

# Inspection report for Little Forest Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	383773
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 June 2012
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Sherwood Park Community Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Little Forest Children's Centre EY341321 Rainbow Nursery @ Little Forest Children's Centre EY363173

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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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.

An inspection of the co-located primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the headteacher of the co-located primary school, qualified teachers and two outreach workers. They also met with representatives from the local authority, community groups, partner agencies, health services, advisory board, parents and staff from the on-site nursery.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Little Forest Children's Centre is a phase two centre, located on the same site as Sherwood Park Primary School. It is one of seven centres in Tunbridge Wells District that is overseen by the District Advisory Board and serves the Sherwood and St James wards. This is one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country.

Little Forest opened in 2007 and received full core offer status in January 2009. The centre's steering group has been renamed Friends of Little Forest. The manager has full responsibility for the centre's leadership and management, and that of a new phase three centre that operates from different venues in Pembury and Capel.

The centre provides childcare, child and family health, job and benefits advice. The crèche operated by the centre is registered by Ofsted on the voluntary aspect of the Childcare Register. The area is undergoing regeneration. It includes some private homes, but mostly it is social housing and flats. Approximately 25% of lone parents and workless families are on benefits, which is above the national average. Families come from diverse cultures, but the majority are from White British backgrounds.

The knowledge, skills and abilities of children when they first start in Early Years Foundation Stage provision are well below the national expectation.

Rainbow Nursery for thirty children aged from three months to four years, run by a private provider, operates from the same building. It was inspected separately in 2011 and the inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website.

## 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 families**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**2**

## Main findings

Little Forest Children's Centre is a good centre that plays an important role in helping all members of the community to change their lives. Staff are determined and resourceful in their efforts to bring about continuing improvement to the circumstances of the families they serve. Many are long serving and know both their target groups and support agencies well. The close relationships they have developed enable them to offer an attractive range of activities and support that are sensitively focused on priority needs of groups and individuals. Particular strengths include outreach work, a range of parenting classes, the programme for young parents, good quality childcare, community activities and support for families with children or carers with a disability or special educational needs. Parents are fully appreciative of the support they receive. One said, 'Staff see me as a person, not just a mum.'

Overall outcomes are good. Counselling, guidance to reduce domestic abuse, courses in first aid, safety in the home, and being healthy keep children safe and living healthier lifestyles. Good quality provision for parents to enjoy learning with their children and the crèche activities, planned by early years teachers, are contributing to the improved outcomes in communication, language and literacy and children's personal development at age five. Staff are keen to enable families to improve their financial situation and have formed good partnerships with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Connexions for this purpose. They have, however, found it difficult to access the support from Jobcentre and external providers for training. These are necessary to give more families advice about benefits and jobs, and how to raise their literacy, numeracy and work-based skills.

The centre has a good capacity for sustained improvement. The District Advisory Board and local authority offer significant challenge. The centre has a strong track record of engaging all groups, including those who are hard to reach. Plans for development include realistic, but challenging, targets for improvement. These are shared with staff and key agencies so that responsibilities for each area of development are clear. Rigorous self-evaluation, data analysis, and the views of parents influence changes in provision. The centre draws on the expertise of professionals within the community and other centres so that staff training and development meet personal needs and those of the centre. That said, early years teachers are unable to access the training they need to implement successfully within the centre the revised Early Years Foundation Stage Framework which comes into effect in September 2012.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

In partnership with the local authority

- Enable more parents to improve their economic well-being by:
  - providing more opportunities for them to develop their literacy, numeracy and work place skills
  - making arrangements that ensure they can access Jobcentre services without difficulty.
  
- Build on the success in improving outcomes for children at the age of five in the area by ensuring that staff responsible for the Early Years Foundation Stage undergo the essential training to implement in September 2012 the revised Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and share their knowledge with provision across the district.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>2</b>
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The centre uses its in-depth knowledge of families to tailor support to enable them to improve their lives and stay safe. Regular multi-agency meetings are used well to review and coordinate support for children who are at risk of harm or subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework process. Data show that there has been a rise in the number of children under five admitted to accident and emergency over the previous year. Consequently, the centre is promoting strongly safety in the home. The uptake of home safety packs and advice from emergency services has been high. Robust risk assessments enable families to feel safe in the centre and when out on trips. Trusting, respectful relationships enable staff to intervene at an early stage. Counselling sessions and high quality support from outreach workers empower parents to overcome complex difficulties in their lives and keep children safe. One parent said that without the centre she could not have coped with the difficulties she faced.

