

Kent – Canterbury Coastal Group

Joy Lane Children's Centre, Whitstable, Kent, CT5 4LT

Inspection dates	9–11 September 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
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.

- Families' views are absolutely central to planning at every level in the group. Leaders and managers listen very closely to families and act on their views. They make sure that the group maintains the good quality services that are needed and valued most in the area.
- Personalised guidance and support reduce inequalities by helping families to take part fully in the centres' activities. This brings significant improvements in the health, personal development and safety of families, particularly those in priority groups.
- Enthusiastic staff and partners in health services publicise the children's centres well, so that the large majority of families are registered and take up the services they need.
- Working in partnership with other organisations such as the Herne Bay 'One Stop Shop', staff support families at risk of domestic abuse to make changes for the better in their lives.
- Children enjoy their play and learning in the crèches or stay-and-play activities; those attending regularly are well prepared with the skills they need for starting school.
- Links with adult training providers are well established so that there are good opportunities for parents to take up courses. Many parents gain useful work-place experience through volunteering.

It is not outstanding because:

- Some children in some locations are not doing as well as other children in their age group by the time they start school. The take-up of funded education for two-year-olds is low in some areas.
- The group is working with partners to make sure that figures held for the numbers of lone-parent families and children living in workless households are accurate. However, plans to support these families are vague and the group does not always know whether it is doing enough to help.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority and partners to close the achievement gaps for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly for children in the areas around Bysing Wood and St Mary's where children's achievement is lowest, by:
 - using data to target specific support to individuals and groups in readiness for transition to school
 - ensuring the uptake of funded early education provision by all eligible children.
- Work with the local authority and partners to make sure that all those involved in service delivery are counting the numbers of lone-parent families and children living in workless households in the same way so that they agree on baselines and the centres plan accurate, specific targets for improvement in outcomes.

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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with managers of the group of centres, staff and representatives of partner organisations in children's education, health, social care and adult learning. Inspectors met and held telephone conversations with the chair and members of the advisory board, volunteers and parents. Inspectors observed the work of the centres and talked with staff, parents and children. They looked at a variety of documentation.

The inspection covered the following centres: Bysing Wood and St Mary's in Faversham; Joy Lane in Whitstable; and The Poppy in Herne Bay. The inspectors visited outreach provision at Briary and Swalecliffe centres and partnership provision at ABC Nursery, Briary Nursery Pre-school and The Avenue.

Inspection team

Christine Davies, Lead Inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Denise Blackwell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Pepper	Additional inspector
Janet Stacey	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The group serves the Kent towns of Faversham, Whitstable and Herne Bay and the surrounding coastal communities in the Canterbury District. The group of four main centres and two outreach centres was formed in July 2014 following a review of children's centre services by Kent County Council. The group is managed directly by the local authority. The early help group manager is supported by a team of full- and part-time receptionists, administrators, early help family practitioners and early help workers who work across the area. Governance is provided through a district advisory board. Local parents' forums link to the advisory board through three local steering groups. The children's centre group is implementing plans for the steering groups to be amalgamated into one.

Bysing Wood, Joy Lane and The Poppy children's centres were inspected as individual centres before becoming a group. All were judged good. No registered childcare is provided by the centres although The Poppy centre shares premises part of the week with the private childcare provision Avenue Nursery School Ltd. Registered childcare settings are found adjacent to all other main centres and outreach venues in the group and all are provided independently. Bysing Wood, Joy Lane and St Mary's (at St Mary of Charity C of E (Aided) Primary School) children's centres are each located on the same site as a primary school of the same name. Each registered childcare provision and primary school is subject to its own inspection. The inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The main sites opened as individual children's centres in 2008. Working together now as a group, the centres provide family support services, midwifery and child health-check clinics and family learning provision. In partnership with other organisations, the centres provide the support for parents to access employment, benefits and debt advice, adult learning and specialist children's services.

The areas served are mainly urban and suburban with rural coastal areas adjoining. The very large majority of the population is White British. There are no predominant minority ethnic or language groups. Polish and Nepalese speaking families are among the fastest growing groups. The area is a traditional home for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, with changing numbers visiting throughout the year. The Canterbury coastal area is relatively affluent although there are a number of pockets of deprivation. Social housing estates such as Lucerne Drive and Long Rock and parts of Heron Ward, with high numbers of families in temporary accommodation, are within the 20% most deprived communities in the country. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and experience that are mostly in line with the expectations for their age, except in Bysing Wood and St Mary's areas where they are often lower.

The group identifies the following priority and target groups: teenage parents; children in need or subject to child protection or care plans; families living in rural isolation or in areas of deprivation; children and adults with disabilities; lone parents; and workless households.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families Good

- Families make good use of the smoothly joined up midwifery and health visiting services throughout the group. Ante-natal appointments, parenting classes and child health checks are all provided on local children's centre sites and take up is good. Health partners introduce expectant and new families to children's centre services so that the large majority of families, including most in the centres' target groups, are registered with the children's centres.
- Staff use their observations effectively to find out about individual children's needs and offer families services that they require. Assessments of children who regularly attend the crèche lead to early referral to specialist services, particularly for children with speech problems or developmental need. Health visitors quickly refer families for support when needs are discovered in child health and development checks.
- Health visitors and midwives running clinics at the centres are very enthusiastic about the expertise available through children's centre services to help parents solve housing, employment, debt and benefit problems. Parents build up trust with a wide range of experts. This is very helpful to parents with low-level anxiety and depression who are prioritised for help by health partners because of the complex challenges they face.
- Within this good picture, the centres further target and invite some of the most vulnerable families to specialist activities. Most teenage parents attend 'YAPs' and 'YAPs Plus' for their age groups. Almost all children with disabilities are registered in the group and access specialist groups like 'Chat and Giggle'. They take part regularly enough to make a difference to their lives and their satisfaction is high.
- The group has identified a mismatch between countywide data and its own local information on the numbers of lone-parent families and children living in workless households and targeting is not precise. Once registered and circumstances known, families in these groups are encouraged to take up tailored services for their needs. Local data shows that their participation is good.
- The centre increased the uptake of funded early education by eligible two-year-olds in the 2013–14 year so that 70% are now taking up their entitlement across the whole area. This could increase in some areas where take up is low and be more specifically targeted but the centre does not currently have access to the names of eligible families to follow up non-participants. The very large majority, 95%, of three- and four-year-olds take up funded early education and the large majority are in high quality provision.

