

Inspection report for Blenheim Children and Family Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Bromley
Inspection number	362447
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Marion Wallace

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Victoria Sweeting
Date of previous inspection	21 May 2008
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Linked school if applicable	Blenheim Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Blenheim Nursery

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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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of the children and family centre services, the area managers, centre leader, representatives of the local authority, parents, teachers and other staff, health workers, family support and parenting workers and early years managers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Blenheim Children and Family Centre shares a site with Blenheim Primary School and a maintained Nursery. Blenheim is a Phase 1 children's centre funded by local authority and children's centre monies. The centre is run directly by the local authority. It offers full core provision. The centre opens from 9.00am to 5.00pm each weekday for 48 weeks a year. The average number of users per week is 108 adults and 101 children. Various services are run on the site and there is also outreach provision and links with other children and family centres in Bromley. The centre has partnerships with a range of social care and health agencies. Levels of deprivation in the area range from the bottom 30% nationally to families who are not deprived. Many of the users come from homes with some level of social disadvantage. Most families in the area are of White British heritage and a few are from a wide range of ethnic minority groups. A large settled Roma and Irish Traveller community use the centre. The majority of parents in the area are in work but many parents using the centre come from households where no one is currently in work and the family is in receipt of benefits. There are many young parents living in the area in temporary housing. Children's attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is below that expected for their age. Five children currently have a child protection plan.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good. Parents who use the centre are positive about the benefits of attending and say such things as, 'It has made such a difference to my life. All staff are very supportive; they go above and beyond to help'. The warm and welcoming rooms and friendliness of staff create a harmonious atmosphere that benefits all users. The centre builds on its successes and strives to improve the number of services on offer. Leaders have good awareness of the hard-to-reach groups in the community but the level of engagement with these groups is still modest.

A strength of the centre is the good leadership provided by the centre manager and the management team in strong partnership with the local authority. The centre runs effectively on a day-to-day basis. The local authority has statutory responsibility for the centre and is the centre's accountable body in legal and financial matters. Leadership of the centre is effective and leaders make good use of clear data provided by the local authority to help to measure the centre's impact. This, combined with accurate self-evaluation, ensures that decisions are made which are effective in improving provision further. The centre has good capacity to improve. Monitoring and evaluation are good. Some parents say that they are not fully involved in decision-making in the centre and inspectors agree. The centre has plans to address this by developing the parents' forum further. Another area identified by parents and centre leaders is to increase the opportunities for parents to improve their literacy, numeracy and information communication technology (ICT) skills. A room has already been set aside to develop a suite to provide these opportunities.

Information to users is managed effectively, pointing parents and carers to where they can get help and advice from those who work in the centre and also from other agencies. Staff signpost parents to other providers so that they can gain further qualifications. The centre also has good links with the local Jobcentre Plus. Those in the community who are vulnerable, such as teenage mothers and the hard-to-reach groups, notably the Gypsy Traveller communities, have been identified effectively.

The centre has worked successfully with its partners in health, education and housing to offer dedicated care and support tailored to the individual needs of these groups. The impact of this is that these families are now engaging more frequently with the centre in higher numbers and evidence of greater community cohesion is emerging. The centre evaluates the impact on children, parents and carers well. Long-term users have attended most of the courses on offer and appreciate the support and knowledge they have gained. The range of courses is good. Parents would, however, like more courses to help them adopt a more active lifestyle, and further opportunities to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

The work the centre undertakes towards promoting healthy lifestyles is good, resulting in positive outcomes for users and their families. The centre is very proud of its community kitchen and now runs popular courses teaching parents and their children how to cook healthy food. The efforts to ensure that children from all groups achieve well and enjoy their learning are also effective. Children enjoy the many activities provided by the centre. They make good progress in developing skills and competencies. Parents say their children enjoy attending the sessions such as 'Messy Play', 'Big cook Little cook', and 'Stay and play'.

Service providers work efficiently as a team to make a real difference to parents and families, particularly those from vulnerable groups and those with a protection plan. The centre works well to ensure equality of access to all. It celebrates diversity well, for example, parents, carers and children thoroughly enjoyed 'Music from around the world'. The centre is constantly striving to identify groups who are not yet making full use of the services it provides. Families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. 'Now we live in England', supports effectively families who are new to this country.

All legally required policies and procedures are in place, up to date and regularly reviewed. Staff have a very good understanding of child protection procedures, are well trained and share any concerns they may have so that the safety of users is good. The staff ensure the building is a safe and secure environment for all users. There are good procedures in place to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of everyone who uses the centre. The care the centre provides with regard to ensuring safety and child protection is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Build parental input into decision-making by developing the 'Parents Forum' so that parents are fully involved in the governance of the centre. Ensure long-term users become more actively involved in the running of the centre both to support their own personal development and to engage the wider community and other users.

