

# Inspection report for Sue Bramley Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
<b>Inspection number</b>	368364
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Clive Dunn

<b>Centre governance</b>	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
<b>Centre leader</b>	Sharon Hollis
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Sue Bramley Children's Centre Nursery Sue Bramley Children's Centre Crèche

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the senior management team, staff and representatives from the local authority, members of the advisory board and partner agencies, including representatives from the health service, and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including evaluations of services, safeguarding policies and records and minutes of meetings.

## Information about the centre

Sue Bramley Children's Centre is located within one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. It serves an area of increasing ethnic diversity and a large population from Black heritages. The most recent census information from local schools indicates that around three quarters of children are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which matches the proportions of the centre's own data about families that have accessed its services. The unemployment rate is high and rising, as is the percentage of families accessing or living exclusively on benefit. Around 39% of children in the borough have been identified as living in poverty. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage in the locality with skills significantly lower than the level expected for their age.

The geographical location of the centre is a challenge for it and its community. Together with the adjacent health centre, schools, parade of shops and co-located library, this hub provides the only facilities that are directly accessible and not cut off by the surrounding multi-lane route into central London, industrial estates and river. The centre provides the full core offer including family support, child and family health services in conjunction with the adjacent health centre, and education, training and employment services including Jobcentre Plus. The adjacent Sue Bramley Children's Centre Nursery and on-site crèche, which were not part of this inspection, provide early years and childcare facilities.

The centre was built in 2001 as part of the original Sure Start Programme. It is managed and operated by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Arrangements for the governance of the centre include the Locality Partnership Group, which offers strategic guidance to all the children's centres in the locality, and the Sue Bramley Children's Centre Community Forum, which acts as the centre's advisory board.

## 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**

**1**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**1**

## Main findings

Sue Bramley Children's Centre provides an outstanding service for its local community. The number of users that this long-established centre reaches through its high-quality services continues to grow rapidly. The breaking down of barriers in order to promote equality in engagement and achievement, particularly for members of the community whose contexts make them vulnerable, is at the heart of its work. The centre is having considerable success in engaging users from most of its hard-to-reach groups, including fathers and teenage parents. Highly effective, wide-ranging and proactive partnership working is a core principle that underpins the centre's offer. Consequently, these links make a significant contribution to the outstanding outcomes achieved by the centre. They are also a key feature of the excellent assessment procedures that ensure there is a very rounded view of the needs of families across all outcome areas.

Users express high levels of satisfaction with what the centre offers. They value the important contribution of the help, guidance and support they receive to the quality of their families' lives. As one parent said, 'I really feel I'm not completely alone.' Tight and effective safeguarding procedures underpin the highest priority given to this aspect by staff at all levels. There is notable improvement in outcomes for those who may be most vulnerable, for example children that are subject to a child protection plan. High-quality targeted support successfully reduces the level of intervention required, and the subsequent reinstatement of higher-tier plans is low. Users feel safe at the centre, are confident to express their views, and recognise that staff listen to these extremely well. There are numerous examples of changes to provision that have stemmed directly from parents' feedback. Some of these are relatively simple, but are very effective in increasing engagement and helping to

create a sense of ownership of the centre by the community.

Outcomes for users are outstanding across most areas. The centre has correctly identified children's speech, language and communication skills are often well below the level expected for their age and made this a high priority. Sessions that help target this area, such as 'Little Rhyme Makers', are of excellent quality and extremely popular. This is just one example where the centre has doubled the number of weekly sessions to cope with demand. Highly popular English for speakers of other language courses, run through a link with the adult college, also make a significant contribution to parents' capacity to promote their child's learning and development, as well as secure their own social well-being. As one parent recognised, 'Having tuition helped me to improve communication with my child.' The excellent link with Jobcentre Plus enables approximately 80 job seekers and related interviews to take place per month. Considering the current financial climate and the highly challenging geographical location of the centre, there is a high success rate at progressing cases to training, volunteering or employment.

Evaluation of its own work carried out by the centre is deeply embedded and involves staff at all levels. The newly formed community forum has started to involve parents closely in the scrutiny of the centre's evaluations of its own performance. Results of users' evaluations routinely influence the centre's own assessments. However, while evaluations of individual activities always consider how many families they have reached and the attendance, they do not always contain specific detail of how outcomes for users have improved through accessing the service. Consequently, although staff are highly ambitious, interim targets and plans to achieve their goals, including evaluation of which services are most effective in adding value, are not consistently as challenging and precise as they could be. That said, the notable improvements in provision and outcomes, extensive self-evaluation and ambitious but realistic plans for the future mean that the centre has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Refine the centre's evaluation to show consistently the impact of individual services on improving outcomes, to inform future planning.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>1</b>
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The centre improves being healthy outcomes for its users through the centre's excellent links with the neighbouring health centre. For example, centre staff help to make checks against children's developmental stages at the popular 'Toddler Party' at the health centre for children who have reached 18 months. This service enables the early identification and subsequent referral of a range of needs, including speech, language and communication. Similarly, although it is yet to affect local statistics, evaluations of the breast-feeding course, run in conjunction with a local

provider, Lifeline, indicate good success rates in mothers' intentions to initiate breast-feeding. One mother commented that the course was, 'Very worthwhile. It was good to meet other expectant parents.' Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services provide family support workers with monthly supervision, enabling specialist input to matters affecting emotional health and well-being.