The quality of practice and services Good

- Families quickly gain a sense of emotional well-being through a mixture of good quality groups that are open to all or by invitation only. These include healthy walks, 'Topic and talk', breastfeeding support, Baby massage and 'Your Time' sessions. Fathers are well served with specialist 'Soccer Tots' and 'Men behaving dadly' groups.
- Staff and health partners target families for good, sustained support that is evident in case records seen. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used frequently to ensure a coordinated approach and the full involvement of families in decisions. A new Kent early help assessment framework was initiated in September 2014 but it is too soon to see the impact.
- Services to help families at risk of domestic abuse are sensitive to needs and extensive. 'Freedom Programme' courses in each of the main children's centres and partner

organisations in the multi-agency 'One Stop Shop' in Herne Bay support families to make safe choices in relationships and housing. The centres promptly make referrals to children's services for children in need of help and protection.

- The group is successful in helping to meet health targets so that obesity among five year olds is very low at 4%. Sustained breastfeeding rates are well below the national average in Bysing Wood and The Poppy area, where families are often living in temporary accommodation. However, breastfeeding rates for some priority groups who have specialist support, including teenage parents, are good. Tailored accident prevention courses are helping to reduce hospital admissions from burns and traffic accidents.
- Children enjoy their learning in the well thought-out family environments in the centres and 'beach learning' expeditions from Bysing Wood. 'Little Talkers' sessions promote communication and language skills well, including for some children waiting for speech and language therapy. Parents enthusiastically fill in 'all about me' records of their children's development. Evaluations of targeted family learning programmes show that all parents gain confidence in their understanding of their child's development and behaviour.
- The large majority of children across the area, 68%, are working within age-related expectations when they start school. This rises to more than 80% of tracked children who have attended activities in the centres. Good partnerships are in place with most schools to improve children's achievement and transition to school. However, transition planning is not sharply focused on children's skills in the Bysing Wood and St Mary's areas where only a minority of children reach a good level of development.
- Parents make great strides in their personal development through attending the centre regularly. The large majority of the parents in priority groups whose progress is followed up by the centre complete their courses when they take up Kent adult education programmes and go on to further training or work. Parents grow in confidence in making their voices heard in evaluation of services for them and through the parents' forum. The rate of volunteering is high, with more than 50 gaining valuable work skills as they help out across the group.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have maintained the best of partnerships in their formation of the group. Parents had a highly influential role in defending the services that they most need in the locations that are most helpful to them. The process of change was carefully managed to maintain services so that, as one parent said to inspectors: 'We don't like all the changes, but to be honest I still get all the help I need.'
- The expertise of centre staff is recognised widely by parents and does a lot to secure their increasing take-up of services and their interest in helping out as volunteers. The Early Help Group Manager and District Early Help Manager have nurtured the skills of staff exceptionally well throughout the changes and put workable supervision arrangements in place so that high quality work has continued. Parental satisfaction is high.
- Governance arrangements have been strengthened across the Canterbury District Advisory Board with secure representation in place. Local steering groups provide a clear and well-understood link between the strategic leaders and local views, including those of vociferous parents. The steering groups are transforming into one unit although it is too soon to see if the new arrangements will provide increased challenge and consistency across the area.
- Early help safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and are implemented. Safe recruitment procedures are carried out for all paid staff and volunteers. Protocols with partners are in place. Centre staff carry out good risk assessments and model safe

behaviour so that parents keep their children safe. Early help workers and early help family practitioners contribute strongly to work alongside other agencies where common assessments have been undertaken or where child protection plans are in place. Those children in need of additional social care support are equally well supported.

- The E-Qualities (Equalities Commission) Award for diversity achieved by Joy Lane and Swalecliffe centres as a cluster has outstanding impact on promoting inclusion across the group. Staff use creative skills to make a warm environment in which all families, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, feel a sense of belonging. This gives parents the confidence to speak out and begin to lead groups like the healthy walks themselves.
- The local authority is providing data which is increasingly accurate and useful to the group leaders within a clear performance framework. Better quality data helps the group to sharpen priorities according to the needs of the area. The detailed analysis of children's achievements in the Early Years Foundation Stage is yet to be used to focus support to children who need it most.
- The centre's self-evaluation accurately captures the extent of the work of the group as this becomes standardised across the group area. It reflects the strengths of the group and those areas that require further development. There is more to do to ensure that the work with some key target groups, particularly lone parents and families in workless households, is measured and evaluated consistently by all partners so that the impact of work with them is understood.

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	80802
Local authority	Kent County Council
Inspection number	451707
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	5587
Group manager	Emma Fairbairns
Telephone number	01227 263 998
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This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20534 Bysing Wood Children's Centre
- 21632 Joy Lane Children's Centre
- 22868 St Mary's Children's Centre
- 23239 The Poppy Children's Centre

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