

Inspection report for Liz Atkinson 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	Christ Church CE Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Liz Atkinson Children's Centre EY402746

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/partner 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.

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, and representatives from the local authority, the governing body and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, such as the health services, parents and other users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

The centre was designated in March 2008 as a phase one centre. It is managed directly by the governing body of Christ Church CE Primary School on behalf of the local authority and is in a loose federation with Rosendale Children's Centre. The centre is open 48 weeks of the year on weekdays from 8am until 6pm and on Saturday afternoons for a fathers' drop-in Stay and Play. 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 scores.

There are 864 children under five in the reach area and 84% have accessed services at the centre. The majority of families come from a Black and minority ethnic background, although 20% of families registered have not specified their child's ethnicity. The proportion of White British families is 12%. The percentage of children aged 0–4 living in households dependent on workless benefits is over twice the national average and the number of eligible families benefiting from the childcare

element of Working Tax Credit is well above that seen nationally. 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

Liz Atkinson Children's Centre provides a good service. The care, guidance and support families receive are outstanding. This is as a result of the in-depth knowledge staff have of those who use the centre, and the way other services are coordinated to provide wide-ranging, highly effective support. One view that summed up many similar ones was 'Staff seem to be in sync, such unity and warmth.'

The centre has been very successful at encouraging families to access the services, and the proportions who do so from all target groups are high. The centre has had particular success in engaging fathers, lone parents and young families. It has also identified its own specific groups whose circumstances make them vulnerable in the local area such as the Somali community and has been successful in engaging them with a range of services, too. Consequently, there are good or improving outcomes for all target groups.

The warm welcome that families receive, the security of the building and the very high levels of trust families have in staff mean that all the families spoken to and surveyed are happy with the services offered and feel safe there. Families know that they will be listened to and their views are taken into account to shape services. However, this is done informally at present as there is no regular parents' forum. Similarly, although families are represented on the advisory board and school governing body, there is not yet a wide enough range from different target groups.

The governing body and the relatively newly formed advisory board review rather than challenge the centre's self-evaluation and development plan. This is because, until recently, there has not been clarity about the different roles of the two bodies. Nevertheless, senior leaders and managers have a clear and accurate understanding

of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement, and the development plan has identified appropriate priorities. The local authority plays an effective role in supporting and challenging the centre and provides useful data to show the centre's impact. Targets are based on an accurate analysis of local needs and, as a result, the centre is having an increasingly positive impact on those it serves with life-changing outcomes in many cases. All staff are committed to continue to improve outcomes, well trained and knowledgeable, and consequently there is a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Involve families in the strategic management and governance of the centre so that their views are formally taken into account by
 - setting up a parents' forum
 - ensuring there is more representation from target groups on the advisory board.
- Strengthen the role of the advisory board and the governing body in their involvement with the centre's self-evaluation and development planning by
 - ensuring a robust monitoring programme is set up
 - embedding the links between the two bodies to ensure they fulfil their separate duties.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Childhood obesity rates in the local area are similar to national averages and breastfeeding rates are good compared to those found nationally; immunisation rates are high. Baby clinics and Milk Spots breastfeeding drop-in sessions that take place in the centre have done much to improve the numbers who access health services. Families also benefit from targeted services such as speech and language therapy and dental health with notable successes. The centre has a strong focus on healthy eating with courses run for families such as Cook Up aimed at young parents and the involvement of the early years community food worker. The Father Nature gardening group held every Saturday for male carers and their children is very effective in encouraging healthy eating and physical exercise. Families with emotional or mental health problems are well supported through signposting to counselling and attending courses to boost their self-esteem.

Emergency hospital admissions in the area are relatively low. Families using the centre all report that they are confident to share concerns with staff and similarly, staff are quick to pick up any possible safeguarding issues. As a result, 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. Courses for parents, such as 'Triple P', 'Life Choices' and the Lambeth

Autism Parenting Programme, have all contributed effectively to parents' good understanding of how to keep their children safe.

