



Firm Foundations



Inside this issue

Family Information Service News, Page 3

News from the PDC, Page 4

MEND, Page 5

Electronic correspondence, Page 6

Medway Early Years Graduates, Page 8

EcaT, Page 9

Royal Wedding celebrations, Page 10

Summer sports days, Page 11

Messy play, Page 12

Living Eggs project, Page 13

Outstanding Ofsted results, Page 14

Useful contacts, Page 15

Welcome! In the last edition of Firm Foundations, I highlighted a series of ground-breaking reports on the importance of early intervention – written by Graham Allen, Frank Field and Dame Clare Tickell amongst others.

Drawing on the findings and recommendations, the Government has now set out its vision for families with children from pre-birth to the age of five. In July the Education and Health departments (DfE and DoH) jointly published their programme for services that should be on offer for parents, children and families in the foundation years.

Supporting Families in the Foundation Years explains why it is important to focus on child development and how parents and families should be placed at the heart of services. It sets out the importance of intervening early and the role of different services working together to ensure that children, their mothers and fathers receive early help where needed. It also explains how we will ensure there are skilled professionals and strong leadership across the sector and describes how the Government is establishing a new relationship with the sector which frees professionals to do what they believe is best.

The Government's aim is to put in place a coherent framework of services for families, from pregnancy through to age five which focus on promoting children's development and help with all aspects of family life.

- increasing the health visitor workforce so that the Healthy Child Programme is fully and consistently implemented to meet families' needs, including a health and development review for every child at two to two-and-a-half;
- retaining a national network of Sure Start Children's Centres, working to a new "core purpose" with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families, in order to reduce inequalities in child development and school readiness;
- introducing a reformed and slimmer Early Years Foundation Stage from September 2012 with a stronger focus on the three prime areas which are considered most essential for children's learning and development, and on sharing information with parents;
- addressing the social and economic differences between families by extending free early education to the most disadvantaged two year olds by 2013;
- requiring nurseries, pre-schools and childminders to give parents a short written summary of their child's progress around the age of two, and ensuring that Ofsted reports are easy for parents to find and as clear as possible;
- revising the Code of Practice for early education (funding) to increase flexibility and reduce bureaucracy;
- working with sector partners to increase take-up of parenting and relationship programmes;
- explore how to improve the gender balance of the early education and childcare workforce;
- continue to invest in graduate-level training in early education and childcare;

With so many exciting challenges, it has never been more important to remain informed and up to date. On **page 6**, you will find news of our plans to send you regular information by e-mail and on our websites. This will ensure that you are on top of all new requirements and changes as they happen – and provides a quick and effective way of asking questions and giving us your views or concerns. It's good to talk!

With best wishes

Mark Holmes

Strategic Manager - early years services

*see all of the commitments and plans on www.education.gov.uk
or type "Supporting Families in the Foundation Years" into your search engine*

Family Information Service News

FIS Information Update

Calling all practitioners – have you contacted the FIS recently to either update or confirm that the information that we hold on our system for you is correct? Just telephone **01634 335566** and a member of our team will be on hand to update/amend or just check your details with you.

NAFIS Families First Award

The FIS team received verification that they had achieved the NAFIS Families First Award in May. The overall judgement of the NAFIS assessor read, 'My findings from this assessment are that Medway provides an effective and well thought of Family Information Service which fully meets the requirements of the Families First Awards standards'.

The team have now received their award, which has been given pride of place in the Director of Children's Services Rose Collinson's office.



Brokerage Services

The Medway Family Information Service offers a brokerage service to parents and carers who are having difficulty finding suitable childcare. We can offer one-to-one support, advice, guidance and help to find emergency childcare options, which meet the needs of the parent and child. We can also help families to access childcare and other services if they or their child has a disability or special need.

The brokerage team can assist with queries regarding short breaks and respite for children with special educational needs and disabilities and signpost to other organisations and support groups that can help families across Medway.

To access this service, please ring the Family Information Service brokerage team on **01634 335566** or email familyinfo@medway.gov.uk.