- Increase provision for parents to develop their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre successfully promotes healthy lifestyles and improves the lives of families in the locality. The range of activities, support and guidance offered makes a positive impact to the physical, mental and emotional health of those who use the centre. There is, for example, a good take-up of groups to support breastfeeding, weaning and home safety. Breastfeeding support helps reassure new mums and gives them a chance to meet other mums. Parents talk positively about the 'Bumps to 1', course for post-natal and new mums. Families benefit from the well-integrated services, including healthcare. Parents and carers develop a good understanding of how to provide a healthy lifestyle for their children, for example in relation to a healthy diet. The provision for encouraging more active lifestyles has been successful in supporting new mothers who want to lose weight after pregnancy but it is limited in relation to its availability across other user groups. The 'Wild Life' garden area for outdoor play is enjoyed by all groups. Diet and what constitutes a healthy diet are discussed in cookery classes and 'fun with food' sessions and, as a result, children try new foods and parents are able to offer a wider variety. Case study notes confirm that parent awareness and improved eating for children and parents are evident. In the weighing clinic parents are reassured that their toddler's eating patterns are within the 'normal' parameters.

Vulnerable groups, such as those who are victims of domestic violence, are provided with both practical and emotional support, for example receiving help to access a solicitor. Members of the 'Freedom' course speak very positively about the support and guidance they received from this course.

The extent to which children feel safe and protected is good; there are high levels of security on the site. Users of the centre receive good levels of support because they feel safe enough to openly share their concerns with staff. Those children using the services at the centre are safeguarded very well. Children who have a child protection plan are effectively supported. The support for children subject to Common Assessment Framework process is good. Help for young pregnant teenagers and teenage parents is effective and these groups say that they have been well supported with advice around sexual health and in coping with their lives. One grateful teenager proudly showed her work folder and commented, 'I love it here, it is calm and it helps me to think. I have done more work in the centre than I ever did at all the schools I went to'. The joint working with partners often provides a seamless support network, for example in arranging a 'Team around a child' meeting where crèche facilities are available. First aid courses run at the centre are well attended and support parents' understanding of what to do in an emergency.

The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development is good. The development of children's personal and social

skills is good. Children are developing good skills for the future. The take-up for formal childcare is good. Courses provided for adults are greatly appreciated and enjoyed. One mum after her first session of first aid said, 'That was great; after only one session I now feel more confident about weaning my child once he goes onto solid foods, as I now know what to do if he chokes'.

Adults are accessing activities and opportunities for learning and gaining some qualifications which support them to prepare for future employment. The confidence of users is further enhanced by one-to-one sessions on interview skills and courses to look at CV preparation, help with purchasing suitable clothing and the provision of makeovers. Opportunities for users to develop basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT are more limited.

Parents report great improvement in their children's behaviour as a result of attendance at parenting courses and support from qualified crèche staff. The support parents receive from all staff in the centre when managing challenging behaviour helps them to persevere with new behaviour management strategies and supports their success.

Children in the Nursery are provided with a stimulating environment. Well-qualified staff who know the children well provide a range of carefully planned activities that support all areas of learning and, as a result, children make good progress. Children make good gains in their skills and understanding, developing an interest in exploring, investigating and learning through play in the crèche, Nursery and in the 'stay and play' sessions. All areas of learning are supported by the access to speech therapy which increases children's communication skills.

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

The centre knows its users well and has established good assessment procedures. The local authority provides the centre with clear data which it supplements with its own. This is being used effectively to plan activities that are effectively focused on need. Health visitors and others work effectively with outreach provision to assess and review the welfare needs of users. There are good links with other agencies to effectively inform assessments to meet learners' individual needs well. The provision to help children learn and achieve is good. Activities, trips and sessions to help children prepare for secondary school are particularly good. Parents who have suffered from domestic violence speak very highly of the 'Freedom' course. Parents are enthusiastic supporters of the centre and say such things as, 'I do not know how I would have coped without the support of the centre'.

Provision for teenage parents and pregnant teenagers is particularly strong. They enjoy the calm atmosphere of the Nightingale room and fully appreciate the support and guidance they receive from dedicated staff. This helps them cope more effectively with their lives.

The quality of care and support for vulnerable families is good, as is the care and guidance of children who attend the Nursery and childcare. Many parents at the parents' forum meeting had accessed the family and parenting support and found them a tremendous help, particularly supporting them to manage their children's behaviour and to complete legal documents. All workers at the centre, including administrative staff, show an awareness of the behaviour management strategies advocated by the parenting courses. Hence, when they see parents attempting to use them they step up and offer support and encouragement. Parents say this has played a major part in their success.

Parents with children who have special needs and/or disabilities receive high levels of support to help them cope on a practical basis with the stresses of managing the extra work and emotional impact of their situation. One parent said that the support that she received from the centre was a lifeline and she would not have been able to cope without it. Many parents expressed the positive impact of the speech and language professionals attending play and crèche sessions. This enabled them to ask questions, raise concerns in an informal situation, and as a result, receive guidance and support for their child at the earliest stage to alleviate concerns.

