

# Sevenoaks and Swanley 1

Swanley Children's Centre, Northview, Swanley, Kent BR8 7BT

<b>Inspection date</b>	10–11 December 2013		
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The group's records show that overall they are not reaching the large majority of families from all priority groups. Some of the information from the local authority is not as precise as it could be in helping the group, district advisory board and steering groups clearly identify how well the group is engaging with these families.
- Although families benefit from family learning opportunities such as 'number sacks', there are too few opportunities for adults to attend courses to gain qualifications and, importantly, improve their prospects of getting a job.
- Family support workers are helping families to improve their lives, but the role is quite new and some workers also have other responsibilities. The role needs clearer definition, so that workers are sure what is expected of them and how they link with other early help services such as the district early intervention team.
- Systems that show how the work of the group is making a difference to families in the longer term are at an early stage. For example, although the universal group sessions help children to make progress in their learning and development this is not being fully tracked through to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage at school.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The children's centre network manager and the staff team are highly valued by parents. They go 'the extra mile' to make families feel welcome and supported. The services provided are of good quality and the centres are real hubs of the community, bringing families from a wide range of backgrounds together, which is important in this locality to build community cohesion.
- Most children in the locality are registered at the centres. Having universal health services in all three centres means that almost all children are seen at clinics. There is good information sharing between professionals which means that additional needs are identified early.
- Partnership working is very well established across the locality. Without exception all professionals that spoke to inspectors value the work of the manager and staff highly and feel part of an extended team. A health partner told inspectors that the group 'plays a pivotal role in preparing children for what lies ahead in their future'.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Swanley, West Kingsdown and New Ash Green.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children centre network manager, the district children's centre manager and the integrated family support manager and strategic lead for children's centres and the members of the district advisory board and the centres' steering groups. They also spoke with parents, children centre staff and partners including childcare, education, health, social care and early intervention professionals.

The inspectors visited all three of the children's centres, White Oak Pre-school and the library in New Ash Green.

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

## Inspection team

Penny Fisher	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Jo Caswell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Joan Lindsay	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre/group

The Sevenoaks and Swanley 1 group of children's centres consists of three centres which fall within the Sevenoaks district. There are seven centres in the district as a whole. The centre is managed by the local authority with governance through a district advisory board and individual children's centre steering groups. The Swanley Children's Centre is a Phase 2 centre designated in March 2008. It is purpose-built and linked with White Oaks Pre-school (URN EY273447), which is subject to a separate inspection. The West Kingsdown Centre is a Phase 3 centre, designated in March 2010 and located within West Kingsdown Church of England Primary School (URN 23509). The New Ash Green Centre is a Phase 3 centre, designated in December 2009 and located within New Ash Green Health Clinic. Inspection reports can be found at Ofsted's website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). None of the children's centres in the group have been previously inspected.

Kent children's centres are currently being reorganised following consultation. Changes are due to be implemented by April 2014. Currently the only planned change within the Sevenoaks and Swanley 1 group is a reduction in opening hours at the West Kingsdown Centre. The group is meeting its core purpose through the delivery of a range of services including early and adult education, health services and family support.

The district covers a large geographical area, with Swanley being one of three main urban areas. Swanley has good transport links, being close to the M20 and M25, but this is not the case for New Ash Green and West Kingsdown. Sevenoaks is the least deprived district in Kent. However, there are pockets of deprivation within the locality, notably in the Swanley area. Data show that the proportion of workless families is increasing across the locality and is above average for Kent in the Swanley area. In the more deprived areas, children are entering school with skill levels below those expected for their age. The numbers of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is below the Kent average in Swanley and West Kingsdown, but above average in the New Ash Green area. The very large majority of the population is White British and there is a growing but comparatively small Polish community.

The group identifies disabled children, carers of the disabled, teenage parents, male carers, children from minority ethnic groups, including Traveller families, and lone parents as its target groups.

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

- The local authority should ensure relevant data and support is consistently supplied to the centres to enable the staff, steering groups and district advisory board to assess the group's performance in relation to priority families and implement effective systems which help the group to continually demonstrate the impact of its work over time.
- The local authority should further develop partnerships with adult learning providers to extend opportunities for families to access adult learning, especially in relation to improving their employability and accessing accredited courses, and implement robust systems to track progress.
- The local authority should clearly define the role and responsibilities of the family support workers within the children's centres and how this service is integrated with the work of the district early intervention team.
- Improve the use of data supplied by the local authority to:
  - track the progress of children who have accessed centre services throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage
  - demonstrate the centres' impact on improving children's readiness for school across all areas of learning
  - analyse the attainment of all cohort groups of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage to identify any gaps in underachievement
  - demonstrate the impact of how the centres' activities are closing the achievement gap for the most disadvantaged children.