Contact Point

We now provide confidential 1:1 advice / information / support at Contact Point, Dock Road, Chatham (Wednesday mornings from 9am to 11.45am). A member of the Family Information Service will be on hand to give expert advice and information on Childcare, Parenting & Family Support and other related issues. Bookable appointments are available.

Please contact **01634 335566** or email family.info@medway.gov.uk for further information.

Contact FIS by phone: **01634 335566**

email: familyinfo@medway.gov.uk

Local website: www.medwayfisd.co.uk

National website: www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Childcare/DG_180946

News from the PDC

We hope you have had a restful break and are ready for the Autumn Term. At the end of last term, you should have received the Autumn Term 2011 Training Programme. Applications have been coming in and we would urge you to send yours in as soon as possible in order to secure a place on the training of your choice.

You can complete a training application form and post it to the PDC, alternatively the programme and application form are available online at www.e-learningatlast.org.uk where you can complete an application form and email it to EYCCPDC@medway.gov.uk.

We have been busy making many changes to the centre over the break and hope you will come to visit soon. We have two 'drop in's' booked again this term on **Monday 12 September** and **Wednesday 16 November**.

As usual there will be a range of materials and equipment for you to make resources, for example, laminates, sewing machines, fabrics, embellishments, etc. Practitioners who came to previous 'drop in's' have made storysacks, puppets, feely bags, 3D shapes, tabards and books as well as laminating posters, using the scrap store and accessing the library books. There is no need to book, just 'drop in' at a time to suit you between 10am and 5pm.

There is additional information about the PDC in the training programme. All enquiries and questions can be emailed to the training administration team at the PDC via email EYCCPDC@medway.gov.uk or we can be contacted on **01634 331488** or **01634 338529**.

We look forward to seeing you.

Anita Griffin

Professional Development Centre Manager

Medway Library Service

Medway libraries offer a wide range of services for children, young people and their parents or carers, with a variety of activities taking place every week, from 'baby bounce and rhyme' and 'toddler shake and boogie' to 'pop in and play'. Early Years professionals are also well catered for with a number of services aimed at children's centres, pre-schools, toddler groups, health centres and all other early years settings

Bring your early years group to your local library and take a look at what's on offer! Services such as interactive story-telling and rhyme sessions are available to inspire young children to develop a life-long love of language and literacy and the library staff are always on hand to help children choose books to take away.

Alternatively, you can arrange for your local library to come to you; Medway libraries has an enthusiastic team of library staff willing to visit your setting and offer fun and interactive sessions to promote and encourage library use.

For further information on any of the services detailed above, please contact a Community Librarian for young people on **01634 335890**.

For more information on what is happening at your local library visit the website www.medway.gov.uk/leisureandculture/libraries/childrenandyoungpeople.aspx



MEND in Medway

MEND offers a FREE, healthy lifestyle programme aimed at helping children and their families lead happier, healthier lives. Developed by experts in child health, the MEND Programme is a course for parents or carers with children aged up to 13 years of age.

The programmes, run over 10 weeks, offer a fun and creative environment for families to learn how to make healthier lifestyle choices and ensure their children have the best possible start in life and for their future.

The MEND 2-4 Programme



- For children aged between 2 and 4 years.
- Helps families deal with fussy eating and encourages children to eat a wider variety of foods using food exposure techniques. It is suitable for families of all ethnicities and encourages families to socialise in a fun and healthy way.
- Uses evidence-based behaviour change and parenting techniques.
- Helps families understand the negative effects of sedentary behaviour and encourage active family play time.
- MEND 2-4's ten weekly sessions combine parent-toddler active play, parent discussion groups and children's crèche style creative play activities. All sessions take place during the daytime in Children's Centres and community venues across Medway.

The MEND 5-7 Programme



- For children aged between 5 and 7 years.
- Helps families develop healthy habits together and set goals and rewards to encourage healthy behaviours.
- The programme offers the chance to make new friends and learn to have fun while being active.
- Parents/carers and children will learn to read food labels and learn how to take the fuss out of meal times.
- MEND 5-7 session runs once a week over 10 weeks.

