

# Inspection report for Hawkinge and Rural Children's Centre

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Local authority	Kent
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

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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 one Early Years Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leadership team, staff, representatives from the local authority and partner agencies, including representatives from the health service, parents and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's operational plans and evaluations of services.

## Information about the centre

The centre is run directly with the local authority and provides the full core offer. It serves a rural, mostly White British community which was in one of the 30% of most deprived wards in the country when it was designated in 2006 but this picture is changing. The village has grown as a result of new housing developments. These include a mix of private housing, social housing and Ministry of Defence housing for serving Nepalese officers. Around 10% of children in the area are living in households where no one is in paid employment and the proportions of eligible families benefitting from working tax credit is higher than in other localities nearby.

A steering group consisting of local representatives, agencies and parents, contributes to the direction of the centre. This group reports to a local advisory board. Until recently the centre was a virtual base but is now able to offer a number of on-site services. Other services are run from local resources including Hawkinge Community Centre, Churchill Primary School and Lyminge pre-school. The centre is linked with a privately-funded neighbourhood nursery which is supported by the centre's qualified teacher one day a week. The qualified teacher also supports a sessional pre-school one day a week.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

### Overall effectiveness

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

3

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

## Main findings

Parents and users of the centre value the welcoming, safe environment it offers and the good range of services it provides. Centre staff make it their business to get to know the local families so that they can provide them with the services that they need. Good partnership working with a wide range of providers, particularly adult education and health professionals, is making a significant contribution to improving outcomes for users. As a result outcomes are good.

Friendly, approachable staff have built high levels of trust among families who feel nurtured and well supported, including when they are experiencing particular difficulties or hardship. This is captured by one parent who said: 'My life has totally turned around. The centre has helped me with my problems and pointed me in the right direction'. Parents are provided with good levels of care and guidance so are confident that issues they seek help with are taken seriously and dealt with sensitively.

The safety and well-being of children and users of the centre's services are given a high priority and promoted well. Positive steps are taken to ensure users, including those with disability, have equality of opportunity to access services and the range of activities offered. For example, crèche facilities are provided for those parents attending adult education courses. Effective actions have been taken to support the Nepalese families in the area. However information, activities and resources which celebrate and reflect diversity fully are not yet embedded and the plan for improvement does not indicate with clarity how this is to be addressed.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leaders use resources well, including other sites in the local community. Users' views about the activities offered are sought routinely through, for example, questionnaires and discussions. They are confident that their views are taken into account and can give examples of where some changes have been made as a result. However, the feedback the centre gets is not analysed systematically and there is a lack of robust performance data linked to improving outcomes for users. Consequently, self-evaluation lacks rigour and leaders

do not have the information they need to measure the impact the centre is having on improving outcomes for all groups of users over time. Lines of accountability to the local authority are understood and reporting arrangements are in place but these are relatively new and not yet embedded. Governance does not provide leaders with robust challenge and support because it is not sufficiently focused on evaluating the impact of the centre's actions, underpinned by a rigorous analysis of performance information. Targets in the centre's action plan link to the local authority's strategic priorities. However, targets and quantifiable success criteria which are specific to the centre, based on robust self evaluation, are not clearly identified. As a result of the weaknesses in these aspects of strategic leadership, although outcomes and provision are good, the overall effectiveness of the centre and its demonstrable capacity for sustained improvement are satisfactory.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should strengthen governance by providing robust support and challenge to the centre's leaders underpinned by the rigorous analysis of performance information
- Improve the rigour of self-evaluation by ensuring it is sharply linked to the impact of services on outcomes for users, taking into account their views, and informs planning for further development
- Ensure the centre's plan for improvement identifies relevant targets and quantifiable success criteria specific to the centre.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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Outcomes for children and their families, including the most vulnerable, are good. The centre is at an early stage of evaluating the impact of its work and as a result the evidence is limited but where it is available, it demonstrates the positive contribution the centre is making to improving outcomes for its users. Parent questionnaires and discussions with users show that satisfaction levels are very high and there are increasing numbers of children and their families registering at the centre and benefiting from the wide range of services on offer.

Parents report that they have introduced healthier food for their children and there has been an improvement in the eating habits of children who were previously fussy eaters as a result of courses and activities run by health professionals at the centre. Good guidance on breast feeding has given mothers greater confidence, including, when weaning their babies. Parents feel that they and their children are safe.

They have an increased understanding of accident prevention in the home and first aid. They have been able to put this into use, for example, when their child was taken ill. Parents have a greater understanding of child development which better equips them to help their child learn and develop. Parents say that they are

increasingly able to enjoy time with their children because of good support and guidance on managing challenging behaviour. Childminders, parents and their children enjoy practical activities together so children play confidently and exhibit good levels of independence and collaboration. Parents have noticed that their children make strong bonds with other children attending the centre from an early age. They note that this has a positive impact on a smooth transition for their child into school. Users say they feel less isolated by attending a range of centre activities where they can make new friends, particularly those who are new to the area. This is making a good contribution to developing their well-being. Baby Makaton signing sessions help mothers and their babies develop early communication skills so that they can recognise and respond to their child's needs quickly, for example when they are hungry.

Users of the centre make a positive contribution to the development of activities, for example by establishing a Dads group, running a stop smoking drop-in session and becoming centre volunteers. One explained how s/he feels that s/he can 'give something back as I have gained so much' and another reported that it 'helps to make us feel like a community'. Users feel their views are sought and acted on but would like more opportunities to do this. Good links with adult education providers are enabling parents to gain additional qualifications, including in English and mathematics, so they are better equipped to access the world of work. Parents spoke positively about how gaining qualifications had also boosted their self-esteem.

