

Inspection report for BRA5 Seesaw Children's Centre

Local authority	Essex
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	John Bunyan Infant School and Nursery
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Seesaw Day Nursery

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 infant school and nursery 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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with: the children's centre co-ordinator and staff; parents and carers, including parents on the Parent Forum; managers from 4children; representatives from health services, partner organisations, local authority services, and the Focus Group; and the headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage teachers at John Bunyan Infant School and Nursery. A telephone conversation was held with the chair of the Focus Group who is also a member of the Parent Forum.

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

Information about the centre

BRA5 Seesaw Children's Centre opened in June 2008 in a new building next to John Bunyan Infant School and Nursery. It is a phase two centre. The reach area covers a range of levels of deprivation, from 9% to 65% most deprived areas nationally. The centre is situated in one of the 9%-10% most deprived areas, and a quarter of the children attending the centre live in this area. Four wards are served by the centre. These are Bocking Blackwater, Bocking North, Bocking South and Braintree Central. Since opening, the centre has continued to access more families year on year. Due to its location, families living in Bocking Blackwater can access another centre, Carousel Children's Centre, more easily; some families in Carousel Children's Centre's reach area access the Seesaw Centre. Ninety-six per cent of families in the reach area are currently registered at one of these two centres, with 80% attending regularly.

The centre works in partnership with a range of partners and services including local schools. The local authority has commissioned 4children to have strategic management of the centre. The Focus Group acts as an advisory board.

A high proportion of families live in social housing. Two per cent of users are from minority ethnic backgrounds in this area mainly from Polish and Portuguese communities. Unemployment rates are high, with 17.8% of children living in poverty. 24% of under 5's live in households on workless benefits. There is a high level of domestic abuse in the area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those expected for their age, but outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in the reach area are rising year on year. Rates of higher education in the area are low.

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

1

Main findings

'The centre is a life-line, I don't know what I would have done without it'. This comment from one parent was echoed by others. Everyone enjoys coming to this good centre. Users know it is there to help them. Outcomes and provision are good, and have improved incrementally over time. Safety is a priority. Safeguarding and all aspects relating to staying safe are outstanding, as are the outstanding care, guidance and support. The centre is a safe haven, which families turn to in times of crisis. Parents know that advice and guidance are always on-hand. Case-study evidence is robust and shows that through highly effective multi-agency working the centre has had significant impact on ensuring the safety and well-being of the most vulnerable families in the community. The centre supports the sometimes complex and diverse needs of many families, including those with little or no English from the Portuguese and Polish communities.

From the outset, the centre has targeted families with the greatest level of need, ensuring that they are supported effectively. It is now looking to develop the centre's work with all families in the area. Seesaw Centre, with its 'sister centre', works with most of the parents in the two reach areas. Their work has been supported by the exemplary use of data. The centre tracks information with fine detail from the first

point of contact. This is supported by another exemplary feature: the strong parent voice. Consultation and evaluation thread through all activities, and at all levels. Parents know that their views are not only sought, but acted upon. Governance and accountability arrangements provided by 4children are of high quality. The chair of the Focus Group runs the Parent Forum. She ensures parents' views are considered by the Focus Group and, if necessary, by the partnership board. The result of this and such effective use of data is that services are closely tailored to users' needs.

Children enjoy taking part in imaginative learning activities, and make good progress. Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. The centre is aware that although outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage have risen, and the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is reducing, the gap is fluctuating and improvement is not consistent. Action has been taken to further promote children's achievement. Increasingly, children's learning needs are being assessed on an on-going basis and opportunities are created to effectively move their learning forward session-by-session. However, currently the centre is not tracking children's progress from established starting points. The highly successful transition programme between the centre and the co-located infant school and nursery enhances children's communication and personal development although this is not currently extended to other schools and local providers. Partnership work with a national organisation working with early years providers supports childminders in planning appropriate learning activities. The centre is aware that not all childminders are accessing these sessions.

A good number of parents regularly take up the training opportunities on offer, which are largely behaviour and parenting courses, family learning courses and those relating to the development of personal self-esteem. Some have gained nationally recognised accreditation at entry-level or level 1. One of the centre's identified areas for development is rightly to improve take-up of higher levels of training, to raise aspiration and to drive adult learning.