The MEND 7-13 Programme



- This programme is aimed at children, aged between 7 and 13 years, and their families who are concerned about being unhealthy or overweight. It encourages having fun whilst being active as well as boosting confidence and self-esteem.
- Sessions allow families to explore healthy behaviours and understand how to read food labels and try new foods.
- MEND 7-13 sessions run for two hours, twice a week at leisure centres and school venues across Medway. All sessions run after school and are broken down into a theory session and an exercise session for the children.

Why not help the families from your setting get involved by referring their parents or carers and help them on the way to a fitter, healthier and happier life!

To find out more contact the Healthy Weight Team on **01634 333741** or via email mend@medway.gov.uk

For further information visit the website www.mendprogramme.org

Electronic Mail: Changes to how we correspond with settings

It is the intention of the Early Years Service to increase the use of email and the **e-learning at last** website when corresponding with settings in the future. This will provide a quicker, more efficient distribution of routine information and also allow us to get important and urgent information to you more quickly.

Beginning in September 2011, most documents and information that are posted to you will also be placed on the **e-learning at last** website.

We will send you a regular email with brief descriptions of the information being made available. Each description will contain a link to the website so that you can also access the complete information electronically. This is the same system that colleagues in schools have used for a number of years.

During the Autumn 2011 term we will progressively put more information on the website whilst still sending you a hard (paper) copy of the information.

From January 2012 we will cease to provide the majority of information to settings in a hard copy format. After this date the only way you will be able to receive this information is via www.e-learningatlast.org.uk

For the foreseeable future some information will still be sent as a paper copy as well as being available on the website. We are currently deciding exactly which information this will be and this will be communicated to you at the PVI Leaders Briefings in October. Details of dates and times for the briefings can be found in the Autumn 2011 training programme.

*From January 2012 we will **not** be contacting personal email addresses for business correspondence. We need to have a **business email address** for your setting that we can send communication to.*

Most settings have already provided us with a suitable email business address. Please email eyheadcount@medway.gov.uk if you have not provided us with a suitable address yet, or if you wish to clarify what contact details we currently have for your setting. If you require advice on how to set one up please contact Andy Wilson on **01634 334026** or andy.wilson@medway.gov.uk who will be able to help.

Further details of the advantages of having a business email address will be explained at the PVI Leaders Briefings in October. Details of dates and times for the briefings can be found in the Autumn 2011 training programme.

The email address you provide is only for use by Medway Council and is not given to third party organisations or the public.

Please note: You may have already provided an address for the Family Information Service to give to prospective parents; this is held separately from our correspondence address list. You can provide us with the same address for both lists if you wish to as long as it is a business address.

Aug 2011	Sep – Nov 2011	Dec 2011	Jan 2012
EY send information only in hard copy.	EY send all information in hard copy and also <i>some</i> electronically.	EY send all information in hard copy and electronically.	EY stop sending the majority of information in hard copy.
	Settings receive further information via PVI Leaders Briefing.	Deadline for settings to provide Early Years with a business email address.	Information sent electronically only to settings with a valid business email address.

Autumn Headcount 2011

All registered providers will shortly receive their Headcount pack for Autumn 2011.

Headcount forms must NOT be completed in advance. Any forms returned to us before the headcount day will be rejected, and you will need to complete a second form.

Dates for your diaries are shown below:

Autumn 2011	Date
Headcount Day	Thursday 6 October 2011
Return Headcount information for Autumn final payment (Deadline)	Friday 14 October 2011
Autumn final payment in your bank account (see note below)	Tuesday 15 November 2011

We are required to reconcile every child on headcount forms from all providers BEFORE we can make ANY payments. Any headcount forms returned late delay this process and may delay payments.

Please contact Clare Hassell on 01634 332202 or email eyheadcount@medway.gov.uk if you have any queries.