Links with the school and the work of the children's centre teacher ensure that children's early learning is at the core of the centre's work. Supporting families to access two-year-old funding has also had a positive impact on how well children learn and develop. Courses for parents, such as Family Learning, ensure they have a good understanding of how to help their children learn and develop, and consequently, tracking of children who move on to school shows that many make good progress. Overall, the Early Years Foundation Stage results for the centre's reach area show a significant increase since 2009 and the achievement gap has narrowed considerably from being well above the national figure in 2009 to being below in 2011.

The centre's work to develop adults' skills has been highly effective, especially in relation to their English language acquisition and their personal development. Consequently, over half the families using the centre are accessing training, adult learning or other activities. Other projects such as the 'Back to Work' course and the 'Child Development Grant', as well as the work of the employment and training outreach worker, have produced good outcomes for many families leading to a return to full-time employment, training or being encouraged to further their education. 'Things I thought I couldn't do, I've learned that I can do' was a common view voiced during the inspection.

Children behave well in the centre and copy the good relationships modelled by staff. Families feel fully involved in the centre and some do contribute to governance and sit on the advisory board. However, because there is no formal parents' forum meeting regularly, their views are not recorded. There are no volunteers in the centre at present, although some families do volunteer in the school and are involved in the Family Engagement Group there which also benefits the children's centre.

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	3
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

Most of the children under five in the reach area are registered at the centre and all target groups are well represented. The centre has been particularly successful in supporting children with disabilities and special educational needs through the close working partnership with the early years alliance home support worker. Services are adapted well to meet the specific needs of groups in the community such as running ongoing courses to meet the high level of need to develop English language skills. The Muslim Women's group has been successful in including the Somali community. A very high proportion of fathers in the area access the services through the partnership with the St Michael's Fellowship. The impact of the centre's work is recorded in case studies but the quality and consistency of the information means that they are not always effective tools to show the extent of the input and the progress.

Achievement is celebrated well through special events and awarding certificates, and encouraging families to aspire to even more achievements such as further levels in the education. Children's learning and development are further enhanced through experiences such as the arts and crafts sessions held at Tate Britain. Parents report that they and their children have achieved a significant amount through their contact with the centre, especially in relation to their personal development. 'The centre has given me part of my life back' and 'The children are so confident' are comments that reflect the views of many families.

Families who use the centre are unanimous in feeling that they receive excellent levels of care, guidance and support. 'This is like our family' was the feeling of many. This is especially so in times of crisis, such as impending homelessness or severe overcrowding, when staff galvanise the expertise of other agencies such as Home Start. The family outreach worker is especially effective in providing very well-tailored support for families and in following up to ensure that the support is long term and appropriate to their needs. Targeted provision such as the Wriggle and Roar literacy group aimed at supporting carers of looked after children provide very high levels of specific support with consequent positive outcomes.

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	2
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.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is well organised and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The senior leadership of the school and the management of the other federated children's centre provide good levels of support and challenge, and they are strongly focused and effective in securing good outcomes. However, the advisory board is newly established and, as such, not yet fully involved in the centre's self-evaluation and strategic development. Key partners are engaged effectively in supporting the centre through commissioned services meetings, although their attendance at advisory board meetings is more sporadic.

Centre resources, and especially the well-trained staff, are managed effectively. The friendly atmosphere in the centre has been instrumental in ensuring the majority of families in most target groups engage well and consequently achieve good outcomes across a number of key areas. The number of fathers and young parents who access the centre is very high as resources and services are matched to their needs. Consequently, the centre gives good value for money.