The centre's success is due to outstanding leadership and management, to the outstanding staff team and its team-working, and to outstanding partnership arrangements. The result is that the centre provides outstanding value for money. It seeks excellence in all areas, is swift to tackle any identified weakness and is committed to seeking further improvement to outcomes. Despite considerable challenges with staffing over the last year, it has continued to improve and develop well. This, together with highly effective evaluation, performance management and supervision means that the centre has outstanding capacity for improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve children's progress and raise their level of knowledge, skills and understanding consistently, by:
 - ensuring that staff plan to meet children's learning needs at the appropriate stage of development;
 - establishing a system to assess children's starting points and track their progress in all areas of learning;
 - further promoting the transition programme to other providers and schools;
 - working with all providers to promote learning activities that are of high quality.

- Increase families' economic well-being by working with parents to raise aspirations, and drive adult learning.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre's outstanding relationship with a wide range of partners is influential in enabling good outcomes for families in the area. The centre provides facilities, including crèche support and outreach workers to enable partners to work effectively to meet families' needs. Take-up rates are excellent, action taken is prompt and intervention well-timed. This close working means, for example, that breastfeeding initiation rates have increased, particularly in recent months and are good. To enhance the work of health visitors and volunteers from a national organisation supporting breastfeeding, the centre has supported the training of peer support volunteers, including one young parent, to help others sustain breastfeeding for longer. 'Family fit' courses are popular, combining exercise and cooking, and have contributed to families' understanding of healthy lifestyles. One parent, who attended the course a year ago, regularly uses the healthy pizza recipe she learnt on the course.

'Wiggles and Giggles', 'Mini Movers' and 'Brushing Buddies' promote not only outcomes relating to being healthy, but also children's communication and language skills. The centre's work to promote children's achievement has contributed to the rising outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. In 2008, 27.4% of children achieved at least 78 points in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with at least 6 points in each area of personal, social and emotional development and communication language and literacy, and by 2011, 46.6% had achieved this level.

Children's behaviour is good. Centre staff take every opportunity to develop parenting skills on an informal basis as well as through behaviour and parenting sessions. The centre is vigilant in ensuring the safety of users and staff, and gives outstanding support to parents in developing their understanding of how to ensure the safety of themselves and their families.

Everything the centre does promotes strong positive relationships. Time and again parents said it has given them a shared sense of community. Baby massage promotes parental and family bonding. Play activities enable parents and children to

play with and alongside each other in a harmonious setting. Strong involvement in decision-making empowers parents to challenge the work of the centre in a productive, evaluative fashion. Parents know that their concerns and suggestions will be listened to and acted on. Children also play their part in evaluating services with the help of 'Gilbert the Bear'.

Empowerment is at the heart of the work of the centre. One mother spoke of the invaluable help of centre staff in helping her to leave the house and finally to come on her own, as she knew that a friendly smile would welcome her at the door. This view was reflected by other parents and carers who showed time and again how much of a difference centre staff have made to users' lives, and how much it has helped them to improve their well-being.

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	1
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

Provision is wide ranging, well targeted and results in good outcomes for families. Staff draw on the full range of partners available to help their families. These include, for example, those partners relating to personal safety, counselling services for teenagers and an organisation which works with teenage parents. All avenues are explored to help overcome barriers and enable children and parents to succeed.

Adult learning is promoted well through family learning sessions in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Comments from parents, such as, 'I have learnt so much in the last 12 weeks and have enjoyed every minute' demonstrate the positive impact of these courses. Some parents have been trained as volunteers and have helped run sessions for example, 'Happy Times'.

An emphasis is placed on providing activities of good quality which promote purposeful learning across the range of outcomes. These create opportunities for parents to interact with their children and ideas for them to take away to use at

home. For example, parents asked for the words to the tooth-brushing song so that they could sing it at home. Parents undertaking the behaviour management course have homework activities to support their children's behaviour at home. This has a positive impact on both parents' confidence and on their children's behaviour. The centre is very attractive, well set out and well resourced. Staff are continually seeking to develop and improve their activities. The centre has established an outstanding level of care in all activities.

