

Inspection report for Sydenham Children's Centre

Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	366431
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2011
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Centre governance	Warwickshire
Centre leader	Joanne Sabin
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Sydenham Primary School 130868
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Purple Play House 200785

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.

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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of the children's centre, programme manager, the group manager, the headteacher of Sydenham Primary School, the manager of the childcare setting known as Purple Play House, two health visitors, a speech and language therapist, the play development worker, two groups of parents and carers, a volunteer, the Chair of the Strategic Board and a representative of the local authority. The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Sydenham Children's Centre is situated in an area of significant disadvantage. The area around the centre has high levels of unemployment, families receiving benefits and workless households. Much of the area immediately around the centre is characterised by terraced housing, low-rise flats and maisonettes. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills that are significantly lower than those expected for their age. The majority of families who live in the surrounding area are from White British backgrounds. A minority of families are from Asian and African, or from Western and Eastern European groups. A significant proportion do not speak English as their first language. The reach area covers rural and urban areas, bringing a diverse range of families to the centre. The building was completed in 2007, when it was designated as a children's centre. Since then, staff have worked hard to operate as an integrated centre and, in partnership with the Purple Play House, it provides the full core offer including early education and childcare. The centre operates in one main building and other activities take place at various community venues within the reach area. It is led by the head of centre supported by the

programme manager. The advisory board is comprised of representatives from the local authority, local councillors, health providers, centre's staff, parents and a number of neighbourhood partners, including primary schools.

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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

Sydenham Children's Centre gives children and families a good level of support. Provision is effective and so outcomes for adult and young users are good. Outstanding leadership from the head of centre means that everyone is made to feel welcome even before they set foot in the building. One parent said that, 'staff are very helpful.' All parents spoken to felt they and their children are safe at the centre. This is because the leadership gives safeguarding such a high level of importance. The well-being of children and parents is promoted thoughtfully due to the fact that staff assess users' needs carefully. Healthy lifestyles are developed well through many activities at the centre. For example, physical education sessions are organised so that parents can try different approaches to exercise, such as yoga.

The secret to the centre's success is the outstanding quality of care and guidance it provides for families. This means that users feel their personal needs are extremely well supported. One parent summed up their thoughts when they said, 'I do not know what I would do if the centre was not here.' Staff work diligently to create productive relationships with children, parents and carers. The centre organises highly valued sessions which allow parents to develop strong bonds with their children, such as through baby massage courses. A significant number of users have attended parenting classes which successfully enabled them to develop their skills in managing their children's behaviour and sleep patterns. Case study evidence demonstrates that the centre supports families going through very difficult times astutely. Other agencies, such as health visitors, are worked with effectively and so referrals are made efficiently due to perceptive evaluations by centre staff.

The development of children's speech and language skills is a high priority for the centre. It works thoughtfully with a speech and language therapist to ensure that any weaknesses in children's language development are picked up quickly. Regular

'Chatter Matters' sessions promote children's communication skills well because centre staff are well trained in how to support this aspect of learning. Children who regularly attend the centre make good progress in all areas of learning. Results from 2010 assessments for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in the local area show that the proportion attaining average levels of skill improved considerably last year. Also, the gap between those children who live in challenging circumstances and others is reducing well. The centre staff carefully assess children and organise activities which take their interests into account. A recent project involved children in using natural materials to create imaginative structures in the outdoors. Occasionally, records do not set out what children's starting points are and so regular assessments are not always used to track their progress in detail.

The centre reflects carefully on ways to improve its provision and it uses self-evaluation well because leadership and governance are good. Recent improvements include successful engagement with some families in the area who did not find it easy to start coming to the centre. The local community is worked with effectively through events including an Easter egg hunt and a Christmas grotto. The centre is always looking for ways to enhance its work. It understands its strengths and areas for development well and so it has a good capacity to improve in the future. Development planning sets targets but a few are not specific enough and so it is hard for leaders to measure their success in detail. The system to collect information about how many adult users are successful in gaining extra qualification is not fully established. This means that the centre is not consistently gathering data about all aspects of its work. The centre meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and diversity effectively. Users from all backgrounds regularly attend sessions at the centre. Families from Asian backgrounds particularly appreciate the sessions especially planned for them to meet together.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that targets for improvement are more specific so that developments at the centre each year can be measured easily.
- Improve records to monitor how effectively parents and carers develop their basic skills and gain further qualifications.
- Develop a system to record children's progress who attend the centre so that initial and regular assessments can be used rigorously to evaluate their achievements.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Children's fitness levels are promoted well at the centre through the creative use of the outside areas. They eat fruit and vegetables regularly because snack time is used effectively to develop healthy lifestyles. Immunisation rates for children are above average as a result of good support from centre staff. Through the 'Food Co-op' users can purchase a wide variety of fresh produce each week at a subsidised price. Recipes are provided which successfully encourage them to use these fruits and

vegetables imaginatively in their cooking.

