefit from good quality early learning activities within the centre. When children start school, they are much better prepared for learning and make faster progress.
- Centre staff clearly understand the difficulties local families face and work hard to provide relevant services to help those most in need.
- The quality and range of services are consistently good. Leaders and managers continually monitor all programmes and ensure these are of high quality and meet families' needs.
- An increasing number of parents develop their skills through courses, volunteering opportunities, and by completing relevant training.
- Leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of what services are needed.
- Significant progress has been made in improving services since the new management arrangements began in July this year. The new management team is highly effective and rapid improvements are already being seen.
- The protection of families who are most in need is seen as a high priority.

It is not outstanding because:

- Not all eligible two-year-olds benefit from funded early years provision.
- Some systems for monitoring the centres' performance are not as effective as they could be.
- Children do not have sufficient time during some crèche activities to play and learn outside.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the good leadership and management arrangements by:
 - ensuring all systems for recording information and maintaining accurate case files are embedded across the group and reflect the high quality work undertaken by staff
 - ensuring the local authority provides centre leaders with information about the numbers of two-year-olds accessing funded early years education within the centres' area
 - making improved use of information from other key partners, such as health, to set challenging and measurable targets
 - consolidating the systems in place for measuring the centre's work.
- Further develop the good early years provision offered within the centres:
 - by increasing the opportunities for children to experience good and better learning opportunities outside
 - by embedding the newly-created systems in place for tracking children's progress.

Inspection team

Jo Caswell, Lead Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Wendy Ratcliff

Her Majesty's Inspector

Helen Hutchings

Additional Inspector

Joan Lindsay

Additional Inspector

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 Birchington Children's Centre, Newington Children's Centre, Newlands Children's Centre and Priory Children's Centre. This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre early help group manager and senior leaders from the local authority. They also met parents, centre staff, representatives from bought-in services, health professionals, local headteachers and early years groups, members of the district advisory board and parents' forum.

The inspectors visited a range of services and activities taking place at each of the centres, including the Little PALs play and stay group, the Kiddiwinks group, Active Play, the baby support group, Family Time, the Flying Start literacy course and health clinics.

Inspectors observed the centres' work, spoke informally with parents and looked at a range of relevant documentation. This included the group's development plan, Early Years Foundation Stage Profile information and reports on the centres' performance.

Full report

Information about the group

The Thanet South Children's Centre Group consists of four children's centres serving the town of Ramsgate and the villages surrounding Birchington on the north Kent coast. The centres are managed directly by the local authority. A group manager oversees all four centres and a district advisory board and steering group provide governance arrangements. Thanet is Kent's most deprived district and it is ranked as the second most deprived area in the south east of England. There are 3,618 children aged under five years living in the community served by the centres. The area is exceptionally diverse. The Birchington Children's Centre serves a very rural area with a number of small villages and large pockets of agricultural land and private housing. In contrast, the centres serving the town of Ramsgate have very high levels of deprivation, long-term unemployment and historical lower educational outcomes. In the Priory Children's Centre area, 50% of children live in one of the most deprived areas of the country. The numbers of children living in households where no one is working vary across the three centres serving Ramsgate, from 24.9% in the Priory area, 38.1% in the Newlands area to 50.5% in the Newington area. Within Ramsgate, the number of families living in rented accommodation, social housing, or homes with a number of occupants is high. The majority of families living in the area are of White British heritage.

The local authority works in partnership with a number of organisations to provide a range of activities open to all families and those especially designed for priority groups. These include stay and play activities, family support services, adult education and health promotion programmes. All of the children's centres are located on the sites of primary schools and independent early years provision. None of these schools and settings were inspected at the same time and they are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The inspection reports can be accessed at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centres' main priority groups include teenage parents, families living in deprived areas, workless families, children being supported by social care arrangements and parents and children who are victims of domestic abuse. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally below those typical for their age.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families Good

- Families regard the children's centres as a valuable part of the community. As a result, the vast majority, (83%) of families living in the area, are registered with the centres. Of these, two thirds regularly access services.
- The centres are particularly successful in engaging with teenage mothers. Currently, 100% of teenage parents living in areas served by the Birchington, Newington and Priory centres access services regularly. In Newlands, the figure is only slightly lower at 81%.
- Fathers are warmly welcomed into all activities. Across the Thanet South district, 95% of fathers are registered with their local children's centre.
- Strong links with other agencies mean all children subject to child protection arrangements are known to the centre. At present, 88% of these regularly access services. The remaining 12% are currently supported through other agencies.
- Concerted work with the local community means families in the most deprived areas regularly access services. At present, 84% of families living in the most disadvantaged communities are registered with the centres.
- Midwifery services are regularly delivered from the centres. This means prospective parents quickly learn about the support programmes available to them and continue to engage with services after the birth of their baby.
- Parents, particularly those who are currently out of work, have good access to programmes which develop their literacy and numeracy skills. This enables them to successfully support their child's learning.
- There is a high proportion of good and outstanding early years provision within the local community. However, only 64% of eligible two-year-olds access funded education in the Newington and Newlands area. The centre staff do not routinely receive this information from the local authority. This means staff do not always know which children access their entitlement to funded early years provision.
- Centre staff routinely monitor which families are regularly accessing services. They have good systems in place to ensure any families who do not attend are supported through other aspects of the centres' work, for example work within the local area and regular family events such as Lark in the Park.

