

# Inspection report for Epsom Downs children's centre

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Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	361092
Inspection dates	7–8 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Dickinson HMI

Centre governance	Advisory Board
Centre leader	Anita Hardcastle
Date of previous inspection	n/a
Centre address	St Leonard's Road, Epsom Downs, Surrey KT18 5RJ
Telephone number	01737 850517
Fax number	n/a
Email address	family.centre@epsomdowns.surrey.sch.uk

Linked school if applicable	Epsom Downs Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Epsom Downs Day Nursery

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Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester  
M2 7LA

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Years Inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher of the primary school, the children's centre manager, a representative from the local authority, groups of front-line staff, the chair of the advisory board, parents and representatives from a range of agencies. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation and data.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
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## Information about the centre

The Epsom Downs Children's Centre is co-located with Epsom Downs Primary School and is managed by the school's governing body. The centre was first designated as a children's centre in October 2005 developing from a Mini Sure Start Centre. It serves families living in the Tattenham, Burgh Heath and Kingswood areas and provides an integrated service from 0–11 years. The centre used to serve one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. This has improved over recent years and it is no longer in this category. The local statistics indicate that employment figures are relatively good and the area the centre serves has some relatively affluent parts. However, some pockets of high social deprivation remain. Most families are of White British heritage although the number of families from other groups, most notably Eastern European and African, is increasing.

The centre includes a 39-place day nursery for children aged from three months to five years, which is open for 51 weeks of the year. The day nursery was last inspected in April 2006. It was not inspected fully as part of this children's centre

inspection. Children attending the day nursery have skills and levels of development generally below those expected for their age.

### Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

### Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

## Main findings

Espom Down’s Children’s Centre is a good children’s centre which serves the families who live in its target area well and provides good value for money. Its co-location with the school and the effective partnership with school leaders and staff mean it plays a key role in the integrated 0–11 provision on the site. Parents find the centre very welcoming and supportive. Several parents described how the centre’s services had helped to reduce stress at home and improved their relationships with their children. The centre is a safe environment to visit and for children to play and explore because staff are very alert to safety and welfare. Good systems are in place to ensure users’ safety and well-being. Parents report feeling relaxed about leaving their children in the crèche which, for many, is the first time that they have been willing to leave them in other people’s care. Other parents spoke of their confidence in the centre and the degree to which they have access to any support they need through the centre staff or partner agencies such as health.

The centre manager gives a strong lead to the centre’s work and development. She works closely and effectively with the headteacher of the primary school and the advisory board and has good knowledge of the role and key responsibilities of children’s centres. Effective steps have been taken to improve services over the last year, since the centre manager took up post. Strong links have been built up with most of the centre’s partners and this has, in turn, brought more families and children into contact with the centre. Numbers using the centre have increased significantly over the last year. There is a clear sense of drive and passion, which is shared by the staff who work at the centre and is central to the good morale, strong teamwork and sense of pride in the centre’s work.

The centre engages successfully with its users, including those from particularly vulnerable groups, and has a positive impact on their lives. The commitment to helping families, promoting the centre’s services and working together effectively with key partners goes without question. However, while users are supported well and benefit, the centre’s leaders do not use the information it holds to full effect to review how well it is reaching the most deprived areas within its reach and the different target groups that it seeks to serve. It is also hindered by a lack of up-to-

date information and data from the local authority and partners so that the centre's leaders can measure and demonstrate the impact of their work more successfully.

Partnership working is strong and continuing to develop well. The multi-disciplinary team is a very positive feature. Its role and membership have strengthened considerably over the last year as it now includes staff from partner organisations who have decision making roles. The team shares and communicates information effectively and members are able to make suggestions to influence the work of the centre in order to serve the members of the community who need it most.

The centre manager and staff go out of their way to be flexible and adaptable, to accommodate parents' needs. Dates and times for crèches, for example, are adapted to take account of parents' changing family circumstances or commitments.