Up-to-date leaflets, sufficient in quantity to ensure parents are informed but not overwhelmed provide good guidance to users. Subjects include information about smoking cessation, support for domestic violence and contact numbers for sexual health advice. Parents with little or no English are signposted to a web-site where they can translate advice into their language. Parents on low incomes and experiencing difficulties are referred to the funding scheme for two-year-olds for free childcare. This enables potentially isolated children to take part in purposeful activities to promote learning and to socialise with their peers.

Multi-agency working, including the use of the Common Assessment Framework, ensures that the wide range of professionals work together with great effect to safeguard and protect children and families. Outreach working is outstanding and is pivotal in the support of, for example, children on the child protection register.

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?

1

The drive and commitment of the centre coordinator and staff, the excellent use of the data management system, and high expectations mean that the centre is bringing about significant change and improving the life chances of users. This vision and sense of purpose is shared by its partners, who are clear in their endorsement of the quality of the centre's provision. Partnerships are chosen carefully to meet identified needs. All partnership working is highly effective.

Staff know the centre's priorities due to the perceptive analysis of its current strengths and areas for development. Most notably, in the engagement with families and the community, the range of activities provided and the continual reflection on the quality and impact of activities. This results in good outcomes and outstanding value for money. The arrangements for governance and accountability are good; 4children provide outstanding strategic management. The Focus Group challenges

the centre in its work, and knows the strengths and areas for development. The group ensures that the centre is run effectively and that users have access to good services.

Inclusion of all children and families is central to the centre's work. The sense of community in the centre is tangible, with users, staff and partners. This is evidenced by the focus on working with those families most in need of support in order to improve the quality of their lives and the steady growth in the number of families who use the centre services consistently. The centre supports those adults and children with disabilities well through links with local organisations, including the local special school. There is a clear commitment to equality of opportunity.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. The centre knows that early intervention and support are key to improving life chances for children. Effective quality assurance systems, through case file audits and supervision, ensure that children, including those with disabilities, are well protected and families are receiving appropriate support. Staff training is thorough and up-to-date. Safe recruitment practices are robust.

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	1
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	1
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	1
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	1

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

Inspectors took account of the report for See Saw Day Nursery, which was inspected

in 2009 and judged to be good. In addition, the inspectors took account of the findings of the current inspection of John Bunyan Infant School and Nursery and the views of the headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage teachers. The school was judged to be good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the BRA5 Seesaw Children's Centre on 8–9 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

To help us make our judgements, we observed activities, looked at documentation and spoke with a large number of service providers, professionals, parents and carers. Thank you very much indeed to all of you who helped us to understand the good quality of services provided by staff.

The centre leader and her team value you and your families highly. They are always prepared to listen carefully to you and seek your thoughts about the activities they provide to make sure they meet your needs. Staff are particular about creating an attractive, welcoming environment where you not only feel at home but are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you feel valued by the centre and you trust staff, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly. You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents, carers and their children. Inspectors think that staff are vigilant in ensuring the health and safety of everyone who uses the centre.

The centre offers a wide range of services and activities for all families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. Centre staff do all they can to help you. They give excellent guidance and refer you and your children to other activities and services they think you would benefit from and enjoy. You told us that coming to the centre had increased your confidence and self-esteem. This is because centre staff and professionals from different agencies work so closely with you, and with each other, to find out exactly what help and support you and your families need and make sure this is provided. One of the centre's strengths of the centre is the outstanding care, guidance and support it provides for you, often in your own home.

The learning activities provided for your children by the centre are good. Children enjoy playing and learning and make good progress. We have asked the centre to make sure that it plans carefully to meet your children's needs and track the progress they make. In addition, we have asked the centre to work with all providers to make sure that the learning activities they provide are of high quality and they

encourage families to take part in the centre's programme to help your children get ready for school. To help you improve your economic well-being, we have asked the centre to help you to gain more qualifications and gain employment.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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