Healthy weights for children are strongly promoted. The centre is on course to meet

its challenging target to reduce obesity in children aged five to 9% by 2013. 'Hop, skip and jump' helps families to take part in healthy exercise along with their children. Over half the mothers visiting the centre continue to breastfeed their babies beyond eight weeks because of the high quality advice from the Honeysuckle support group. Activities such as 'Cooking with kids' and the provision of nourishing snacks promote healthier ways to eat. The centre grows vegetables in containers to demonstrate that wholesome food can be produced cheaply in a very small space.

Evaluations show high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction with the provision. 'Boogie babies', and 'Stay and play' are among the many enjoyable activities where parents learn how to promote good language development. Baby signing enables them to communicate effectively with their very young children, and the speech therapist gives specific advice to overcome impairments. Children make good progress in all the activities because they are carefully planned. They are happy to come and share their toys at a very young age. Qualified teachers use astute observations of children's progress and the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework to plan the next stage in their learning. Progress is recorded in a 'learning journey' to which parents contribute. This approach has been shared with other early years providers in the area and is one of the reasons why the outcomes for children at age five in national assessments are improving. The percentage of children achieving 78 points rose by 1% across the reach between 2010 and 2011. The gap between the 20% lowest achieving children in this age group and others is reducing.

Parents achieve well in their personal development and parenting skills. Uptake of courses is high because they are designed to meet needs, especially those for young parents, and transport is arranged for those who live at a distance. Parents and Friends of Little Forest contribute to the decisions made about overall provision. The popular 'Play Bubble' came from a suggestion from parents, but parental representation on the District Advisory Board is limited. The admission threshold of numbers for the local college to provide basic skills training is too high for the centre to fill on its own. Consequently, few parents gain qualifications. The centre is exploring ways to provide access to this in partnership with other local centres.

Data indicate that the number of children in workless homes or in receipt of Working Tax credits is remaining the same over time. Outreach workers, staff, Citizens Advice and Connexions offer advice about jobs and benefits, especially to young parents. However, there is too little engagement with Jobcentre services to help parents enhance their economic well-being by gaining workplace skills and returning to work.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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Staff draw on data and information from parents, professionals and their contact with a wide range of voluntary and private providers to plan engaging programmes that meet universal and specific needs of all target groups. Overall, the centre reaches almost two thirds of the families. The programmes for young parents and parents with children with a disability and special educational needs are particularly successful in involving almost all of those registered. The Kinship group provides invaluable support for older carers supporting their grandchildren at home. Parents enjoy craft activities in 'Sparkle and Bling' where they can develop friendships and have time without the children, knowing they are safe in the crèche. They also appreciate 'Learning Links' that helps them understand how best to manage their child's development and behaviour.

The centre is careful to avoid duplication of courses. Other groups in the area make provision for fathers' groups, but many attend activities within this centre or receive one-to-one support. Parenting courses are run at alternative centres to ensure they are always full. 'Twins club' and 'Hop, Skip and Jump' are among sessions provided at venues within the community that enable harder-to-reach families access services. Outreach workers negotiate individual programmes of development to promote independence and decision making. Adult achievements are celebrated, often with a ceremony to present certificates.

Qualified teachers employed by the centre provide training and support to early years childcare providers and centres across the reach and district. This is raising skills of providers and improving outcomes for children aged five. However, the effectiveness of this work is currently impeded because the staff concerned have not been able to gain admission to relevant training. Overall provision is enabling families to achieve good outcomes in all areas except their economic well-being. Faced with the lack of availability of college courses and limited engagement of Jobcentre services, staff find other means to support parents to improve their financial situation. However, they do not have sufficient expertise to enhance literacy, numeracy and workplace skills to enable more parents to return to work.

Families know that they can ask for help, especially in times of crisis, and they are confident that their concerns are taken seriously. Case studies indicate intensive

support, sometimes for short periods, to enable families to reduce the risk of harm to children. Outreach workers often act as advocates, accompanying families to meetings so their voice can be heard. Health services provide good advice and guidance to support parents in improving their sexual health and reduce their reliance on substances that are harmful. Through the centre’s advice and training, ten parents have become accredited volunteers and make valuable contributions to a wide range of the centre’s work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Decision making processes in the centre are clear. The District Advisory Board uses data and robust self-evaluation processes well to hold the centre to account. Challenging and ambitious targets in the centre’s action plan are linked to those in the development plans of the local authority and key partners. This means there is a cohesive approach to long-term strategic planning, sustainability and improvements in outcomes that are easily checked. Performance management, training and appraisal systems add to the success of the centre. All sessions are monitored, albeit informally, to check that good quality is sustained.

