

# Inspection report for TEN1 Sydney House Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	384149
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 March 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Susan Smith HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Bob Jillins
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable.
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable.
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Little Pals Children's Centre Nursery (EY395827)

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's senior leadership team, joint partnership board, health professionals and partner agencies, a representative from the local authority, front-line staff and a group of centre users. Inspectors toured the centre's reach area, visited groups operating from Sydney House and at Hemmington House. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The Sydney House Children's Centre developed from a Sure Start local programme and was designated in September 2005. It reached full core offer in September 2009 and is a phase one children's centre. The main children's centre location is at Sydney House, Clacton-on-Sea which consists of a two storey purpose-built building. A satellite site operates from Hemmington House in Jaywick. Other sites within the reach area are used to deliver services. These include St Osyth Village Hall and Coppins Hall. Childcare is provided by Little Pals Children's Centre Nursery Limited, which is privately owned and opened in 2009.

The centre serves children and families in the Golf Green, Rush Green Park, St Osyth and Point Clear wards of Tendring. Most of the reach area falls within the 10% most disadvantaged communities nationally and includes Jaywick which is the most disadvantage area nationally.

There are 744 children aged under five years and their families living within the centres reach area. The centre serves a community that is mainly of White British heritage and experiences very high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The area is made up of social and private housing where 55% of households with dependent children are in receipt of workless benefits.

The area is characterised by low aspirations and educational attainment. Levels of unemployment are high among adults. On entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age.

The centre is currently governed by the Anglian Community Enterprise on behalf of the local authority but will be governed by Barnado's from 1st April 2012. The centre leader is the area manager for three children's centres in the Tendring district. The centre works in cooperation with all nine centres in Tendring to provide services that complement each other and to share resources and staff.

## 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

Sydney House Children's Centre is making a good contribution to improving outcomes for users, particularly those who are most vulnerable and in greatest need. The key to the success of this centre is the dedicated and motivated manager and staff team. They show high levels of commitment and work extremely well together in order to meet the needs of users. Through their diligent approach they have successfully gained the trust of an increasing number of families within a community that has historically, proven hard to reach and mistrustful of many agencies working in the area.

Procedures for safeguarding are comprehensive and robust. The centre is rightly recognised by users as a place of safety. Centre staff model positive behaviour and safe practice and help centre users to understand clearly how to keep children safe and protect them from dangers. Good partnerships with children's services and other agencies ensure children who may be at risk are monitored closely. Vulnerable families and those known to be facing crisis are extremely well supported. However, the relationship with housing is not yet as effective as with other agencies. Currently, the centre does receive notification from housing when new families with young children are moving into the area, so that they can offer support to them at the earliest opportunity.

Equality and diversity are promoted sensitively throughout all areas of centre provision. An effective, robust approach is taken towards ensuring the inclusion of all

centre users. The centre works tirelessly and successfully in helping to engage the majority of families within its area and identify their personal needs.

Families warmly appreciate the excellent quality care, guidance and support the centre provides and the difference it makes to their lives. Their positive comments strongly reflect this. 'I would not have my children if it was not for Sure Start' and 'Staff are so approachable, like a family and you can talk to them about anything.' are typical examples. This is because staff develop exceptionally warm and trusting relationships with parents who are confident to approach staff and talk freely about any problems or issues they face.

Children and families make good improvements in all outcomes, often while facing the most challenging of personal circumstances. Staff are very skilled in helping users to gain an understanding of their problems and themselves. Users are encouraged to take courses in parenting and progress onto other courses. This sometimes leads to roles as volunteers and paid employees. However, the centre does not currently place a sufficient focus on celebrating achievement and success to further raise aspirations of families and children in the area.

Governance is good, and clear lines of accountability have been established. Staff display a strong sense of teamwork. They are highly self-motivated, resourceful and enthusiastic about providing the best possible levels of service and care for users. The whole staff and leadership team are self-critical and constantly search for ways to do things better. This has led to an initiative described as 'Bridging The Engagement Gap' (BEG) which entitles scrupulous assessment and analysis of data to identify why families might not be engaging with the centre's services. The resulting well targeted action plan outlines ambitious targets to obtain even better outcomes, especially for those groups who are proving the hardest to reach. This model has been recognised as a good practice tool and as a result other centres within the Tendring area have adopted this approach.