Oral Health Awareness Training Days Autumn 2011

NHS Medway Dental Team are now offering **free training days** aimed at raising the awareness of oral health and promoting best practice for the oral care of young children. They are open to those who work with parents and young children and influence the health choices made by individuals.

Training outcomes will include:

- Knowledge of basic oral health messages for parents of under 5's.
- Knowledge of common dental problems associated with unsuitable feeding and eating habits and extra needs.
- Understanding teeth decay and how to maximize prevention including the correct use of fluoride toothpaste.
- Be able to confidently deal with parenting issues and modeling associated with poor oral health.
- Be able to promote positive, practical, workable change for best practice for oral health.
- Understand best practice for snacks and drinks for under 5's.
- Be aware of and use a Common Risk Factor approach to oral health.
- How to find an NHS dentist in Medway.

Training sessions will be taking place on **Wednesday 14 September 2011** and **Thursday 24 November 2011** between 9:30am and 1pm at NHS Medway, Chatham. If you would like to reserve a place for either of these dates or reserve a place on a future course please complete the enclosed booking form and return by post to:

Pam Bridges Dental and Optom Team Administrator
NHS Medway
50 Pembroke Court, North Road,
Chatham Maritime ME4 4EL

or via email to pamela.bridges@medwaypct.nhs.uk

Congratulations to the Medway Early Years Graduates!

Friday 6 May 2011 saw practitioners from Medway Private, Voluntary and Independent settings graduate at Canterbury Cathedral. For these practitioners it was a time to celebrate their hard work and dedication in achieving a BA (Hons) with recommendation for Early Years Professional Status. Medway Council has been delighted to fund practitioners from settings across Medway since 2006 to support the council's vision for a graduate led workforce; this is the first cohort to have achieved the full degree and we are now looking forward to embedding a strong graduate workforce within Medway Early Years PVI settings. This first celebration marks an exciting period of development for Early Years in Medway and these first graduates are inspirational.



These practitioners started on this graduate journey in 2007 and the pathways to the BA were varied for each individual. Some started with the 20 credit course that provided a taster experience of what undertaking a degree might be like, this gave the practitioners the opportunity to engage in level 4 qualification training that required academic reading and writing. These practitioners then continued their journey by embarking upon the Foundation Degree in Early Years Studies.

The Foundation Degree consists of 12 modules delivered over two years and practitioners are expected to attend university once a week for 30 weeks of the year; each module has an assessment element that ranges from written essays, verbal presentations and posters in addition to the professional development reviews that requires each practitioner to reflect upon their learning and possible next steps in their development.



Medway Council has an aspiration that the PVI sector will in time be led by a graduate workforce: to meet this vision settings have been supported since 2006 to get their practitioners qualified to a graduate level. Many pathways have been supported which has enabled each practitioner to engage in further training in a way that meets their individual needs and circumstances.

Over half the settings in Medway now have a graduate or at least one practitioner undertaking a graduate pathway. Having a strong graduate presence in the sector is creating change; our graduates are visionary and are strong advocates of high quality early years practice that is underpinned by detailed pedagogical knowledge that has strengthened their practice and impacted upon the provision within their settings. Our graduates are leaders of change and that change is becoming more visible in those settings where they have taken on the role of the Early Years Professional.

Settings that have a graduate on the staff team can apply for a Graduate Leader Incentive. This is an enhancement for the graduate's salary if the graduate commits to undertaking and gaining their Early Years Professional Status within two years; just under half of the settings in Medway now have someone in receipt of the Graduate Leader Incentive within their setting.

For further information on graduate pathways and the Graduate Leader Incentive please contact Medway Early Years Quality Team on **01634 334030**.

Every child a Talker (EcaT)

Over the last year, 20 PVI settings have taken part in the Every child a Talker (EcaT) programme run by the Early Years and Childcare Quality team in partnership with Sara Crouch (speech and language therapist). Members of staff that completed the programme have attended 10 days training over the last year, which have explored:

- Speech and language development.
- Adult strategies and behaviours to support early talk.
- English as an additional language.
- 'Letters and sounds' songs and games.
- Dialogic reading approach.
- Using data to plan appropriate interventions and provision.
- And many more.