Safeguarding children and their families is a key priority. Specific provision to promote the safety and well-being of children is reviewed regularly, and amended, to check that it is successfully reducing risks. All staff, volunteers, professionals and visitors undergo Criminal Records Bureau checks. Clear policies, procedures and regular training ensure that staff know precisely what to do if they suspect abuse. They make clear to parents the centre’s responsibilities to safeguard children. The centre responds rapidly to concerns and collaborates closely with key agencies, monitoring the progress of children subject to child protection plans and the Common Assessment Framework process to keep them safe.

Good levels of engagement of families from all target groups reflect the emphasis the centre places on equality and diversity. Strong partnerships with key agencies and private and voluntary providers within the community enable staff to personalise support. The exchange of expertise with staff working in a special educational needs centre enhances provision for children with a range of specific needs. The atmosphere in the centre is particularly conducive to supporting young parents. Arrangements to identify the needs of target groups are shared across all those

working with the centre. Data indicate that, except in economic well-being, the achievement gap for disadvantaged families is narrowing.

Since opening, the centre has extended its provision. It opens every day, except bank holidays, and in the evening rooms can be hired for community use. In between school terms staff provide holiday clubs. Multi-purpose rooms are used flexibly, and financial resources monitored carefully. Staff expertise is interchangeable across the district. The centre provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

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

None.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Little Forest Children's Centre on 19 and 20 June 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for contributing to the inspection when we visited Little Forest Children's Centre recently. We were pleased to meet you and hear how much the centre has helped you to make a difference to your lives. You appreciate the warm trusting relationships you have with the staff and that they see you as individuals. One of you said, 'Staff see me as a person, not just a mum.'

We found that all the staff are determined and resourceful in finding ways to get you the help you need. They put a great deal of thought into making the courses attractive so that you want to attend and make things better for you and your family. You are pleased to have a say in the kind of activities you would like to attend. The young parents particularly value the contributions they make to the design of their programme. You mentioned you enjoy the courses where your children are enjoying their time in the crèche, as well as those where you learn alongside them. You said that the parenting courses were particularly helpful to you in understanding your child's development and their behaviour. Some of the activities, such as 'Hop Skip and Jump', are put on at venues in the community so that they are easier for you to get to. If you live further away, or there are difficulties with transport, someone will collect you.

Your children make good progress in all the sessions because they are planned well and the activities are matched to your child's needs. Teachers take into account what they have learned before, so each visit includes something a little bit more challenging for the children to learn. They keep good notes of the progress children make in the 'learning journeys' and you can add your views too. Staff are helping you to communicate well with your children when they are very young and to speak well as they get older. The teachers have shared these ideas with other early years providers and this is why all the children in the area are doing better in national assessments at age five.

Many of you have found the safety in the home packs useful in helping to keep your children safe. The counselling sessions take away a lot of your concerns and help you to make changes to your lives. The staff at the centre make sure you are safe while you are there and you know to keep all children safe by not using your mobile phones and cameras whilst in the centre. Staff teach you well about living healthier lifestyles and introduce you to people who will help you to give up drinking and smoking. They show you how you can grow vegetables cheaply and in a small space at home.

Staff at the centre know of many different groups that can help you who are out in the community. Their work with Ravensdale has helped them to advise you and to plan activities for children who have a disability or special educational needs. Parents too who have a disability can visit the centre easily. You told us that you cannot

speaking highly enough of the staff, but especially the outreach workers and the support they have given you, especially when facing real difficulties in your lives.

The atmosphere in the centre is very welcoming to everyone, but is particularly so for the young parents who wish to see the midwife. The health visitors and Honeysuckle group provide you with lots of advice when starting to breastfeed your babies so they gain a good start to their lives.

All involved in the centre are determined for it to get even better by helping you to improve your financial situation. The volunteers have developed many new skills and often work with you in the centre or community. This has been a pathway into work for some. Staff have organised sessions with Connexions and Citizens Advice for you, but it is difficult for you to talk to Jobcentre services about the availability of jobs and the training you need to get them.

We have asked the local authority and the centre to work together to help more of you get the advice you need easily from Jobcentre services and to gain the skills you need to be successful in the world of work. We have also asked them to make sure that young children continue to make progress and achieve well at the age of five. They can do this by ensuring the early years teachers attend training to be able to introduce the revised Early Years Foundations Stage Framework successfully in September 2012.

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