The centre's recent progress and the energy with which weaknesses are currently being tackled are indicative of its good capacity to sustain improvements.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Strengthen the working partnership with housing to ensure information is shared to enable the centre to provide timely support to new families being housed in the area with children under the age of five.
- Develop more opportunities to celebrate personal development and achievement to further raise aspirations and expectations of children and their families.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2

There is good partnership working with health professionals to deliver a good range of universal and targeted services within the centre premises. Attendance at the baby clinic is high and baby massage is very popular and helps mothers bond with their babies. The 'First Time Parent Group' offers effective support and advice to new parents and reduces the feeling of isolation. The centre actively promotes healthy eating by offering healthy snacks to children, parents. New initiative such as 'Make and Bake' offer small groups of parents the opportunity to enjoy cooking healthy receipts with their children. Parents confirm that they gain the confidence to cook healthy at home. However, these efforts are yet to be reflected in a significant reduction in levels of childhood obesity.

Analysis of data indicates the centre is starting to have an impact on increasing the number of new mothers starting breastfeeding. However, levels are still well below the national average. Parental feedback indicates the positive impact of speech and language support on children's learning and development. However, direct access to speech and language therapist for parents has reduced due to a reduction in the availability of a therapist to attend activities held at the centre.

All staff are attentive and friendly; consequently, children and families feel very safe when accessing services. Effective safeguarding arrangements mean that vulnerable children and their families are protected. Children subject to a child protection plan, looked after children and those involved in the Common Assessment Framework are supported well. As a result of good targeted support and early intervention, a few children have been stepped down from child protection to children in need, and some have been successfully removed from children in need status.

Parents who access the centre's activities say it helps them to establish lasting friendships and to feel increasingly confident in their ability to cope with the challenges they face. Staff are excellent role models and promote positive relationships amongst all who visit the centre. Trusting and confident relationships are well developed between the staff, parents and carers enabling full and frank discussions to be shared. As a result, those facing challenging circumstances in their lives make good progress in their parenting skills through courses and individual support. Parents confirm that the support they receive from staff has a very positive impact on helping them to effectively manage their children's behaviour.

Staff have introduced several opportunities for families to learn together about the outdoor environment through the introduction of 'forest school' activities. The newly designed outside area at Hemmington House has resulted in increasing numbers of parents enjoy playing with their children outdoors. They actively explore the 'bug hotel', and look for bugs in the willow wigwam. Parents continue these activities with their children at home and are proud to share their experiences with staff. For example, a parent proudly informed other parents and staff how on his exploration with his son they found a centipede. Children have good opportunities to practice their communication and problem solving skills, for example when they negotiate the best way to get down the mound. These strengths, together with close liaison with

childminders and preschool settings, help children to achieve well.

Training and adult learning help to increase parents' readiness for work. Support for accessing benefits ensures improved economic well-being for families. Arrangements for parents to contribute to decision making and influence the development of the centre are good. In discussion, parents said they feel their views are valued. Good opportunities are given to parents to volunteer their services and to contribute to the governance of the centre. Two volunteers run the 'Cheeky Monkeys' group which has recently achieving the Bronze Award toward the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA) 'Good Practice Checklist' and a parent representative attends the locality group.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

The centre uses its knowledge of the reach area well to assess the needs of the most vulnerable families and to target services with precision. Activities such as one-to-one support and targeted group sessions for a variety of specific, often hard to reach groups, are successfully building understanding and confidence, removing barriers to learning and progress. Long-term friendships often begin at these groups and long-lasting relationships develop with family support staff, based on mutual trust and respect.

The centre's work benefits from close working with health visitors who help to promote the centre's services to new parents. Services are well supplemented by services offered at other centres within the Tendring area. These are planned to complement one another and enable wider choice for families both in terms of activities but also in terms of timings.

Staff have successfully raised the aspirations of some families within the reach area. Through their engagement in services, families recognise that they can improve

outcomes and are becoming increasingly engaged in doing so. The centre promotes purposeful learning well. Families are developing basic skills as staff work in partnership with adult education to provide courses which develop literacy and numeracy. Although staff regularly celebrate the success of families on a one-to-one basis the centre as a whole does not have a system in place to commemorate achievements to further raise aspirations.

Families have easy access to extremely good-quality advice and guidance. Staff are very knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of when to signpost parents onto other agencies, and do so effectively. In addition, a very good range of information is available on notice boards and through leaflets on display throughout the centre. Staff take a sensitive approach to the provision of information of a confidential nature. For example, information regarding domestic violence and sexual health is provided within toilet cubicles where it can be accessed by individuals without being observed.

The 'Parent Voice Group' (PVG) provides a range of activities such as trips to local attractions which enhances the provision provided by the centre and is greatly appreciated and valued by the centre users. It allows families to have a day out together they would otherwise not be able to afford.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

The centre is managed by a cohesive management team that shares a common vision for the centre, and has high expectations and a drive to succeed. Staff morale is high and all are committed to providing children and their families with services of a good quality. Centre staff systematically evaluate the effectiveness of each of their programmes. They take good account of users' views in order to adapt services. The ethos of self-evaluation and reflective practice is used exceptionally well to set meaningful targets and increasingly to measure impact. Such as, through the 'BEG' initiative.

