

Inspection report for Comet Nursery School and Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Hackney
Inspection number	383343
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2012
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Centre leader	Lisa Clarke
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Comet Nursery 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.

An inspection of the maintained 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: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The inspectors held meetings with several parents, the headteacher/centre manager, the community services manager, governors, front line staff including a midwife, a clinical psychologist, the Multi Agency Team (MAT) chair, a health visitor, a speech and language therapist, and the childminding coordinator. They also met with representatives of The Learning Trust including the Head of Early Years and Strategic Lead for Children's Centres in Hackney.

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

Information about the centre

Comet Nursery School and Children's Centre, a phase two centre, was designated in 2008 and began delivering the full core offer of services in 2009. It operates as a satellite centre of Sebright Children's Centre which provides the strategic oversight of a cluster (Cluster E), which also includes Mink Kardes Children's Centre.

The centre is managed by the headteacher of the Nursery school who is supported by a community services manager who oversees the day-to-day delivery of services. The governing body of the school is responsible for the centre through a service level agreement from the Learning Trust. Services are planned jointly within the cluster.

The centre's reach area, in the south west of the London Borough of Hackney, covers the wards of Dalston, De Beauvoir, Hoxton and Haggerston. Within this area, the centre's designated reach includes four super output areas (SOAs) which are all

within the top 10% most deprived in the country. One SOA is in the top 1% most deprived nationally.

Ward profile data for De Beauvoir, which is the 348th most deprived ward in England, are typical of the other wards in the centre's reach area. This profile shows that 64% of families are White, including 49% White British, 24% are Black, 5% South Asian and 3% are of mixed ethnicity. Welfare benefits data from 2010 show that 6% of families are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. Sixty-nine per cent of families live in rented accommodation. Children's levels on entry to early years provision 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

Comet Children's Centre, most ably described by those who currently use its services as 'very welcoming from the moment you come in' and 'enriching, giving you more in life' is making a positive difference to families in Hackney. The leaders and managers, front line and support staff are passionate, ambitious and driven to ensure that this centre has the greatest impact on those families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. Together they have made considerable progress in establishing Comet Children's Centre at the heart of the community and know what they need to do next to reach out to the small minority of families that are not currently accessing services. They are currently limited by the quality and analysis of some of the data made available to them by the Learning Trust and Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. The centre's leaders, and the Learning Trust, are acutely aware of this area for development and the need to assess the medium-term impact of the services that they deliver.

Since Comet Children's Centre began delivering services in 2009 it has significantly increased its reach, including to those families in target groups, and exceeded the reach target set by the Learning Trust. In 2011/12, for example, the three children's centres in the cluster increased their reach to disabled children and those who have special educational needs from 51 to 76 children. However, a more detailed analysis of reach shows some variation, and in the top 1% most deprived SOA, 44% of

families currently access services at any centre in the cluster compared to 81% in the least deprived SOA. White British families are underrepresented. Participation rates are high, with many sessions oversubscribed.

Care, guidance and support provided by the centre effectively support families to address a wide range of issues. For example, between September and December 2011, families sought help with childcare, housing, parenting, home safety, employment, benefits and bereavement from the Family Support Surgery. Case studies and case files demonstrate the impact of highly targeted support to some of the most vulnerable families, through the use of the Common Assessment Framework and the exemplary MAT approach. Health visitors and a wide range of other professionals refer families to the MAT at the earliest opportunity and as soon as they identify any additional unmet needs. Partnerships are strong, for example with children's social care, and social workers refer families to the children's centre as part of the 'step down' process so that families continue to receive support for as long as they require it.

Health outcomes for those families accessing the children's centre are improving and the centre has significantly increased the range of healthy living activities that it delivers in response to an accurate evaluation of locality health data. However, obesity rates in the reach area are significantly higher than the national average and increasing. In De Beauvoir ward, 36% of children were overweight or obese in 2009/10, 3% more than in 2006/07. Families are very ably supported to improve their emotional and mental health through highly targeted support. This includes a weekly respite crèche, to which families are referred. Parents' views of this are extremely positive: '... a very helpful service that has supported me through ongoing difficult times'.

