

Inspection report for Vauxhall Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Lambeth
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Vauxhall Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, senior leaders of the school, representatives from the local authority, the governing body and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, such as the health services, parents, carers and other users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

The centre was launched at the end of 2009 as a phase two centre and achieved full core purpose in March 2010 when the building officially opened. It is managed directly by the governing body of Vauxhall Primary School on behalf of the local authority. The centre is open all year on weekdays only, from 8.30am until 4.30pm. It serves an area in the 20% most deprived nationally, with a high proportion of severely deprived households, particularly in relation to housing and services and environment scores.

There are 658 children under five in the reach area and 72% are registered at the centre. The majority of families come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Other groups include those from Portuguese and Spanish speaking communities. The proportion of White British families is 15%. The percentage of children aged 0 to 4 living in households dependent on workless benefits is well above the national average as is the number of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children's levels on entry to early years education across the reach area are well below those expected for their age.

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

Vauxhall Children's Centre provides a good service. In the relatively short time it has been fully open, it has had a positive impact on outcomes for those who use it. This is especially in relation to how well children learn and develop and are prepared for school, and enhancing various skills in adults. This is recognised by the families through common views, such as 'Children and adults are blooming' and, 'It has been like a backbone for me'. Staff are committed and caring and highly knowledgeable about the community and the specific groups that require their support, such as the high number who have no recourse to public funds.

There are already a good number of families registered with the centre and all target groups are represented. However, there are some target groups, such as fathers and lone parents, which are relatively under-represented. This is partly due to the short time that the centre has been fully operational, and because the centre only opens during the week. In addition, the 'Dates for the Diary' timetable is not always clear enough about who the sessions are aimed at.

Very strong links with a wide range of partner agencies have developed quickly and effectively so that support for often complex needs is available rapidly. Consequently, the provision is good and there are many examples of how families have been helped to improve their circumstances through good care, guidance and support. However, although there is clear evidence of the impact of the centre, the way some of that evidence is recorded and tracked is not consistent and not always easy to follow.

The building is warm, welcoming and secure and seen as a haven by many families. 'You get such an incredible welcome, they know your child's name', was a view that summed up many similar statements. The centre is very inclusive, with all who use it mixing and supporting each other well. There are high levels of respect shown, modelled by centre staff. 'Parent Ambassadors' are highly supportive and enthusiastic and involved well in the centre.

The senior leadership team of the school is fully involved in the management of the

centre and they, along with the local authority and the centre manager, have worked effectively to improve outcomes. This is especially so for those considered to be the most vulnerable groups. There is a clear and accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development because self-evaluation processes are well established. Plans for future development have correctly identified priority areas and focus appropriately on extending the services to some under-represented groups. This demonstrates the clear commitment of all those involved and means there is a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the numbers from some target groups who access the centre, such as fathers and lone parents, by:
 - reviewing centre opening hours
 - ensuring the timetable is clear about who the activities are aimed at.
- Implement a consistent and effective system to record and track the impact of the centre's short- and long-term work with families.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Childhood obesity levels are slightly above national averages but data are only available for the borough and relate to 2010. Consequently, the centre had not been open long enough to influence them. However, there is a strong focus on healthy lifestyles highlighted by the work done with Guys and St Thomas hospital nutritionists, baby clinics and postnatal cafes held in the centre and a focus on healthy snacks and outdoor play at centre activities. Consequently, families who use the centre have a clear understanding of how to lead healthy lives. Breastfeeding rates are well above national figures and immunisation rates are high. Families with mental health issues are well supported through 'Every Parent Matters Surgeries' and signposting to specific professional help and counselling.

All families using the centre feel safe there because they have high levels of trust in the staff. Specific parenting courses, such as 'Triple P' have given them a greater understanding of how to keep children safe, reinforced by 'Children's Safety Week' activities. Links with the community police officer and fire brigade enable parents and carers to understand how to safeguard their children in and out of the home. In addition, the centre's full involvement in supporting families subject to child protection plans and the use of the common assessment framework has led to positive outcomes for many of those children. Emergency hospital admissions in the area are relatively low.