Centre staff are well qualified and trained and their expertise is used well to improve outcomes. They are effective at targeting their service delivery based upon users' starting points. For example, they work on building users' self-confidence before supporting them to improve their basic skills and /or attend training to improve employability.



Governance arrangements are good. The partnership board oversees all nine children's centres in the Tendring area and provides a good strategic steer. A locality board provides more local oversight of initiatives and projects. There are effective two-way communication links between the 'PVG' and the locality board. Hence, decisions taken by the partnership board are well informed by users' views.

Rigorous checks ensure that all who work or volunteer in the centre are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are good. All partners spoken to praise centre staff and share their vision of providing the very best they can for families' needs. Staff are well trained with regard to safeguarding, and all place a high priority on ensuring confidentiality. The accommodation, inside and out, is well maintained, and staff conduct regular checks to assess safety.

Volunteer parents develop their self-belief and skills which enable them to run groups and activities successfully within the centre. Staff and resources are deployed well across the three centres in the cluster to ensure the centre provides good value for money. Good value is also achieved by a sharing of resources with other children's centres throughout the Tendring area.

The engagement of users is good. There is a range of opportunities for centre users to share their views, contribute ideas and help shape future provision. Consequently, the centre is highly regarded by the local community. The centre is fully committed to supporting equality and diversity across its area and wider community. It has an inclusive approach towards all services in order to eliminate any discrimination. Access to facilities such as a cooker, dining room, a washing machine and tumble dryer are available at the centre for families to use. This enables families living in the very poor housing conditions, the space and facilities to be able to prepare and cook their own lunch and to wash and dry their clothes. Designated provision is offered to disabled children and disabled parents and this ensures these families receive specialist support. The centre has been very successful in engaging with grandparents who are caring for young children.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

Findings from the most recent inspection reports of the Little Pals Children's Centre Nursery contributed to this inspection's judgements.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the TEN1 Sydney House Children's Centre on 14–15 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to talk to us about your involvement and experiences at the centre. It was very enjoyable to meet with you and your families. You made it very clear to us how much you appreciate the children's centre and the support you receive from staff. Many of you told us the positive impact the centre has had on your lives, particularly when you may be experiencing difficulties. We found the staff are extremely caring towards you and provide you with the relevant guidance you need. Procedures for keeping children and families safe are good. Staff are dedicated to providing a secure environment and they work closely with other agencies to obtain the specialist support you need.

The provision for helping you and your families develop healthy lifestyles is good. The links with health professionals are good within the centre. This enables you to regularly seek advice from health visitors which supports the healthy development of you and your children. The centre is a very happy and well-resourced place. Many of you told us how much you and your children enjoy attending groups and developing new skills. You particularly enjoy using the new outdoor area at Hemmington House.

We noted how well planned the activities are and how they help you to understand how your children learn and develop. We noted that many of you develop your confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being. This leads to some of you

beginning to undertake formal training, qualifications and be successful in returning to work. A few of you have become volunteer parents and develop new skills. Although the centre staff acknowledge your achievements on a personal level we have asked the centre to develop more opportunities to celebrate personal development and achievement to further raise aspirations and expectations of children and families.

You warmly appreciate the excellent quality care, guidance and support the centre provides and the difference it makes to your lives. Your positive comments strongly reflect this. 'I would not have my children if it was not for Sure Start' and 'Staff are so approachable, like a family and you can talk to them about anything.' are typical examples. This is because staff develop exceptionally warm and trusting relationships with you and you are confident to approach them and talk freely about any problems or issues you face.

We recognise how well the centre is managed. They are good at taking account of your view in order to adapt services. They strive to constantly improve what they are offering to you and initiate new ways of working, such as introducing the 'Bridging the Engagement Gap' initiative. This has been recognised as a good model for analysing performance and planning meaningful action to engage more of you in the centres services and activities.

All staff work together very well and share a commitment towards meeting your needs and providing the relevant support. The centre is becoming an important part of the local community. It works well with other agencies in the area to provide services and signpost you to other professionals who are best placed to support you. In order to develop further, we have asked the centre to strengthen the working partnership with housing so that the centre receives information on new families being housed in the area with children under the age of five at the earliest opportunity so that support can be made available immediately to these families.

We recognise how inclusive the centre is and staff ensure all families are welcome. The centre has been especially successful in reaching grandparents who find themselves caring for young children.

We enjoyed our time at your centre. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).