To lead by example, the centre offers healthy snacks in conjunction with its sessions and groups, which also sometimes serves to introduce new foods for parents. Healthy eating workshops and the 'Feed your family for a fiver' course, run in conjunction with the adult college as a direct result of parental requests, improved parents' understanding of healthy diet. Children attending the local school have the lowest rate of obesity in the borough. There is good attendance at fitness classes and these focus on broader aspects of general health and specifically target information and advice where necessary. The centre is at an early stage of reintroducing support and courses to help parents stop smoking, following a period of transition regarding the partnership intended to deliver this service.

Children and parents that participate in sessions at the centre demonstrate exceptionally positive behaviour. The centre routinely seeks users' views on services and most are confident to express these, through either individual satisfaction surveys, or the very effective Parents' Forum. Staff support users who may be less confident to express their opinions very well, either through targeted support meetings or helping them to complete evaluations and surveys. A repeating theme from these surveys is the centre's highly effective communication. The centre has worked successfully to engage hard-to-reach groups, including involving families of White British heritage in universal services; parents and children from different backgrounds mix together well in sessions.

End of Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores at the neighbouring infant school have improved significantly and the gap between the lowest attaining 20% and the rest is decreasing. The centre tracks its results carefully to match these to the children that have accessed its services, which applies to the large majority of children that achieve the level expected, including in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. Information provided to the school for these children at the point of transition is excellent. Sessions focus highly effectively on children's concentration and readiness to learn in preparation for school. Combined with the success of the Jobcentre Plus partnership, the Lifeline job brokerage service and 'Step back to work' course that reaches other users, and the English for speakers of other languages classes, there is outstanding improvement in economic and social well-being outcomes for children and parents.

Parenting courses have a strong focus on promoting safety and the centre's work to improve confidence and self-esteem has a significant impact on reducing risk for potentially vulnerable users. Excellent use is made of multi-agency working to reduce harm and protect from domestic violence. Individual cases where there is significant reduction in risk, or improvement in outcomes, such as children that have been subject to a child protection plan, Common Assessment Framework or in local

authority care, continue to be carefully monitored and tracked to ensure improved outcomes are sustained as intervention levels decrease. Children are confident and conduct themselves safely in groups.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>1</b>

## How good is the provision?

**1**

Facilitators make excellent use of pre-course evaluations and broad assessments of users' needs to adapt services and ensure provision can be highly personalised to individual requirements. For parenting courses, for example, this has included clearer course introductions to parents, including pre-course home visits and strategic scheduling to match demand. Consequently, completion rates for these courses have significantly improved. In high-quality play and communication sessions such as 'Little Rhyme Makers', the facilitator assesses children's rapid progress as well as evaluating their parents' ability to support their children. Provision is highly cohesive because referrals and links between services are strong, tracked through and monitored. Graduation ceremonies help to celebrate achievement, either in the locality or across the borough.

Attendance rates are typically high. The strong sense that the centre is for the benefit and convenience of its users is embedded extremely well at all levels. This has included extending opening over the Christmas period, for example, giving users a potential outlet in a geographically isolating area. One parent rightly said that staff have 'always got the time for us'. In the last year, outreach events targeted at hard-to-reach families have contributed to the successful engagement of 427 new service users. Links with Portage have helped the centre reach children in the locality with disabilities through 'Portage Explorers' sessions.

Consultations with the multi-agency locality team provide additional advice and support where there are safeguarding concerns. The Common Assessment Framework arrangements are fully established and integrated within a tiered system of support. These well-established procedures and the increasing effectiveness of early intervention have resulted in a reduction in the numbers of social care cases

allocated to targeted family support. The strong links with the health visitor, community nursery nurses and general practitioner, who makes referrals to the children's centre, help provide a coherent package of support, guidance and advice for users. Parents feel confident to turn to the centre in times of crisis. 'We'd be lost without the children's centre,' was the comment made by one parent.