Early years development is at the core of the centre's work and close links with the

school have enhanced this, as has support to access two-year-old funding. Special transition 'Stay and Play' sessions enable children to move on smoothly to the next stage of their learning. Early Years Foundation Stage results improved significantly in 2011. Despite the achievement gap widening slightly from 2010 to 2011, it has narrowed overall over the last three years and is in line with national averages. Tracking of children who have accessed the centre when they move on to nursery and school show that they outperform those who had no contact, especially in their personal development. Parents and carers confirm this, with a typical view being, 'It's a brilliant stepping-stone for me and my children.' Children behave well in the centre and develop positive relationships with adults and each other.

The centre's work to develop adults' skills has been highly effective especially in relation to their parenting, English language acquisition and their personal development. Consequently, over a third of families using the centre are engaged in training, adult learning or relevant activities. This has led to notable outcomes in relation to returning to work, training or education and hence their economic stability. Many parents and carers report an increase in their confidence enabling them to take on roles in the centre such as 'Parent Ambassadors'. Although there are few formal volunteers in the centre at present, parents and carers do make a good contribution to the centre and are keen to do more. Parent and carer governors and representatives on the advisory board ensure families' views are put forward and taken into account. The centre has also been effective in encouraging participation in community projects, such as the 'Gasworks Art Project', and through hosting events, for example 'Black History Month' and 'Your Community Matters' surgeries.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff have a clear understanding of the local community and specific needs of the most vulnerable groups, such as those without recourse to public funds and where there are language and communication difficulties. Services are adapted to meet need, for example, through putting on additional English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses and setting up a basic course to support families wishing to follow a career in childcare. However, there are some target groups that are under-represented, such as fathers and lone parents. The centre has been successful in engaging some young fathers through the specific work of the St Michael's Fellowship but the weekday opening hours limit accessibility for others and for those who work. In addition, the centre does not record and review its intervention and support in a consistent manner.

Achievement is celebrated well through awarding certificates and raising the aspirations of families who use the centre, especially of those most lacking in confidence and self-esteem. Trips to the theatre, seaside, museums and parks extend families' experiences well. Parents and carers report that their children's learning and development have improved significantly through contact with the centre.

The quality of care, guidance and support has been enhanced by effective outreach work, not only from the centre staff but also through specialist work, such as for children with disabilities. The centre has been particularly successful in supporting families with multiple and complex needs and helping those in times of crisis, for example, those with mental health problems or to escape an abusive relationship. Close working links, such as with the 'Stockwell Partnership' to support Arabic and Portuguese families, ensure specific groups are assisted to gain appropriate advice and guidance on accessing services. This has a positive impact on outcomes for those families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements are clear, as are roles of responsibility; the local authority supports and monitors the centre well. Different layers of management, such as the children's centre committee of the school governing body, the school senior leadership team and the joint advisory board covering three other children's centres, communicate effectively to ensure good levels of strategic management. The governing body has played an effective role in ensuring the centre's self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate although a similar process in relation to the centre's latest improvement plan is ongoing. This plan highlights appropriate key priorities but does not use data effectively to measure impact. Nevertheless well-integrated key partners, and families using the centre, are fully included in the development planning. Consequently, outcomes for families are good and improving.

Resources are managed effectively and the building is well used during the week so that the large majority of families in the area are being reached. The centre is particularly successful in engaging families where there is a disability or special educational need and also minority ethnic families. Teenage parents, though few in number in the local area, also access the centre's services. Staff resources are used well and the warm welcome that everyone receives has a positive impact on families' desire to keep coming to the centre and also to support the work it does. Consequently, the service gives good value for money.