Sue Lamb (deputy manager – reducing inequalities) was delighted to present certificates to the members of staff who have now completed the EcaT training programme and have become Early Language Lead Professionals (ELLPS).

Sue said 'I would like to express my thanks to everyone who took part in the EcaT programme and your extreme hard work. I have no doubt that you will all use what you have learnt to continue to improve speech and language outcomes for the children in your care.'

As a result of the EcaT programme, progress data has indicated that across Medway children's achievement in the four strands of speech and language has shown significant improvement.



Congratulations to St Michaels Day Nursery, Allhallows Pre-School, Just Learning Day Nursery, White Road Pre-School, Bo-Peeps Pre-School, Our Lady of Gillingham Playgroup, Play-A-Way Activity Centre, First Friends Day Nursery, 1st Tiny Steps, Little Explorers Day Nursery, All Saints Pre-School, St Francis Pre-School, St Lukes Pre-School, Lordswood Under 5's, 2J's Pre-School, Kidstreet Day Nursery, St Mary's Day Nursery, All Saints Day Nursery, Phoenix Education Day Nursery and Blossoms Day Nursery.

Changes to the National Minimum Wage

From **1 October 2011** the NMW rates will be as follows (current rate in brackets):

- The main rate for workers aged 21 and over will increase to **£6.08** (£5.93).
- The 18-20 rate will increase to **£4.98** (£4.92).
- The 16-17 rate for workers above school leaving age but under 18 will increase to **£3.68** (£3.64).
- The apprentice rate, for apprentices under 19 or 19 or over and in the first year of their apprenticeship will increase to **£2.60** (£2.50).

For further information visit the website:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/TheNationalMinimumWage

Buttercups 'Have a Heart' fête

Earlier this year Buttercups in Walderslade Village held a fundraising event in support of Heart FM's 'Have a Heart' appeal, raising money for children's hospices throughout the UK and in particular the children's hospice local to Medway, Demelza House.

The staff at Buttercups organised a fête, open to both children and adults alike and had a fantastic range of activities on offer; children enjoyed an Easter Egg hunt and took part in raffles and tombolas as well as taking turns at hook the duck, lucky lolly, hoopla and face painting.

The children were invited to take part in an Easter picture competition and were also treated to a visit from Fifi and Mr Muddles, who stopped by to show the children some balloon modelling and put on a puppet show. Refreshments were provided for the mum and dads and even the staff got in on the act by allowing the children to throw wet sponges at the teachers!



The fête and raffle raised over £500 and with further fundraising events planned, including a quiz and disco night, the setting hopes to raise an incredible £1,000. The money will help to support the work of children's hospices throughout the UK, helping to provide care and support to seriously ill children and their families in their own homes.

Many congratulations to Buttercups, well done for all of your hard work!

St Lukes Pre-School's Royal Wedding garden party

The staff and children at St Lukes Pre-School in Rochester celebrated the Royal Wedding in style earlier this year, with their own Royal Wedding garden party.

Tables and chairs were set up outside the setting for a lovely party banquet and the grounds were decorated with Union Jack flags and Royal Wedding bunting. The children dressed up in their finest party clothes and some even wore fancy dress to really get in the party spirit!

Staff spoke to the children about what the bride and groom might wear and showed the children some examples of wedding dresses; Mrs Cox brought in her own wedding dress and wore it to the party to show the children a traditional wedding dress and Mr Bains brought in his wife's wedding dress to show the children what a traditional Sikh bride would wear.

Despite the threat of a shower the rain held off and the children were able to tuck into lots of tasty party food and treats outside. Everyone had a wonderful time and the children really enjoyed being involved in the Royal Wedding celebrations.



Beresford Pre-School's sports day

Beresford Pre-School managed to keep the rain at bay this year when they held their annual sports day at Balfour Junior School on Friday 17 June. Mums and dads were there to cheer the children on as they split into teams to compete in some classic sports day events.