~~These are the grades for the outcomes for users~~

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
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 effective is the provision?

2

The centre provides a good range of integrated services and activities which are well matched to the needs of users. Assessment of need is carried out to ensure that those with the greatest level of need are prioritised. Home visits are provided to support those who have difficulty accessing the centre or who are in most need. The centre's community involvement workers, often jointly with health visitors or Homestart, which contributes to a co-ordinated approach to services offered. Well

attended ante-natal clinics, baby clinics and paediatric baby health checks at the centre ensure that new parents are quickly made aware of what the centre has to offer. Activities and services are advertised well through effective links with other providers and community groups, including the local schools and the community centre.

Centre staff positively promote activities when they meet parents in the local area. The centre assesses the needs of all groups to ensure they are able to provide a good level of support and guidance. For example, the Nepalese families have been provided with language support and guidance on completing forms, and a Nepalese toddler group has been set up. This has been valued by the Nepalese families. One parent said, 'When I walk into the centre my mental state is free and relaxed, I meet friends, gain confidence and am learning'. The 'You make a difference' course, designed to develop parenting skills, is particularly valued by parents. The centre provides crèche facilities through a private provider to enable parents to attend courses run by adult education such as 'Chatter Matters' and to gain further qualifications.

Good guidance and support is provided to the crèche, neighbourhood nursery and network of childminders by the qualified teacher to develop their practice and help them assess and support the development of young children, for example through learning journals. The Citizens Advice Bureau sessions at the centre are well attended, providing advice and guidance, for example on managing finances and housing issues. The centre provides good quality information and guidance documents in its new reception area but these do not yet reflect the full range of diverse needs of users, for example by being available in other languages or in large print. Accommodation is of a good standard and well maintained. The centre is clear about how to develop the new facility further, for example by developing the outside area at the rear of the building for the children to use and also by providing a buggy park.

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?

3

The centre's leaders work well as a team and have built effective links with users,

other agencies and providers which they use effectively to provide services that are of good quality and well matched to users needs. There is limited space in the new building but leaders are adept at making the best use of the space it does provide as well as using other community facilities. As a result the centre is well attended and outcomes for users are good. Consequently the centre provides good value for money.

Staff have undertaken relevant training and have good levels of qualifications to support families and keep them safe. All policies and procedures are clear and meet requirements, including those on recruiting and vetting staff. Good attention is paid to health and safety issues. Leaders have high expectations of users of the centre which is echoed in the views of one parent who said, 'I feel they have high expectations of me to achieve my goals'. However, the effectiveness of leadership and management is limited by a lack of robust performance data and the absence of detailed analysis of monitoring information to inform rigorous self-evaluation. Consequently leaders do not have a clear idea about the impact of specific actions and improvement over time. Although the centre's action plan links to the local authority strategic targets, it does not include precise centre targets which are developed from robust self-evaluation. It also lacks quantifiable measures against which the centre can evaluate the impact of its actions on the outcomes for users and improvement over time, including in relation to fully promoting equality of opportunity and celebrating diversity. While lines of accountability are understood, reporting arrangements are not yet embedded and the centre's governance is not providing sufficient challenge or support to hold the leaders to account for the impact of their work. This results in the leadership demonstrating satisfactory rather than good capacity for sustained improvement.

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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
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	3
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

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Hawkinge and Rural Children's Centre on 25 and 26 May 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre provides parents and their children with an attractive, safe environment where they feel well cared for and valued. Parents told inspectors that the centre is making a big difference to their lives and that they enjoy attending the good range of activities on offer. There is a very high level of satisfaction among users of the centre's services and the numbers attending the various courses and activities are increasing.

All families are welcomed and helped to attend a good range of well advertised sessions, for example by the provision of a crèche. Those who need it are given support in their own homes or information and help with difficulties they may be having such as with housing or managing their finances. The good information and resources do not yet include anything specific for those with particular needs, such as those who do not speak English or those who may have visual difficulties.

There are good opportunities for parents to learn new skills and gain qualifications, for example in mathematics and English. The links the centre has with other services, including health visitors, adult education, local pre schools and the Citizen's Advice Bureau are good and providing valued support for parents and their children.

The centre staff know families well and build up good relationships with them so parents feel well supported, more confident and know where to go to get help or advice when they need it. They also said that the centre has helped them and their children to make new friends.

The centre leaders work well together to make sure that the centre is well-organised. They often ask for the views, feedback and ideas of parents to help them decide how they can help more. Parents said that they would like more opportunities to do this.

The group which has responsibility for the centre is made up of a wide range of people, including from the local authority. They regularly meet and discuss how the centre is doing. However this group does not give the centre enough support or set challenging targets to help it become more effective. Also, the centre does not yet have enough information about how it is making a difference and improving. This lack of information means that how the centre is planning to develop is not clear or detailed enough yet. As a result the centre's effectiveness overall is satisfactory.

The good services offered by the centre are making a difference to those families who use it and the numbers doing so are increasing. In order for it to become even more effective and improve further we have asked the centre's leaders to do three things. Firstly, we have asked the local authority to set challenging targets and support the centre so that it knows precisely how it is making a difference and meeting the needs of local families. Secondly, we have asked centre leaders to improve how they measure the difference they are making to all the families who use their services or who might benefit from them. Thirdly, we have asked the centre leaders to include more detail in their action plan about what they are going to improve and how they are going to know whether they have been as successful as possible.

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