Security is good and so children and adult users feel safe in all parts of the centre. Users understand everyday dangers well. For instance, they know that getting too much sun is bad for you because of good use of information and staff's awareness. Users have methodically developed their understanding of how to keep their family safe through first aid training offered through the centre. Good liaison between agencies means users' safety is well supported. For instance, they are given effective support on how to make their home safe from fire because of good links with the fire service. External agencies report that the centre uses the Common Assessment Framework rigorously. Evidence from case studies indicates that vulnerable or looked-after children and their families are supported extremely well as a result of the centre's work.

Children develop writing and painting skills well because of the good use of resources. Children's speech and language skills are promoted successfully because of rigorous use of open-ended questioning by staff. They develop their information and communication technology skills effectively. For instance, children learn to use a camera successfully when they photograph their favourite thing in the centre. Children develop social skills constructively due to good levels of care from staff. Occasionally, planning for sessions does not fully use the national guidance on developmental stages to formulate specific learning objectives for children. This means that not all staff are clear about what the learning focus is for a key activity. Children are prepared for school effectively and their transfer to the next stage of education is well thought out.

Users freely share their concerns because staff develop strong relationships with them. Children behave well and handle equipment carefully due to astute management by staff and parents. Users respect others in the centre and get on well as a result of leaders working effectively to include everyone whatever their background. All parts of the reach area are worked with well, including minority ethnic groups. Users contribute their views successfully and so crèche's are set up regularly to allow users to attend some sessions without their children. A few parents regularly attend 'Steering Group' meetings where key centre decisions are discussed.

Children and parents develop knowledge successfully which promotes their economic stability. They make good progress in all areas of learning because of well organised sessions by staff. For example, they learn to play musical instruments and move to music because of good use of specialist support. Children and adult users make really effective progress in their personal development. Many parents reported increased levels of confidence since they started coming to the centre. A parent has started a university course due to staff significantly raising their self-esteem. Parents receive a wide variety of information about childcare in the area so that they can return to work. Good financial advice is given to them. This means that they have accessed extra benefits to which they are entitled.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

Children's speech and language needs are assessed astutely as a result of highly trained staff. Early identification of children who may need additional assistance to learn to communicate successfully is a key part of the centre's work. The speech therapist offers thoughtfully organised, weekly drop-in sessions when parents can gain extra advice on how to promote their children's speech. Some children who have attended speech sessions have improved significantly and no longer require any extra support. The centre understands its adult users' needs well because assessment is used methodically by staff. The times when sessions take place have been moved because of the centre's shrewd assessment. For instance, of how difficult some new mums can find it to get out early in the morning. However, systems do not always record children's progress in key areas of learning effectively.

Adult users' successes are celebrated thoughtfully through annual achievement ceremonies. Some users gain childcare work experience because of careful support from the centre. Children's achievements are celebrated enthusiastically by the centre through wonderful displays. For example, there are many beautiful displays of children's artwork which show that staff value their early painting skills. Children and adult users are keen to come to the centre and settle quickly to sessions. Users really value the stay-and-play sessions, especially ones which include messyplay activities that promote children's creative development.

The centre provides a good range of services and activities and meets its users' needs well. It is effective in engaging with the hard to reach groups. Outreach sessions held in different community venues are regularly attended and appreciated by users. Saturday morning activity sessions are popular and enable the centre to make successful contact with working parents and fathers. Trips away from the immediate locality are highly valued by users. For example, parents said they had really enjoyed the trip to Stratford where they explored a butterfly farm with their children. A pantomime, which was performed at the centre, allowed users to

effectively develop their children's understanding of the theatre and fairy tales, such as Jack and the Beanstalk.