The red, yellow, blue and green teams took part in a range of fun filled races including the egg and spoon race, sack race, flag race, scooter racing and many more. All of the children got a chance to take part in each of the races and were rewarded with special stickers when they crossed the finishing line, which they loved to show off to their mums and dads in the crowd!



After all of their hard work the children received ice lollies as a special treat and sat back to watch their families get competitive in a series of special mums and dads running races, as well as a toddler race for the little ones. Even the staff got a chance to take part in the day's activities in their very own running race whilst being cheered on by all of the children.

Everyone had a fantastic time and the children really enjoyed taking part in the races and cheering on all of their friends.

Sports day at Hempstead Village Hall Playgroup



The friends and families of the children at Hempstead Village Hall Playgroup took full advantage of the brilliant summer sunshine last term when they turned up on mass to cheer on the children at their sports day fundraiser. The event, which was held at the setting on 29 June, saw the children competing in a wide range of fun sports day activities. The children had a fantastic time cheering on their team mates and taking part in the egg and spoon race, balancing race and relay race, to name but a few. Each child was given their very own gold medal as a special reward for their hard work in all of the races.

The day was a huge success and as well as having a wonderful time competing in their sports day, Hempstead Village Hall Playgroup managed to raise a total of £600! The setting has decided to donate £300 to Cystic Fibrosis Trust UK, which will go to help children like the playgroup's own little budding athlete Jake Jordan aged two and a half years old, seen here receiving his medal. Jake and all of the other children had a fabulous day and really enjoyed having fun in the sun with their friends.



St Matthews Morning Nursery's farewell picnic

St Matthews Morning Nursery's teddy bears picnic was tinged with sadness this year as the children and staff bid a fond farewell to Sue Ratcliffe as she retired.



The children presented Sue with gifts and cards from everyone at the nursery, which included a photo frame with pictures that had been taken at the setting over the years and a fabulous retirement cake.



Sue has been a much-loved member of staff at the setting for over 25 years and will be greatly missed by all of the children and staff at St Matthews. Sue is looking forward to taking a well deserved rest, but is planning on returning to the setting once a week from September to read to the children in their book corner.

Everyone at the setting would like to thank Sue for all of her hard work and great fun over the years.

Messy Play at St Nicholas Playgroup

The team at St Nicholas Playgroup in Strood had a fantastic time getting grubby at the setting's Messy Play day on Tuesday 12 July.

Staff and children used sponges and rollers to paint each other with their favourite colours; beautiful blues, greens and reds were splashed on clothes, faces, arms and legs as the children set to work at getting very messy and having a great deal of fun in the process!

The children sat together to sing 'Row, row, row your boat' and wiggled their bodies in the paint as they sang 'There's a worm at the bottom of my garden'; the children loved the feel of the squidgy paint between their fingers and toes and were amazed at the wonderful shapes that they could make.

Everyone had a fantastic time and by the end of the day all of the children were covered head to toe in lovely mucky paint! It was then time for the staff to work their magic and set to work at getting the children lovely and clean and into nice dry clothes, ready to tell their mums and dads about their day of messy fun.



ABC Playgroup's Living Eggs project

This July ABC Playgroup played host to a set of chicks, nurturing them over the course of two weeks, watching their journey from the egg and beyond.

The ten eggs arrived in an incubator on a Monday morning, delivered to the playgroup by a company called 'Living Eggs' who supplied everything that the setting would need once the chicks had hatched and detailed instructions on how to care for them. By Wednesday some of the eggs had already started to crack; the children, parents and staff were mesmerised, watching as the chicks began to emerge. Sadly two of the eggs didn't hatch, however, by Thursday one female and seven males had hatched out of their shells and were taken to a light box to keep warm.



The children were allowed to handle the chicks under supervision, which they thought was wonderful and they really enjoyed watching them grow. By the end of the second week the chicks had grown rather big and their wings had even started to form proper feathers.

After two weeks 'Living Eggs' returned to collect all of the equipment and the chicks moved into a new home, living with a grandmother of one of the children who was already equipped to look after them.



