

Maidstone Town Children's Centre Group

c/o The Meadow Children's Centre, Furfield Close, Maidstone, Kent, ME15 9JR

Inspection dates	29 June–2 July 2015
Previous inspection date	18–20 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
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 group of centres is good.

- Significant progress has been made since the last inspection to improve the quality and range of services provided for families.
- Leaders and managers, and those responsible for governance, have thoroughly reviewed the organisation of the centres and the management structure. As a result, services have a consistently positive impact on families who access the centres.
- The majority of families who live in the Maidstone area are registered at the centres. Continual improvements have been made in the numbers of families who regularly engage with services after they have registered.
- Highly effective working arrangements with other services and organisations within the Maidstone area mean families receive professional help quickly.
- Centre leaders and staff are highly motivated and dedicated to their role. They praise the new management structure and take full responsibility for the quality of their work. Staff continually told inspectors they want the very best for the families they work with.
- Parents and other partner agencies are very complimentary about the centres' work.

It is not outstanding because:

- Although there has been an increase in the range of training courses provided for parents, these are not always specifically matched to what families need. Systems to monitor the quality of these courses are still in the early stages of development.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Develop the arrangements for adult learning to ensure all courses consistently meet parents' specific needs and training is of continually good or better quality.

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 four Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the local authority, the centres' leaders and the district manager; representatives from health services, adult learning, social care and partner agencies; local headteachers; centre staff; members of the district advisory board; focus groups of colleagues from a range of services; volunteers and parents.

The inspectors visited three stay and play sessions, including one held at the local barracks; the young parents' group, a community café, childminding group, adult learning sessions, health clinics and a Baby Bumpkins session at The Meadows centre.

The inspection covered the following centres: East Borough Children's Centre, Greenfields Children's Centre, Howard de Walden Children's Centre, Sunshine Children's Centre, The Meadow Children's Centre and West Borough Children's Centre.

Inspectors observed the centres' work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. This included the centres' improvement plans, safeguarding records, staff development files and performance monitoring information.

Inspection team

Jo Caswell, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ali Mekki	Her Majesty's Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Additional inspector
Jameel Hassan	Additional inspector
Ann Janssen	Additional inspector
Anthony Mundy	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Maidstone Town Group consists of six children's centres in the Maidstone district of Kent. The centres serve the town centre and surrounding villages, covering a densely populated area. The centres are managed directly by the local authority. A children's centre delivery manager oversees the group. A district advisory board provides governance.

The centres work 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. East Borough, West Borough, Greenfields, The Meadow and Sunshine children's centres share the same sites as primary schools, although these are subject to separate inspection arrangements. Independent early years provision is also provided on the same sites as East Borough, (Trinity Pre-School EY244005); Howard De Walden, (Little Monsters EY468478); Sunshine, (Little Stars Pre-School 127343); and The Meadow Children's Centre, (The Meadow Children's Centre Nursery EY335427). These settings were not inspected at the same time as the centres and are subject to separate inspections. These inspection reports can be accessed at www.gov.uk/ofsted. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally below those typical for their age.

There are 8,391 children aged under five years living in the community served by the centres. Around 11% of families living in the locality are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the main groups being mixed British, Indian and Asian families. The number of families who are workless and dependent on benefits is in line with the local authority average. There are pockets of deprivation, for example in the wards of Shepway South, High Street and Parkwood. In areas covered by Sunshine and The Meadow children's centres, families live in areas that are deemed to be the least advantaged areas of the country. In the Maidstone area, 25% of families live in socially funded housing, slightly below the local authority average rate of 28%.

The centres' main priority groups include: children and families living in the less affluent areas; teenage and young parents; children known to be supported by social care; and, military families.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families Good

- Since the last inspection, the local authority has significantly improved the range and type of information provided to the centres' leaders about the families living in the Maidstone area. This enables staff to accurately identify the range of services children and parents need. As a result, the numbers of families registered with the centres and regularly using services have continually improved.
- Staff rightly prioritise services and resources in the areas where families most need support. For example, targeted work in the Parkwood area, where some of the most vulnerable families live, has doubled the numbers of families now regularly accessing services.
- The good working arrangements with partner agencies mean priority groups of families access services easily. For example, 100% of teenage parents in the Maidstone area are registered with the centres and regularly access services. Similarly, good links with the local barracks mean almost all of the military families (91%) access stay and play sessions

delivered on site and services delivered within the town.