Good parenting support enhances the knowledge, confidence and abilities of parents in raising their children. There is a wide range of literature and guidance available for parents to help them make choices about issues such as immunisation and clarify their understanding of how they can keep their children safe and support their learning. At times of crisis parents are very well supported. This is largely due to the relationships between staff and users. Users see the centre as a safe place where they can share their problems and can feel confident that swift and effective solutions or support will be provided. The centre signposts parents to good-quality

support for smoking cessation. The quality of information, advice and guidance for parents seeking work is good.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The good quality of the provision and the positive impact upon children and adult users alike is due to the good-quality leadership and management at all levels. The recently appointed manager of the centre has good knowledge of its strengths and the aspects which can be improved still further. Leaders at all levels and all staff are fully committed to ensuring the centre is as effective as it can be and that relationships and communication between staff are good. Governance is good and systems to ensure accountability are secure. The activities are thoughtfully planned and carefully evaluated.

Safeguarding arrangements are efficient. Child protection arrangements are good and records are kept effectively. Records indicate that all staff working at the centre have been subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. There are rigorous recruitment checks. The centre ensures all partners are fully trained and that procedures are known to all. Policies are clear and implemented fully and risk assessments are rigorous and monitored to a high standard.

Early intervention to support those that are vulnerable is a priority. This is supported well by good partnership working with regular 'Team around the child' meetings to collate and support joint working. This provides a seamless service for parents and children. Partners now feel more able to utilise the resources at the centre than they did in the past. This, in turn, results in the centre engaging with more users from their locality. Access to the centre improves the work of other professionals, for example when childminders who attend the 'Childminder Drop in', share good practice and, as a result, improve the service they offer. These sessions are organised and run effectively by the childminders themselves.

Users express satisfaction with the centre through a variety of formats. Evaluations after attending courses, discussion taking place in questionnaires and a recently produced promotional video, all show positive outcomes. Most users express good

levels of satisfaction in relation to their relationships with staff, who they describe as welcoming and extremely helpful. There is some dissatisfaction around the effectiveness of communication as some users are unaware of details of courses. Most users are already targeted in the development plan, indicating that staff have listened to users and taken steps to address their concerns.

The centre provides effectively for equality and diversity and meets all the requirements. Staff are committed to promoting inclusion of all families within the reach area. The centre gathers valuable information about the different groups of users and evaluates their engagement. For example, case study evidence indicates that the centre has been effective in working with children and parents who are new to the area and from ethnic minority groups. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well provided for both in the physical accessibility of the building and through access to appropriate professional support. Celebration of cultural diversity is good. The skills of the staff and resources are used well. Value for money is good. Governance arrangements are secure and there are thoughtful lines of accountability in place. Members of the governing body are fully committed to improving outcomes for children and their families and for ensuring the sustainability of the service.

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

Blenheim Children's Centre Nursery inspection report, May 2008.

Blenheim Primary School inspection report, May 2008.

Brief discussion with inspectors in school at the time of this inspection.

Brief discussion with parents of children attending the primary school who had previously attended the centre.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Blenheim Children and Family Centre on 18 and 19 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you we met and who spoke to us about the centre and its work. It was a great help to us. We agree with you that the centre is a good place for you and your children to attend and that all the staff involved in the centre's work do a good job to help you and your children. You told us how friendly and approachable everyone is and how happy your children are when they are in the centre. We could see that those of you who use the centre regularly enjoy and benefit from all it has to offer, such as the 'Wild Life garden', the crèche, the courses and the new kitchen area.

We think the wide range of things that the centre plans for you is good but can be even better as there is plenty of room for more people to use the generous spaces available. One of the things you have asked the centre to do is to provide more courses for you to improve your literary, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. We agree with you that the centre could offer more courses to help you build on previous courses you have attended.

The centre helps you in so many ways, for example the support it provides for lone parents and those of you who are experiencing domestic violence or looking for work. It also provides support with legal papers, housing advice and practical help to make your homes safer for your children and guidance to help you with their learning. We know the centre is eager for more of you to contribute to decision-making at the centre through the parents' forum.

There are many good things in the centre to admire. Your children make good progress in their learning and behave very well because they enjoy all the activities offered. We enjoyed talking to some of them. We thought the childminders organised their crèche activity well because all children were fully involved and enjoying themselves learning to play with and alongside others. It was great to see seven very young children cooperating well together to use the musical instruments; they all showed a real sense of playing together to create their own special music.

The 'Messy Play' session was enjoyed by all the children as they explored the messy things and discovered that they could make coloured footprint and handprint patterns.

All of the people who work at the centre do a good job. This is especially the case with regard to the leaders. The work that they do to assess what is needed and to put plans in place to make things even better is good. They are helped by the local authority who have ultimate responsibility for the centre. We would like them to consider the needs of long-term centre users who have attended most of the courses and plan the next steps for this group.

The centre ensures that children and users are safe and well protected. Staff are all well trained and regularly update their training in these aspects. Security and safety are of the highest priority and records have to be kept to ensure that all who work at the centre are properly qualified and meticulously checked.

It was a pleasure to meet you during the inspection and to hear your views. We hope that you and your children and many more families who live in and around the Orpington area will continue to enjoy and benefit from the many activities and services the centre offers. Thank you again for contributing to the inspection by sharing your comments and thoughts so openly.

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