The staff at the playgroup had held a special event to raise money for the project and everyone at the setting feels that the experience has been worth every penny. The children enjoyed the experience from start to finish and have spent their days since the chicks hatched drawing pictures of the chicks, making models of them and listening to stories about chicks! The staff and children at ABC have found the whole experience fascinating and very rewarding and would recommend the experience to other settings.

Bereavement support and the Sand Rose Project

Many Early Years professionals will find a time when they come in to contact with children and families who are experiencing the trauma of bereavement. In order to support these families the staff at High Halstow Pre-School have researched information and resources and compiled a bereavement folder; the folder holds information on a number of organisations that are able to assist families during their time of need, including the Sand Rose Project.

The Sand Rose Project is a charity that provides free breaks to young bereaved families. They are based in Cornwall where cottages are offered to allow families to enjoy space and time together in beautiful surroundings, for one or two weeks at a time. The project does not include therapy or counselling facilities, but offers a unique place for people to adjust and become more able to cope with their loss, providing a stepping stone for people to move forward. Sand Rose works through a nomination process and all requests for a break must be supported by a nominee.

For further information on Sand Rose visit the website www.sandrose.org.uk, or contact them via their email address info@sandrose.org.uk

If you would like some further information on High Halstow Pre-School's bereavement folder or to arrange to come and take a look please contact Deborah Smith on **01634 255088**.

Outstanding Ofsted result

Following an inspection in June, Hempstead Village Hall Playgroup achieved an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating; this is the second time the setting has been judged to be 'Outstanding', the first being achieved in 2007.

The committee run playgroup has provided sessional care for children aged from two to five since its opening in 1967. The setting is inclusive, serving the local area and providing support to children from a range of backgrounds with varying needs, including children who speak English as an additional language and children with special educational needs.

Ofsted declared the overall quality of the provision to be outstanding, highlighting the staff's dedication to the children in their care. Staff were praised for the support they offer to the children and their families, adapting the provision to meet the needs of the children as individuals. Ofsted noted the strong partnerships that the staff have forged with parents and carers, with the positive effects of these partnerships being duly noted.

Carolyn Bassindale, Manager at Hempstead Village Hall Playgroup, said 'I am very proud of all the hard work the staff have put into making our playgroup a continued success. It is very important to us that we maintain good working relationships with the parents and carers and involve them in their child's learning, which I feel then culminates into a happy and healthy "family" atmosphere. That is what we are all about.'

Key areas highlighted as exceptionally good practice include:

- Resources & activities available to children.
- The setting environment and outdoor area.
- The setting's use of planning and the systems that have been put in place. Systems are constantly being evaluated and developed, enhancing the outcomes for all of the children.
- The relationships practitioners have developed with the children at the setting and use of communication.
- Links with the local community; children have benefited from a variety of visits from adults in the community, including local policemen and fire officers.

'Staff form a very stable team providing an exceptional service that is sensitive to the needs of all its users.'

'Children feel extremely secure in the setting because staff create a calm and nurturing atmosphere which promotes their feelings of trust.'

The team at Hempstead Village Hall Playgroup are delighted with the outcome of the inspection and are very pleased to have kept their 'outstanding' status intact. Carolyn added 'I felt confident during the inspection which was due to recently gaining my Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) alongside obtaining a BA Hons in Early Childhood Studies. This time I actually enjoyed having the inspection and had been looking forward to sharing and celebrating our successes and strengths.'

Many congratulations to the team at Hempstead Village Hall Playgroup!



Places to visit in Medway...

Covering 114 hectares of former farmland on the North Downs, Capstone Farm Country Park provides a beautiful and exciting day out for all ages with ancient woodlands, old orchards, a freshwater lake, meadows and hedgerows offering habitats for a variety of wildlife. Capstone Farm Country Park is one of Medway's finest green spaces and offers wonderful opportunities for walking, running, cycling and more; there are plenty of things to keep children busy and active with a mountain bike course, horse riding trail and fishing lake all on hand at the park.