The Learning Trust's annual performance conversation, which took place in December 2011, correctly identified five priorities including developing outreach services and improving obesity rates. The centre's self-evaluation form is largely descriptive and has limited data to assess impact. However, leaders and managers do analyse some of the data that are available to them and have used this information with success to target services, improve outcomes, and also to demonstrate the impact of some services. Capacity for sustained improvement is therefore good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The Learning Trust and Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust should support leaders and managers further by providing outcome data to reach level, and support them to analyse this data effectively, so that the centre:
 - increases its outreach to the minority of families who are not currently accessing services, particularly White British families and those who live in the 1% most deprived SOA

- effectively tracks its impact on improving outcomes, particularly in health and social well-being, and breaks these data down by target group and ethnicity so that services can be more effectively targeted
 - implements effective outcome tracking processes to assess the medium-term impact of services.
- Reduce obesity rates of children in the reach area by working closely with partners to deliver targeted health interventions to families.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families say that they feel very safe at the centre and that it has helped them to keep their children safe. In 2010/11, 43 parents accessed first-aid and baby resuscitation courses, and health visitors, who had identified potential risks to children during their home visits, referred 55 families to the accident prevention scheme. The percentage of children subject to a child protection plan who live in the cluster reduced between 2010/11 and 2011/12 from 20% to 15% of the Hackney Borough total.

Health outcomes are satisfactory overall, despite the high obesity rates of children in Reception class in the reach area. The 'Food and Family' sessions are oversubscribed and the centre now carefully manages who can attend these activities. In 2010/11, 211 families accessed these courses and parents are positive about the impact: 'My daughter tries new foods. I now cook different foods at home and this has made a lot of difference.' Some parents explained to inspectors that they had told centre staff that they did not make healthy breakfasts at home and the centre responded with activities to promote healthy breakfast ideas from around the world. For example, parents were taught how to make Huevos rancheros, a Mexican breakfast of tomato and vegetable salsa with eggs. In 'Food and Family' parents make a wide range of healthy food with their children including Jamaican muffins and yam fritters. The latest data available to the centre, from 2011, show that the percentage of mothers living in Cluster E and breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is broadly in line with the national average at 46%.

The percentage of children achieving at least 78 points across all 13 Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales with at least six points or more in each of the Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Communication, Language and Literacy scales has increased in the reach area. In 2008/09 this was 32% rising to 56% in 2010/11, slightly lower than the national average. The achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest in the reach area has increased over the same period from 35% to 37%. However, the centre is helping children to achieve well. Data for the first cohort of children, who have been tracked by the centre and completed the Early Years Foundation Stage, shows that 71% of them achieved at least 78 points. The concurrent inspection of the Nursery school judged that the school was closing the achievement gap so that all groups of children were doing well.

Support to help parents develop their parenting skills is effective. Over 150 parents

attended the 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' programme across the cluster in 2010/11. The impact of these programmes is clearly evident by parents' comments which include, 'I believe I have become a better parent due to this course' and 'This course helped me to understand parenting and the importance of praising my child.'

Data provided by the centre show that 532 parents accessed employment related services in 2010/11. However, these data are not sufficiently analysed to show whether any parents have successfully gained employment or whether they continue into further education after attending English for Speakers of Other Languages courses (ESOL) for example. Economic and social well-being is improving in the reach area, with the number of children under five living in workless households falling from 180 in 2010/11 to 156 in 2011/12.

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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has successfully engaged families from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds including Turkish families. The centre routinely records total numbers of children and parents accessing services by target group and ethnicity and over the last three years all target groups have shown a significant increase. However, it does not always compare these data to local population information to accurately track how effectively it is engaging all of its target groups. Detailed analysis of reach by ethnicity shows that 18% of White British families access children's centres services, and this group is therefore underrepresented as the local population of these families is higher than this.

When parents access literacy and numeracy courses at the centre they complete individual learning plans which clearly set out long-term goals and which are supported by diagnostic and screening assessments undertaken by staff. Goals set by

parents include, for example, '... to independently write a report so that I can use it in work'. These records demonstrate the positive impact the centre is having on improving adults' basic skills. The 'My Journey' records engage parents in capturing the development of their children and are well received by parents and children alike.

Children are well supported to make the transition from the children's centre to the Nursery school, which is across the shared hallway. Many activities are coordinated between the school and the children's centre, for example, book week or sport relief. The transition to nursery programme is well regarded by parents, who say, 'I have a great feeling about leaving my child in Nursery' and 'I know that my child is going to enjoy and learn at the same time.'

Starbright, a service for vulnerable pregnant women with children under five years of age, is well attended and makes a remarkable difference to these families. Staff are trained to test for drugs in these sessions which helps to ensure that children are safe. Parents speak very highly of this support. One parent said, 'Starbright saved my life.' This service, the respite crèche and the MAT approach exemplify the good care, guidance and support provided by the centre and its partners and the excellent safeguarding arrangements in place and used.