A particularly successful aspect of the centre's work is its adult learning provision. Over 400 adults have attended courses over the last year through the centre, some have taken more than one and some are pursuing further courses to gain qualifications. The impact of this work is very positive and there are examples of the centre improving users' confidence and self-esteem as well as fostering a commitment to future learning beyond the centre. There are some weaknesses in the partnership with Jobcentre Plus, which is a responsibility of the local authority. The partnership agreement has lapsed and not yet been renewed; some aspects of the support outlined in the previous agreement have not materialised.

The centre has established a clear and consistent method for evaluating parents' views on the activities and courses they attend and for gauging the impact for users. Participants evaluate their skills and knowledge before they start courses and again at the end. This provides useful information for the centre manager and staff. However, the systems for reviewing and evaluating how well the centre provides services for more vulnerable families and the groups that all centres are required to support are not as well established. The centre's leaders are not yet drawing fully on the information the centre already holds, to review its effectiveness.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should continue to work with partner agencies, especially the primary care trust to provide relevant and helpful data to the centre; inform its work; help it to measure and evaluate its reach; and to set targets.
- Develop self-evaluation further to measure the impact of the centre's work in meeting the needs of the target groups and most vulnerable families, establish aspects that are going well and inform future priorities.
- Work with the local authority to strengthen the partnership with Jobcentre Plus, agree a new partnership agreement and bring about closer and more effective

joint working.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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The centre's evaluation shows that services are clearly having an impact on improving healthy eating and well-being. Parents benefit from a variety of courses to support family health and welfare and there are many examples of parents developing their understanding and confidence through, for example, cookery, weight loss sessions, smoking cessation courses and a range of safety-related activities. The practical support that the centre offers in relation to everything from form-filling to managing crisis points is viewed as a lifeline by many.

Activities observed during the inspection showed good participation and enjoyment with many parents speaking positively about their appreciation of the centre's services and the various ways they have benefited from them. Children and parents appreciate the open spaces of the gardens and play areas and enjoy tending the allotments and caring for the animals.

The centre plays a key role in supporting vulnerable children and families because staff work in very close partnership with the school and relevant support agencies. Family support workers, for example, contribute routinely to assessments and reviews for the most vulnerable families. Case studies show the impact this coherent partnership working has had on several families' lives and how successfully it has supported children's welfare and safety.

Children are settled and happy and readily engage in play opportunities in the crèche, stay and play and the day nursery sessions. They demonstrate positive attitudes, interacting well with one another and with the staff who support them. Parents are very confident that their children are in good hands. The activities provided are interesting and varied. They enjoy participating in active play, including exploring the outside area. There are plenty of opportunities for children to develop their motor skills, balance and control as they manoeuvre ride-on toys, climb or run up and down the gentle landscaped slopes outside the day nursery. The good early years provision and good attention to their care and welfare mean children are well prepared for maintained nursery provision or reception classes.

Parents report that they feel very involved in the centre and their views are sought and acted upon. The parents' forum is used well as a means of sharing ideas and influencing what is offered at the centre. It has been actively involved in campaigning for a road crossing, for example, and has been successful, thus improving safety for the wider community. Several parents contribute to the centre's work, for example by running their own crèche under the guidance of the early years' practitioners and staff. Parents also have representation on the advisory board to contribute information and share their views.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups,
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2
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are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

### How good is the provision?

2
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The day care and activities arranged to support children's learning and development are good. Sessions are planned effectively to ensure all aspects of children's development are promoted within a safe and supportive setting. Parents are given advice about the different activities and this gives them ideas for supporting their children at home. Several parents spoke positively about their increased skills and confidence in playing with their children and promoting their learning and development. Children's and parents' achievements are valued and celebrated in many ways at the centre, through displays, stickers, certificates and photographs. Parents taking part in the cake decorating course, for example, were immensely proud of their accomplishments and the various skills they had developed.

The partnership with health professionals is good and the joint-working supports parents well. This includes baby-weighting clinics and breast-feeding support groups as well as joint home visits. Although the local authority is taking steps to improve the sharing of information and data, the centre is not yet able to obtain information from the primary care trust to help them identify prospective users who could benefit from this partnership and the centre's other services.