Parents who spoke to the inspectors were particularly positive about the support they receive from centre staff. One parent said, 'It's always friendly and welcoming.' Children's weight is watched carefully as a result of the way staff run weekly clinics at the centre. Users are encouraged to add solids to babies' diets because weaning sessions are used extremely effectively to guide parents. Families in crisis are cared for exceptionally well and so challenges in users' personal lives are supported thoughtfully. Individual families enjoy highly personalised guidance due to extremely good levels of engagement from staff. The needs of families in the reach area are met very effectively. For example, teenage parents are supported really well due to thoughtful use of outreach sessions.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

One parent summed up their thoughts when they said, 'It is well run and organised.' Governance arrangements are good, and leaders know what they are accountable for. Members of the advisory board are committed to improving outcomes for children and their families in the local area. Effective team work and management by the head of the centre and the programme manager ensure that staff and volunteers' morale is high. All partners understand their roles successfully. Users' views are regularly sought and significantly influence services provided by the centre. The head of centre has developed careful systems and procedures to ensure that provision is successfully integrated and so funding for three- and four-year-olds is accessed wisely via partnerships with Purple Play House. All relevant partners are thoroughly involved in the drive for improvement because of the high expectations of senior leaders. Improvement planning is secure but the five key targets for development are not always recorded appropriately to help leaders measure success. Systems are not effectively in place to gather all the evidence about qualifications attained by parents and carers. This means that the centre does not always gather evidence fully to show what impact it has on users.

Resources are managed well and are carefully targeted towards users with the greatest needs. The accommodation for the Early Years Foundation Stage is of good quality and includes good outdoor areas. The centre is well maintained and health and safety issues are quickly dealt with. It keeps detailed records about staff which contain valuable information on, for example, their qualifications and references from previous employers. Records indicate that all staff working at the centre have been subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

Partnership working is a significant strength of the centre's work. The staff are proactive in sharing information. Inter-agency working is really thriving and it carefully identifies those families and children who are at significant risk. Protocols and practices for referrals are used carefully by staff. The centre's child protection policy and guidelines are robust. However, one user is not clear about who to contact if they have a concern about the head of the centre. This is because notice boards are not always used totally effectively to share basic safeguarding routines with everyone. All staff have been fully trained at the appropriate level in child protection procedures. Risk assessments are created effectively for inside and outside activities.

The centre meets all the requirements with regard to promoting equality and diversity and tackling discrimination. Staff are enthusiastic about promoting the inclusion of all families from the surrounding areas and the wider community. The centre is beginning to gather valuable information about the different user groups and astutely evaluates their engagement. The centre effectively develops children's and parents' awareness of multi-cultural society. Users learn willingly about different faiths and cultures by studying festivals such as Diwali where they explore stories about Rama and Sita. Children and adult users with disabilities are well provided for, both in the physical accessibility of the building and by access to appropriate professional support. As a result of effective management and outcomes for users, value for money is good.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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 inspectors took into account the inspection findings for linked provisions which took place at the same time as the children's centre inspection. The Purple Play House 200785 inspection judged provision and outcome for children as good. The Sydenham Primary School inspection judged its overall effectiveness as outstanding.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sydenham Children's Centre on 19–20 January 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for helping us to find out about your children's centre. We enjoyed having the opportunity of talking to some of you. Your children make good progress in their learning and behave well at the centre. Children achieve effectively in language development because, for example, 'Chatter Matters' sessions are led well by trained staff and supported by a speech and language therapist. The centre helps to prepare your children successfully for the next stage of education. You and your children are encouraged effectively to keep yourselves and your families safe whether you are at home or out and about.

You told us that you and your children really value the centre and the support it provides. We heard that you like trips out together where you can explore new places like a butterfly farm. You appreciate sessions where your children can explore

a wide variety of materials, such as messy play sessions where your children can enjoy being creative in an effectively organised place.

Through the good work that the staff do, you and your children are guided extremely well. This means that you learn about successful ways to support your families. Several of you told us how very well staff care for you, and you really value the thoughtful way they listen to you. The staff work closely with other agencies to make sure that you are put in touch with others who can give you the best help and support. You said you like the 'Jo Jingles' music sessions where your children learn to play musical instruments and move to music.

The centre welcomes people from all backgrounds and treats everyone equally and fairly. The head of the centre has extremely good ideas about ways to improve the centre. Staff listen to your evaluations of sessions carefully. The centre responds well to your requests and has given you access to extra sessions at times which suit you best.

We have asked the head of the centre and senior staff to look at how they can make things even better. The most important things are to:

- create targets for improvement which are more specific so that success can be celebrated with you more clearly
- make sure more information is collected about the extra qualifications you successfully gain
- ensure staff record your child's progress in key areas of learning even more carefully.

It was a real pleasure to meet you and your children. I hope you continue to flourish and enjoy your time at the Sydenham Children's Centre.

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