### Inspection judgements

#### Access to services by young children and families

#### Requires improvement

- Most children in the locality are registered with the children's centres and almost all priority families attend universal services within centres. The group is very successful in reaching families from some target groups such as teenage parents and Traveller families and there are Saturday groups for those that cannot attend during the week, such as male carers. Priority families are well known to staff, but data collection systems do not show that the large majority of all priority families are attending services.
- Staff vacancies and the restrictions of fixed-term contracts have had a negative impact on the delivery of services at the West Kingsdown Centre. Following the children's centre consultation, a reduction in hours is planned for April 2014, but actually this centre is already operating a reduced timetable.
- The children's centres provide warm, welcoming and friendly environments. Good attention to detail in the design and availability of resources at the Swanley Centre ensures a very child-orientated setting. Universal health clinics are easily accessible in all centres and ensure that the group is reaching almost all of those expecting children in the locality.
- Protocols are in place with children's social care services and ensure that the group are aware of the most vulnerable children in the locality. Effective information sharing with health partners ensures priority families are identified early and can access the specialist services they need.
- The centres are fully inclusive and make an important contribution to improving community cohesion in the locality. The centres are seen by parents and professionals as important hubs of these communities and partners describe them as fundamental to improving outcomes for local families.
- Parents value the effective support provided by the group that has helped them to access their free entitlement to early education. Currently 35 funded two year olds have taken up places at good quality settings. All potentially eligible families in the locality have been identified, enabling the group to increase take-up further.

**The quality of practice and services****Requires improvement**

- Universal provision is having a positive impact on children's learning and development. Tracking systems to monitor children's progress have been recently introduced but it is too early to see the impact that the group is making on Early Years Foundation Stage achievement and more refined analysis of data is needed to identify differences within cohorts and any gaps in achievement.
- The centres' family support workers provide generally effective support, advice and guidance to families and use the common assessment framework and team around the family approach appropriately. However, the role and responsibilities of the children's centre family support workers and the integration of this service with the district early intervention team to provide a coherent, well-understood early help offer across the locality requires greater clarity.
- Although parents have opportunities to attend family learning, such as the 'number sacks' workshops, there is very limited access to adult learning, especially accredited courses which would improve employability. This is important as aspiration is low in parts of the locality and the number of workless and low income families is increasing, notably in the Swanley and West Kingsdown localities.
- The district's qualified early years teacher is having a positive impact on improving the quality of early years provision both in the centres and across the locality. In 2013 the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage varied widely across the schools in the locality. Some good, targeted work is taking place with centres, pre-schools, primary schools and parents to improve the quality of early education, reduce inequalities and make children's education more accessible for parents. However, the impact of this work is not tracked closely.
- The centre is reaching all teenage parents in the locality. Joint working with some highly vulnerable young parents has led to positive outcomes, including children no longer being the subject of child protection plans. Parents speak highly of the sensitive support they have received from the centre; one told inspectors 'I don't know what I would have done if they weren't here.'
- Staff and partners make every effort to ensure that the diverse needs of the community are met through the delivery of a wide range of well-balanced services, especially at the Swanley Centre where there are more priority families. For example, there is good support in place for the victims of domestic abuse through the accessible 'one stop shop' and a local voluntary group provides advice and guidance on debt, housing and mortgage problems. However, the impact of these services, delivered by partner agencies, is not fully evaluated.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage planning used in universal stay and play sessions such as the well-attended 'Waddle and Toddle' is detailed and individual to each child. Children's interests are taken into full account in the planning of all activities with a relevant focus on improving their language and communication.
- Persistent work with health partners has been needed to bring about a change in attitudes towards breastfeeding in the locality. There has been some success as seen in the 2011/2012 data and the increasing numbers of mothers attending the breastfeeding drop-in sessions.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Requires improvement**

- The local authority is monitoring the centres' performance through regular quarterly monitoring and an annual conversation. The district children's centre manager understands the areas where development is required to drive improvement across the district and her support is valued by the district advisory board and children's centre network manager.
- Governance arrangements are well embedded and the district advisory board, chaired by a parent, provides sufficient support and challenge to the group. However, there is scope to strengthen governance further by ensuring that the data and information provided to the board clearly outlines the group's targets and performance in relation to priority families. The group's self-evaluation is accurate overall, but does not contain enough data and information about the long-term impact of

the group's work.

- The enthusiastic and loyal staff team are highly positive about their work and work very hard, often going the extra mile, to maintain quality service delivery despite capacity restraints and staff shortages. Through challenging times of change and uncertainty they continue to make improvements to services such as the universal group sessions in the New Ash Green Centre. Effective partnerships ensure that best use is made of available resources.
- The well-respected children's centre network manager has an accurate view of the quality of services and the priority areas for development. She is reflective in her approach towards ongoing improvement and passionately committed to the families in the locality. She knows the community well and has been a driving force in building strong partnerships with a wide range of agencies, most notably health teams.
- The safeguarding of children is at the centre of all the group's work. Policies and procedures are robust and ensure that staff are suitable and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to protect children, including those subject to child protection and child in need plans and those that are looked after. The centre provides outstanding support to enable contact visits to take place, which are highly valued by parents and foster carers.
- Parents have good opportunities to engage in parents' forums and told inspectors they feel fully involved in the group's work. Their views do influence the design and development of services, such as family learning opportunities at New Ash Green. Some parents are represented on steering groups, but these largely provide opportunities for professionals to share information regarding the community and services. The group provides sensitive and effective support for volunteers, students and apprentices on early years placements.

*What inspection judgements mean*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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.

*Select details*

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80357
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	424772
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	2327
<b>Centre leader</b>	Helen Reed
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01322 668132
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**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

- Swanley
- West Kingsdown
- New Ash Green

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