Capstone has excellent facilities including an education room, visitor centre, café, children's play area and picnic facilities as well as a ranger service. The rangers cater for all ages and hold regular events for children and adults that aim to increase public understanding about the local environment and the organisms that live within it. The rangers can be contacted through their office on **01634 812196**; initial contact & provisional bookings by phone are preferred.

Capstone Farm Country Park is easy to get to, with car and coach parking. Admission is free and the park is open from 8:30am to sunset.

For further information contact the park on **01634 338191** or via email capstonefarmcp@medway.gov.uk

Useful contacts

ACAS ☎ **08457 47 47 47**

📄 www.acas.org.uk

Business Link ☎ **0845 300 0218**

📄 www.businesslink.gov.uk/south_east.html

Charities Commission ☎ **0845 300 0218**

📄 www.charity-commission.gov.uk

Child Protection Services, Children's Social Care Services ☎ **01634 334466**

📄 www.medway.gov.uk/healthandsocialcare/childrenandyoungpeople/makinglifebetter/childprotectionchildabuse.aspx

Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Support Team ☎ **01634 334324**

📄 www.medwaychildrenstrust.co.uk/working-together/common-assessment-framework

Early Years & Childcare Professional Development Centre (PDC) ☎ **01634 331488**

📄 www.e-learningatlast.org.uk

Kent Police ☎ **01622 690690**

📄 www.kent.police.uk

Ofsted ☎ **0300 123 1231**

📄 www.ofsted.gov.uk

Student Services (Admissions) Team ☎ **01634 331110**

📄 www.medway.gov.uk/educationandlearning/schoolsandcolleges/admissions.aspx

Dates for the diary...

Heritage Open Days

8 - 11 September 2011

Heritage Open Days celebrates Britain's history and culture by allowing visitors free access to a number of English Heritage attractions that are either not usually open, or would normally charge an entrance fee.

www.heritageopendays.org.uk

PDC Open Day

12 September 2011

16 November 2011

A chance for practitioners to meet the team and see first hand what the PDC has to offer.

01634 331488

Jeans for Genes Day

7 October 2011

Jeans for Genes Day is a lovely day to share with the children in your setting and the money that you raise will be a great help to children with genetic disorders. For further information and ideas on fundraising visit the website.

www.jeansforgenesday.com

National Baking Week

17 - 23 October 2011

Children at Early Years settings can join in the fun of National Baking Week and discover how to 'Bake and Share' with family, friends and the wider community.

www.nationalbakingweek.co.uk

BBC Children in Need

18 November 2011

Pudsey Bear is back for another 'Children in Need' fundraiser; the website is packed with fun ideas on how you can get involved, along with some fantastic art and craft resources including Pudsey masks, poster packs and colouring pages. To register for your fundraising pack or for fundraising ideas visit the website.

www.bbc.co.uk/pudsey

Road Safety Week

21 - 27 November 2011

Road Safety Week returns and provides an excellent opportunity for settings to teach simple yet important lessons, such as holding hands and the word 'STOP', while children take part in fun activities.

www.roadsafetyweek.org.uk

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition of Firm Foundations!

This magazine is written for you and we really value your views, we would like you to send us news about your setting or any other information you think may be useful to other providers.

The deadline for our next issue is Friday 16 December. Let us know about any upcoming events...

- Outings with your children (e.g. local visits, trips to the park etc.)
- Events at your setting (e.g. coffee mornings, competitions etc.)
- Any media recommendations (e.g. TV programmes, books etc.)
- Ideas about the kinds of articles you would like to read

Please note if you wish to send in any photos of the children in your setting, you need to ensure permission has been granted by the parents/carers before the photo is sent to us.

Please contact us if you would like us to send you a photograph release form.

As this is your magazine we want **you** to tell **us** what you would like to see, contact us to request information on interesting topics that you feel would benefit your own setting which will in turn benefit others.

Contact details for editor:

Name: Gemma Pearson

Phone: 01634 332191

Email: firmfoundations@medway.gov.uk