The building is accessible to those with disabilities and special educational needs. It is highly inclusive and those who use it accurately reflect the community with the most vulnerable groups fully included. 'It's a common ground for everyone' was how families summed it up. The provision of a crèche has had a very positive impact not only on increasing the numbers who can participate in courses but also on children's development as they learn to part happily from their parents and carers and can enjoy the wealth of resources available at the centre. As a result of all of this, the centre is successfully narrowing the achievement gap for families, as the quality of their lives is improving, for example, through improved self-belief and confidence in helping them return to work and support the education of their children.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are strong and staff are well trained. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out. The designated child protection coordinator is also the school's special educational needs coordinator and this means there is a constant exchange of information and continuing support for families when they move on to school. Staff, and especially the outreach worker, play an effective role in ensuring that assessments, including those under the Common Assessment Framework, are well informed. Consequently, children's interests are safeguarded well and the risk of harm reduced. Strong partnerships and a high level of information exchange play a significant role in the good safeguarding. For example, the centre is made aware of all children under five who are subject to child protection plans in the reach area, and joint home visits are carried out with the

outreach worker and other agencies.

Other well-established and effective partnerships include those with the Baytree Centre to deliver ESOL classes and with the Toy and Book Library service which delivers 'Stay and Play' sessions with a strong focus on developing children's communication, language and literacy skills. Families benefit from good links with the speech and language specialists, whose joint work with the centre ensures effective early intervention and support. All of this contributes well to the good outcomes for families using the centre.

Families were particularly eager to share their positive views of the centre. This is also reflected in survey results that show 98% satisfaction levels and in the evaluation of courses and activities. Children's views are taken into account in relation to what activities they enjoy through observation. 'Parent Ambassadors' and those who represent the centre on the joint advisory board have good opportunities to shape the services offered, although some feel hampered by the perceived 'red tape' of personal checks that they feel stop them being more actively involved on a day-to-day basis.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

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

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Vauxhall Children's Centre on 25–26 January 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we looked at your centre's improvement plan and numerous other documents. We spoke to a wide range of partner agencies working with the centre as well as staff, members of the governing body, the school senior leadership team and representatives from the local authority. We also visited several centre activities taking place during the inspection, such as the information and communication technology class, English class and 'Stay and Play' sessions and spoke to a substantial number of families using the centre.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. It was very helpful to have your input. Views that summed up those of many we spoke to included: 'Children and adults are blooming' and the centre 'gave a lot of us a lot of motivation to do more'. Although the centre has only been fully open for a relatively short time, it is already having a positive impact on the families who use it, especially in relation to building confidence and skills to help improve your lives and the way children learn, develop and settle into school. 'It's a brilliant stepping-stone for me and my children' was a typical view. Families reap the benefits from having a better understanding of how to lead healthy lives and to keep children safe and help them learn.

The staff provide high levels of care, guidance and support because they know the specific needs of the local community well and also because there are strong partnerships with many other agencies that can be called on quickly to provide the best support. This covers a wide range of needs, such as helping to learn English, develop skills to assist you to return to work and helping with children's needs, such as speech and language development. Because there is a high degree of trust in staff, everyone feels safe and welcome and this has a positive impact on the numbers who attend and the outcomes that result. 'You get such an incredible welcome, they know your child's name' summed up the opinion of many of you. However, although those who use the centre reflect the community it serves, there are some groups that are under-represented at the moment, namely fathers and lone parents. As a result, we have asked the centre to look at how it can make it easier for those groups to attend and to make sure the information available about the sessions makes it clear who they are aimed at.

Although the centre records the work it does for families, this is not always done in the most consistent or easy to follow way so that sometimes it is difficult to track the progress and benefits for families in the longer term. We have asked the centre to make improvements to the way the good work they do is recorded and measured so that the impact of this work can be seen more easily.

Families using the centre are very satisfied with the services on offer and are eager to be involved. The work of the 'Parent Ambassadors', parent and carer governors and representatives on the advisory board is important and effective in voicing the families' views and in shaping services. Some of you would like to be able to do even more for the centre, especially in relation to spreading the knowledge of its work in the local community.

Everyone is enthusiastic and committed to improve and increase the numbers who benefit from the centre's work. There is a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development from all levels of those who run the centre, and the local authority provides good levels of support. There has already been a positive impact on many outcomes, particularly in relation to children's early development and adults' skills. As a result, the centre is well placed to continue to improve.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.