- Close working arrangements with early help colleagues mean children being supported by social care, including children subject to child protection arrangements and those supported through other services, are registered at the centre.
- Centre staff have an extensive knowledge of the local area and recognise where families find it harder to access services. Many community venues are used to accommodate services. This means families living in more isolated areas can access children's centre activities easily.
- Good work has taken place with the Traveller community, meaning access to these families is now improving. Early help workers have built strong, trusting relationships with families, helping them to access services they may need, including training to become volunteers.
- Health visitors and midwives work closely with the early help workers and deliver clinics from the centres. This means prospective parents and new parents quickly engage with the centres from a very early stage.
- Centre staff have worked tirelessly to promote the centres' services across the area. Extensive promotional work and community events have significantly raised the centres' profile and increased the numbers of families accessing services. As a result, the centres are now regarded as hubs of the community.
- Almost all children aged three and four years take up their entitlement to funded early years provision in good or better pre-schools, childminders and nurseries. Although the number of two-year-old children entitled to funded early years provision accessing places is lower, work is already in place at strategic level across Kent to address this.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Parents consistently praise the work of the centres and explain the positive impact it has on their lives. They build close relationships with the staff and recognise the centres are a place to go to receive help.
- Teenage parents and young parents benefit from a range of services delivered through the Bumps to Babes, Young and Able Parents (YAPs) group and YAPs+. This means targeted support is offered from a specialist midwife to meet the needs of parents and children. As a result of this, younger parents confirm they have received support in building their self-confidence, fostering their emotional well-being and helping them manage issues such as housing and preparation for employment and training. In total, seven young parents have returned to education or employment.
- A well-established volunteer programme is now in place and take-up rates are continuing to increase. The programme offers good support with extensive training, supervision and an ongoing mentoring system. This enables parents to develop their professional skills and be well prepared for accessing training and employment.
- Breastfeeding rates across the Maidstone area have improved. Across the group, almost 41% of mothers are still breastfeeding their babies at six weeks after birth, slightly below the national rate but higher than the Kent average. Where it is recognised that engagement levels are lower, specialist advice from a lactation consultant and team of 'breast buddies' provides ongoing support.
- Across Maidstone, health outcomes are good. The number of children recorded as being of a healthy weight at the end of Reception year is above average. A good range of programmes, such as cookery courses, has helped parents understand the importance of healthy eating, portion control and how to prepare nutritious meals.
- At 71%, the numbers of children achieving in line with expected levels at the end of the Reception year has increased and is above national average. As a result of concerted and

focused work with local schools and nurseries, children have developed the skills they need for starting school. Consequently, the gap between the most disadvantaged children and the rest has narrowed within the Maidstone area. This is particularly successful given children's low starting points.

- Good support is provided for families at times of crisis. Extensive links with other agencies mean parents receive support with food parcels and specialist advice with housing, financial and employment issues. Close working relationships with organisations such as the Oasis café and Jobcentre Plus mean parents are referred to the centre for professional help and advice when they need it the most.
- The centres provide a wide range of programmes and support for victims of domestic abuse. Parents who have completed these courses confirm they feel more confident, have higher aspirations for themselves and their children, and increased emotional well-being. This enables them to make life-changing decisions to keep themselves and their children safe.
- A wide range of parenting courses and programmes is delivered by the centre. These include support for managing children's behaviour, enhancing parents' well-being, first aid and programmes to help parents understand how children learn. Parents confirm that they have found these courses helpful and that this has built their confidence as parents and enabled them to enjoy more positive relationships with their children.
- Although parents enjoy the training courses available, these are not always specifically matched to precisely what they need. Leaders and managers have only just started to monitor the quality of training delivered by outside agencies and rightly recognise they need to do more to check that all parents benefit from the type of training available.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Since the last inspection, the local authority has taken concerted action in addressing the identified areas for improvement. Stringent performance monitoring arrangements have been introduced, with enhanced levels of staff development, and this has resulted in significantly improved practice. Comprehensive and precise action plans are now used to ensure that all priority areas to improve are targeted effectively.
- Information is now used more purposefully by all leaders, managers and those responsible for governance to monitor practice and measure the rate of progress. As a result, resources are deployed more effectively. Any weaker practice is addressed promptly. Services which do not sufficiently address the needs of families are quickly changed. Therefore, the centres' services consistently provide good value for money.
- The district advisory board plays a fundamental role in accelerating the centres' rate of improvement. Partners from a wide range of agencies bring together an extensive range of skills and expertise and actively challenge the centres' leaders. Their combined knowledge of the needs of Maidstone families means the services delivered by the centres are continually in response to local need.
- One of the main contributing factors to the centres' rapid improvement since the last inspection is the highly effective leadership and management team structure. Senior leaders and key staff have remained in post since the last inspection. This has been instrumental in driving the pace of improvement and improving staff morale.
- The centres' leaders have exceptionally high aspirations for themselves, their staff and the families they work with. This has resulted in significant improvements in the quality and range of services provided. New systems are now in place to measure progress and improvement.

- Safeguarding arrangements underpin the centres' work. Extremely good working relationships with social care colleagues ensure all vulnerable children and families are known to the centres. Case files are managed well and evidence shows positive outcomes for children as a result of highly effective work with other agencies.
- Partnerships with other agencies contribute to the centres' effectiveness. The excellent work that has been done to promote the centres' work has made a significant number of other agencies engage more purposefully. As a result, families receive a seamless range of services and professional support delivered in a timely and effective manner.
- Parents are fully involved in the development of the centres. The district advisory board includes parents and there are many systems in place for gathering parents' views and responding to their feedback. As a result, changes have been made to the activity timetable and organisation of services in response to parents' requests.

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	80808
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	455018
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	8,391
Children's Centre Delivery Manager	Kareen McKeown
Date of previous inspection	18–20 June 2014
Telephone number	03000 412700
Email address	maidstonecc@kent.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- (21015) East Borough Children's Centre
- (21307) Greenfields Children's Centre
- (21569) Howard De Walden Children's Centre
- (23012) Sunshine Children's Centre
- (23218) The Meadow Children's Centre
- (23494) West Borough Children's Centre

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

This template is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130186.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 130186

© Crown copyright 2015