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

Between 2010/11 and 2011/12 the number of children who were subject to Common Assessment Framework processes has risen slightly and these families are referred to the Hackney MAT meetings, which are highly effective at delivering coordinated early intervention to families. This, together with the support provided for families who have experienced domestic violence and those who suffer from mental health issues or drug abuse, demonstrates that the quality of safeguarding provided is of the highest quality. The centre's approach is underpinned by robust policies, systems and processes for safeguarding children including those for safe recruitment of staff. All staff are appropriately trained, including support staff.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Of those children who access the centre, the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% and their peers at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has narrowed. The centre has also successfully increased the number of disabled children and those who have special

educational needs who access the centre's activities. However, as the centre has not been provided with population data for the reach area it has not been able to effectively analyse its actual reach and compare this to the local population. It is for this reason that the centre has not identified and targeted the White British community as an underrepresented group. Despite this, it has effectively engaged all other target groups, and families from a wide range of backgrounds get on exceptionally well together and their diversity is celebrated at the centre, for example, through the wide range of different foods cooked at 'Food and Family'.

Regular supervision of staff takes place and staff feel well supported. Partnerships are strong, as shown through the MAT approach, but partners are not fully involved in the planning or evaluation of services or for example in the development of the self-evaluation or development plan. Strong partnership-working with health colleagues has enabled the centre to access an additional £25,000 to deliver services focused on reducing obesity, including provision for Turkish families who have been identified as requiring targeted support. As a member of health staff said, 'This centre makes me feel very welcome when I work here' and 'It's a very friendly environment.'

Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has recently begun to provide data on accident and emergency admissions of children. It is too early for the centre to analyse this information in any meaningful way. However, the continued provision of this information is crucial to ensuring that the centre can target services further and help to keep children safe.

Some parents are engaged in the governance of the centre and all are invited, on a quarterly basis, to evaluate provision. Those that are involved make a positive contribution. As one said, 'I feel like I have a lot of control.' However, the centre has correctly identified that more parents could be involved in the running of the centre, through volunteering for example. Children behave well in all activities and positive behaviour is encouraged in the centre and co-located Nursery school.

Value for money is good overall and, under the leadership of the headteacher and community services manager, the centre demonstrates good capacity for sustained improvement. Governance is effective overall, and with better quality data analysis and support from the Learning Trust this centre will be more able to target its provision further to those families whose circumstance make them more vulnerable.

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	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target	2

groups	
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	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

The inspection report of the concurrent inspection of the co-located Nursery school, which was judged outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Comet Nursery School and Children's Centre on 22–23 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for sharing your stories of how the centre has so ably supported you.

As some of you told us, Comet Children's Centre is: 'very welcoming from the moment you come in' and 'enriching, giving you more in life'. We agreed that the centre is making a positive difference to many families living in the local area. The centre is particularly effective at providing excellent support to ensure that you and your children are safe and we therefore judged safeguarding as outstanding.

We enjoyed attending many of the activities, including 'Food and Family.' It was so positive to see so many of you cooking healthy food with your children and it did make us smile when we saw children wearing their mini-chef's hats.

The leaders and managers, front line and support staff are passionate, ambitious and driven to ensure that this centre has the greatest impact on those families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. This is evident from the way in which the

reception staff and site manager welcome you and your children on site each day to the quality of activities and support provided.

The centre staff have made considerable progress in establishing Comet Children's Centre at the heart of the community and know what they need to do next to reach out to the small minority of families that are not currently accessing services. They are currently limited by the quality and analysis of some of the data made available to them by the Learning Trust and Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. We have therefore asked these organisations to help the centre improve further.

Since Comet Children's Centre began delivering services in 2009 it has significantly increased its reach to families. We judged that the care, guidance and support provided by the centre effectively supports families to address a wide range of issues. For example many of you have sought help with childcare, housing, parenting, home safety, employment, benefits and bereavement from the Family Support Surgery.

Health outcomes for those families accessing the children's centre, although satisfactory, are improving and the centre has significantly increased the range of healthy living activities that it delivers in response to an accurate evaluation of locality health data. However, obesity rates in the reach area are significantly higher than the national average and increasing and we have asked the centre to do even more to halt and reverse this trend.

We have judged that the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement as it has effectively improved outcomes for you and your children and know what it needs to do next to continue to improve.

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