The centre promotes equality and diversity very well. The purpose-built building is fully accessible to those with disabilities and special educational needs. Vulnerable groups are fully included through targeted drop-in sessions such as for families concerned about their child's development or the weekly outreach surgery. The provision of a crèche has had a very positive impact not only on the numbers that can access adult courses but also on the children's development as they learn to part happily from their carers and sessions are planned around the early learning goals. The highly mixed community is fully reflected in those who attend the centre and all groups show a high level of respect for each other, modelled very effectively by staff. 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 through greater self-belief leading to return to work or enhanced confidence in helping their children to learn.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are strong and staff are well trained. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out. Staff play an effective role in ensuring that assessments, such as under the Common Assessment Framework, are instigated when necessary and well informed because of their high level of knowledge of the families involved. 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 safeguarding children, especially as the centre is now being made aware of all children under five who are subject to a child protection plan in the area. Staff training to deal with domestic violence means that they are alert and proactive when this is suspected.

Other well-established and highly supportive partnerships include those with the Baytree Centre to deliver English classes and with the Stockwell Partnership to help

Somali- and Portuguese-speaking families access appropriate health, work and benefits guidance. The wide range of partnerships and the depth of the relationships all contribute effectively to the generally good outcomes.

Families were eager to share their unanimously very positive views about the centre and how it has helped them. This is also reflected in the annual survey undertaken by the local authority where 100% of respondents were satisfied with the centre. Regular course and activity evaluations, and observing the choices children make, ensure that families' views are taken into account. Well coordinated outreach and partnership work has been effective in engaging families who were proving hard to reach. 'It's given me freedom' sums up how many families feel about their contact with the centre.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The 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

Findings from the concurrent school inspection in relation to attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, leadership and management, and safeguarding were taken into consideration and contributed to the children's centre report and judgements.

The childcare provision was last inspected in May 2010 and the findings did not contribute to this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Liz Atkinson Children's Centre on 2–3 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we looked at documents and spoke to agencies working with the centre as well as to staff, members of the governing body and the advisory board, the school senior leadership team and representatives from the local authority. We also visited the centre activities taking place during the inspection, such as baby massage, 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 and to hear how positive you all feel about the centre, and especially the commitment of the staff. Views that summed up those of many we spoke to included 'This is like our family' and 'The centre has given me part of my life back.'

We agree that the centre staff provide outstanding care, guidance and support for the families using the centre. This is because they have a high level of knowledge of your specific needs and they use the strong, effective partnerships that are in place to put in the right level and type of support. Specific drop-in sessions, such as if you have any concerns about your children's development or for breastfeeding, support you and help you feel more confident. Because staff are well trained and vigilant, and are quick to spot and act on any concerns, they are effective in ensuring children are safeguarded well.

The centre has been very successful in encouraging families from all groups in the community to access services there. This is particularly so in relation to fathers, young parents and lone parents through activities such as Cook Up and Father Nature. The centre is also very effective in supporting families where children have a special educational need or a disability through working with the early years alliance home support worker and Lambeth Autism Parenting Programme. This helps everyone to be fully included and welcome.

Families are reaping the benefits in many ways, including how to lead healthy lives and how to keep children safe and help them to learn. Courses such as the Triple P parenting course, English classes and the work of the employment and training outreach worker help families gain confidence to return to work or further education and have all been effective in improving outcomes for those who use the centre. One parent summed up the views of many by stating 'Things I thought I couldn't do, I've learned I can do' and another said 'It's given me freedom.'

Families are very satisfied with the centre and feel that they are listened to. However, at the moment, there is no formal parents' forum so that your views can be fed on to the advisory board and, although families are represented on this body, the range is not wide enough. This is something we have asked the centre to improve.

The centre is well led and managed on a day-to-day basis and there is an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for development. However, the advisory board is relatively new and not yet fully involved in challenging the centre by regularly monitoring the development plan and centre's self-evaluation. This is also the case with the governing body as these two groups have only recently defined their separate roles. We have asked those responsible to ensure that the two groups work effectively together so that the centre is helped to provide an even better service.

The strong commitment of all staff and the impact they have already had on outcomes for a high proportion of families in the community, combined with outstanding care, guidance and support, means that 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.