The centre is very good at finding ways to support individual children and families and offers a rapid response when help is requested or a need is identified. They work closely with the school in supporting the most vulnerable families. The centre staff are committed to trying to reach those in the community who they know are under represented as users of the centre, such as fathers, pregnant teenagers and teenage parents. They are creative and hardworking in their efforts to attract such groups to the centre but recognise that there is more to do encourage more users from these particular groups.

The centre is promoted effectively within the community by family support workers, who provide outreach, and members of the parents' forum. Staff from the centre take every opportunity to talk about the centre's work and encourage people to

come. They take part in community events whenever possible, often providing play activities as well as information and signposting services. This has contributed to the increased participation in the centre by parents and a significant increase in the number of children benefiting from the centre's activities.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The integration and co-location with the primary school is a key strength in the leadership and direction of the centre. The centre manager is a member of the school's leadership team and there are effective links between the school's community committee and the centre's advisory board. Governance arrangements are well established through the advisory board and the lines of accountability are clear. Members of the advisory board receive reports from key members of staff on a regular basis to raise their awareness of the centre's work and developments. They rightly ask pertinent questions to explore how well the centre is supporting the most vulnerable groups in the reach area. However, the lack of information and data on how well the centre is indeed reaching these groups limits the capacity of the advisory board, and the local authority, to hold the centre to account fully for its work.

The centre manager and staff are responsive to parents who use the centre and there is a strong commitment to supporting families' welfare and health needs and to promoting equal opportunities. The centre uses its resources well and there are clear examples of activities being adapted or developed in response to parents' requests and needs.

Safeguarding users is a clear priority at the centre and keeping children and families safe is at the forefront of everyone's work. The centre is a safe environment to visit because security is good and a wide range of safety measures are in place.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is	2



integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

### Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The day nursery has not been inspected within the last 12 months. The findings from its last inspection report have not therefore been used as evidence for this inspection.

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### Summary for centre users

We inspected the Epsom Downs children's centre on 7–8 July 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that the centre is benefiting from strong leadership and direction from the centre manager. She has a lot of experience of children's centre, from her previous job, and has brought in several changes that have improved the effectiveness of the children's centre. More children and parents are visiting the centre compared with the figures from a year ago and many parents are joining courses and other training opportunities through the centre. The centre manager has set up an effective team of professionals who meet regularly to discuss how the centre can offer support to families. They work together closely to plan support especially for families who are encountering particular challenges and difficulties and need the most help and

support. They also work well together to discuss the centre's work and make suggestions for its further improvement.

We were pleased to talk to many parents during our inspection and were grateful for their views and comments, which helped us find out about the centre's work and how it supports children's and parents' health, enjoyment and general well-being. The centre works very closely with Epsom Downs Primary School and has strong links with the headteacher, staff and the governors of the school, through the centre's advisory board. It is good that a member from the parents' forum is also a member of the advisory board, to represent and put forward parents' views and have an opportunity to influence on the services the centre provides.

The crèche facilities and the day nursery provide good care for your children. The children enjoy a good range of activities, including those available outside, and they well cared for. The early years staff provide helpful advice for parents on how to support children's play and learning at home and many of you spoke to inspectors about how useful you found this. The early years provision is helping to prepare your children well for school. Staff at the centre work very closely with the headteacher and staff at the primary school and make a strong contribution to the support for children and families who are going through particularly difficult and challenging times.

The centre works closely with a variety of providers to arrange courses and training opportunities and a large number of users have benefited from these over the last year. Staff provide financial advice and help with employment opportunities as much as they can but we have asked the local authority to support the centre in improving its partnership with Jobcentre Plus so that users can be supported more effectively with financial advice and opportunities that could lead to further training, education or employment. We have also asked the local authority to work with health services and other partners to provide helpful information and data to the centre so that it can check that it is supporting and reaching all groups in your area, including fathers, pregnant teenagers and teenage parents.

The centre has good systems for finding out whether courses and activities have been useful and we saw many examples where parents had reported how helpful these had been. We have asked the centre manager and other people responsible for the leadership of the centre to improve the way the centre reviews its work, to find out what is going well and also what could be improved. This is so that centre staff can decide what the priorities should be over the next year and to help more people from your area benefit from the centre's services.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).