The quality of practice and services Good

- Concerted action has been taken to help children to become ready for starting school. As a result, at the end of the Reception year, children achieve as well as other children living in Kent and better than the national level of children of the same age across England.
- Considerable work has been completed to engage adults, especially those who are known to be unemployed and lone parents, in training and further education. Consequently, more parents are taking up volunteering opportunities and successfully gain employment.
- The quality of services is good. Despite running on limited budgets and with reduced staffing, a range of courses and activities has continued. Since the change in management arrangements in July, a more comprehensive programme and range of activities is scheduled from next year.
- Staff provide effective one-to-one support for those families who need the most help. Staff skilfully gain families' trust; they help parents to increase their confidence and motivate them to make positive changes in their lives. Consequently, families in crisis know where they can get the help and support they need.
- Particularly good support is offered to parents who are victims of domestic violence. Parents who complete relevant support programmes highly commend the help they have received in improving their well-being and re-building their self-confidence. Typical comments from parents include, 'I can now recognise it was not my fault,' and, 'I feel stronger as a person now.'
- Staff are skilled in identifying and nurturing parents' skills. Programmes often begin with confidence-

building courses and lead on to accredited training and volunteering. Parents enjoy the wide range of opportunities to extend their skills and knowledge, including English, mathematics and information and communication technology courses. Almost two thirds complete courses; this demonstrates a good level of satisfaction with the programmes on offer.

- Opportunities for adults to improve their education and employability skills are well developed. These include families living in the most deprived areas or identified as in need of additional help. Many parents are supported to obtain additional qualifications to enable them to gain employment. Programmes provided in conjunction with Jobcentre Plus result in almost two thirds of participants entering employment.
- Courses provided by adult education partners, Kent Adult Education and East Kent College, are very well attended. Last year, almost 1,000 parents benefited from the wide range of activities planned by the children's centres to improve their parenting and employment skills.
- Staff work hard to improve the health and well-being of local families. Designated courses are run to help parents and children understand the importance of healthy eating. Staff members take on the roles of 'Food Champions', and work together with health professionals to successfully deliver programmes which improve family health. Obesity levels are significantly reducing and concerted action is being taken to promote breastfeeding across the area.
- Parents praise the way in which they can access health clinics easily within the centres. Midwives, health visitors and speech and language therapists deliver services and health support, meaning parents can obtain advice and professional help easily. Attendance at clinics is consistently better than those offered at local surgeries.
- Centre staff work closely with other services to keep children and families safe. Timely and robust checks ensure families, including those at risk from domestic violence, receive the help and support they need. Detailed home visits and good partnerships with other agencies, such as the fire service, have significantly improved safety in the home for some families.
- Parents were unanimous in their support for the centre when talking to inspectors. They clearly recognise and fully appreciate the positive impact that staff and services have on their lives. Typical comments included, 'You can be having a really bad day but you forget that when you arrive at the centre.' 'It's a happy place to go when you are down and need help.'

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The children's centre group has only been in place since July 2014. Prior to this, the local authority went through a period of significant change. The management team should be commended for the way in which staff have been managed through the change period. Services have continued to operate without disruption to families.
- Parents and other professionals were also keen to praise staff for maintaining services during the period of significant change and potential disruption. One parent said, 'We hardly felt a ripple.' Another senior member of staff, from a different agency, stated, 'I cannot praise the staff highly enough.'
- The new management team is strong and highly focused in delivering services of a high quality and meeting local families' needs. New systems are now in place to help leaders clearly monitor the numbers of families registering with the centre and accessing services. This means any slippage is quickly recognised and relevant systems are put in place to keep parents engaged with services.
- Significant improvements have been made to the way in which information is produced by the local authority. This helps staff to monitor the impact of their work with families. Leaders and managers recognise that more work is necessary to fully embed this process, but secure systems have recently been put in place to address this.
- Various methods are used to record the impact of the centres' work and make continuous improvements. However, sometimes these procedures are not always linked sufficiently well. This makes it harder for managers to measure accurately the rapid improvements that are being seen.
- There is some minor inconsistency in the way staff record the work they do with families. This does

not always fully reflect the good work and positive outcomes that have taken place.

- The district advisory board, steering group and parents' forum make very good contributions towards driving improvement. All groups are well attended and there is a clear focus on building on the new management system and making sure services consistently meet local families' needs.
- The centre has established strong partnerships with a number of partners to identify the needs of the community and offer courses designed to meet their needs. Partners value the strong relationship they have with centre staff. They confirm the trust built up with parents helps families to seek help from other agencies, for example in times of crisis to help with housing, benefit advice and in cases of domestic violence.
- Safeguarding procedures to protect children in most need, and those known to be at risk, are good and highly effective. Excellent partnerships with other services, such as social care, the police, health colleagues and schools, mean children in most need are consistently supported well. As a result of agencies working together so well, the numbers of children being supported by social care are decreasing.
- Good procedures are in place to identify accurately each child and family's needs. Children who are looked after, subject to child protection plans, and those deemed to be children in need are well supported. Early help assessment systems are used well to identify individual needs.
- Despite running with a reduced staff team due to the recent re-organisation of services, staff have continued to deliver services of high quality. A new team structure, under the wider 'Early Help' agenda, means resources are continually focused on the families most in need. This has a very positive impact on improving outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged and families in most need.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80813
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	450704
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,618
Early Help Group Manager	Jane Higgins
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01843 587457
Email address	jane.higgins@kent.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

Birchington Children's Centre (URN 20309)
Newington Children's Centre (URN 22122)
Newlands Children's Centre (URN 22123)
Priory Children's Centre (URN 22428)

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