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

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

**1**

A strong sense of ambition, drive and high expectation permeates through staff at all levels. The centre thoroughly interrogates data provided by the local authority to help evaluate the impact of its services. Leaders work extremely hard to drill down to make the figures as relevant as possible to Sue Bramley, as well as using its own data, while never forgetting the wider impact of its work on improving long-term outcomes. In this way, leaders maximise the use of all available information to sustain and develop the outstanding range and quality of services the centre provides. The centre's evaluation links clearly with the effective centre improvement plan, which identifies responsibilities of staff and leaders at all levels, actions and milestones. Although measures of the impact of some individual services to target improvements do not consistently focus on outcomes, overall targets are ambitious, specific and measurable so that subsequent monitoring and evaluation is effective.

Each different group that makes up the governance structure of the centre understands its role and contribution well. Although the community forum, chaired by a parent, has only met twice so far, it is quickly developing the ability to ask challenging questions of the centre's leaders in a shared desire to make Sue Bramley the best it possibly can be. However, the new structure needs more time to fully establish itself and demonstrate maximum impact. Communication between leaders at different levels is excellent, creating a strong sense of common purpose. As one parent recognised, they 'really do a great job'.

Equalities and diversity is a standing item on all meeting agendas. Increasing numbers of hard-to-reach families engaged by the centre, as well as careful tracking of individual cases, demonstrate notable improvements in outcomes for these groups. The centre is extremely proactive in this aim, from the clear display in the reception area of staff that can speak different languages through to engaging the services of MENCAP to carry out an accessibility audit. Although the numbers of families or children with disabilities that the centre reaches are currently static, they

have successfully referred users to a neighbouring centre identified as the main provision in the locality for this purpose.

Excellent systems for safeguarding children and users are embedded through all activities and services the centre provides. Policies are detailed, specific-related to the centre and understood well by staff. Monitoring of individual case files, including those of children who are subject to child protection plans or in local authority care, is tight and their quality improved as a result. Careful recording and monitoring of mandatory safeguarding training and criminal records checks ensure there are no omissions. The centre has adopted best practice through keeping a single central register. Strong use is made of clearly defined thresholds for referral. An excellent range of risk assessments are in place, reviewed and fit for purpose. Outstanding multi-agency working, including for consultation or the use of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Committee in cases of domestic violence, enhances the excellent safeguarding work of the centre.

Outstanding leadership has ensured services at the centre have continued and improved against a backdrop of reduced spending. Leaders place a high priority on ever-increasing already excellent partnership working in order to extend sustainability. Staff and resources are shared across the locality for greatest impact and value. All services are quality assured thoroughly using best value principles, including precise, individual costing on service plans and evaluations.

<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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</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>1</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>1</b>

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

Inspectors consulted the inspection reports for EY280449 Sue Bramley Children's Centre Nursery on 19 March 2009 and EY272933 Sue Bramley Children's Centre Crèche on 24 July 2008, but did not use these to inform the judgements made during this inspection, as both inspections were carried out more than one year previously.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Sue Bramley Children's Centre on 23–24 March 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We would like to thank those of you who took the opportunity to meet with or speak to us during the inspection. We greatly appreciated your contributions. We also used evaluations you have completed and your satisfaction surveys to get a broader picture of your views of the centre. The extremely positive views you expressed, together with the increasing numbers of you that use the centre's services, told us that you are extremely satisfied with what the centre provides. We were particularly impressed with the growing numbers of fathers and teenage parents that are engaging with the centre. Excellent partnerships with other agencies, including the health centre next door, provide you with an outstanding range of services that you clearly appreciate. You feel staff at the centre are very approachable and listen to you very well to make sure they meet your individual needs.

The safety and well-being of you and your children is obviously a top priority of the centre. Not only does the centre have excellent procedures to keep you safe when attending sessions, but they work extremely well with you to help protect yourselves and your children at home, for example through parenting courses. As well as the excellent work with the health centre to arrange sessions such as the 'Toddler Party', the centre has responded well to your requests for courses like 'Feed your family for a fiver'. A good number of you attend the fitness class. The centre is currently working to reintroduce support for those of you who may wish to give up smoking.

Sessions for your children, such as 'Little Rhyme Makers' and 'Toddler Talk', are of extremely high quality and we are delighted to see that so many of you attend. These make an excellent contribution to helping your children be ready for school. It is also great to see how many of you have experienced success, for example in courses such as the English for speakers of other languages classes, or through making good use of Jobcentre Plus, to name just a couple.

Staff that work at the centre, from those you have most contact with to those responsible for leading and managing the services, are highly ambitious for you and your children. They are constantly seeking ways to improve what the centre offers in order to make some difference for you. Leaders have made very strong systems to do this, including regularly asking you for your feedback and responding to what you say very well. Your new Community Forum has got off to a great start, and together with the Parents' Forum, this makes an important contribution. Leaders use a wide range of information to consider carefully what difference they are making to the lives of those in your community by the package of services they offer. To help them make plans that are even more effective for the future, we have asked them to make sure they also always focus on what difference each individual service makes in improving something for you and your families.

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