

# Inspection report for Amersham Children's Centre

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| <b>Local authority</b>     | London Borough of Lewisham |
| <b>Inspection number</b>   | 367735                     |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>    | 19–20 April 2011           |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b> | Julie Winyard HMI          |

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| <b>Centre governance</b>           | London Borough of Lewisham                          |
| <b>Centre leader</b>               | Kate Platt  |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | This is the centre's first inspection               |
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|--|---------------------------------|
| <b>Linked school if applicable</b>                     | Not applicable                  |
| <b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b> | Amersham Early Childhood Centre |

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the area manager, children's centre staff, health and social care professionals, users of services, the parents' forum, the advisory board and local authority officers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate**

## Information about the centre

Amersham Children's Centre is a phase one centre situated in Brockley ward. It was opened in 2007. Activities take place at the centre as well as in a number of outreach locations, including a hostel for the homeless and playgroups located in local parks. The linked nursery, run by the local authority, is housed in one of the two buildings used by the centre.

Governance of the centre is by the local authority, supported by an advisory board made up of users of services, local authority personnel, health and social care professionals and third sector representatives. The centre is managed by a head of centre who also manages three other children's centres in the area.

Brockley ward has a population of 13,697 of which 60.01% is White British, 4.34% of mixed race, 3.54% Asian, 28.64% Black African or Black Caribbean and 3.48% Chinese or from other ethnic groups. There are 834 lone parents and 555 children living in workless households. There are two areas of high disadvantage; one in the north and the other in the south. In these areas of the ward, a large majority of residents are described locally as 'welfare borderline' with high-density housing and

reliance on state benefits. A proportion of residents are young professional or full-time students. The area has transport links and several education campuses for Goldsmiths University and Lewisham College.

By the time children are ready to enter early years provision their skills, knowledge and development are above that expected for their age both in the borough and nationally.

## 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

Amersham Children's Centre is a good children's centre with some outstanding aspects. The wide range of provision enables all users to achieve good outcomes in most areas of their lives. The staff are very welcoming and users say they feel safe and relaxed coming to the centre and centre activities. All courses and group activities, for example drop-in sessions for parents and carers with children under five, are very well attended and all users complete the courses they choose to take. There is no unlawful discrimination and all users say they feel valued and supported.

The children's centre has outstanding partnerships, working exceptionally well with many different agencies and third sector organisations. These close partnerships are aided by the local authority's robust and highly successful emphasis on collaborative working across professional boundaries. For example, the strong relationships with the primary care trust (PCT) ensure that health visitors are fully supportive of children's centre services and register every parent at the first visit following the birth of their child. Because of this, the children's centre is certain that all families with children under five at least have an introduction to what is on offer. However, there is still work to do in helping users understand the value of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR).

There are outstanding systems and procedures in place to ensure users are safeguarded. Highly effective systems are in place to ensure that the most vulnerable families receive the support they need. For example, a senior social care professional spoke very highly of the 'immediate' action taken by nursery staff to ensure that a family received the interventions needed so that a child was not put at risk. The success of this intervention, and other examples seen in case studies, is evident in the good progress families make in coming through times of crisis. Many go on to attend services at the children's centre thanks to their improved confidence and self-esteem.

The centre's reach into the community is good, although staff acknowledge that there remains a small minority of families who need encouragement to use the centre.

The children's centre funds an early years teacher, who works very successfully with the nursery and with other local nurseries and primary schools. For example, the 'Playing with Words' project has contributed to improved outcomes in communication language and literacy in all schools that took part. Children in the centre's crèches and drop-ins have excellent behaviour. This is due to the effective support from centre staff and the impact of parenting courses.

There is good leadership and management of the centre by the area manager with good support from the local nursery manager, children's centre teacher, parent involvement officers, outreach workers and administrative staff. The children's centre team works exceptionally well together and with the other professionals working with the centre, for example the family support workers who are commissioned to work with some of the most vulnerable families. Users describe staff as 'brilliant!' Centre staff are very reflective and there are good systems in place for evaluating their work and for professional supervision. Evaluation of the centre's work is good, but the use of local authority data to set more overt targets and to monitor success against these is relatively limited.

Governance of the centre is good and parents on the advisory board are very proactive in encouraging parents in all areas of the ward to access services. They do this because they value the services they have received and have witnessed how effectively children's centre workers support families and enable them to come through difficult times. The board is also a strong advocate for improving relationships in the wider community and values the opportunities for parents from many different backgrounds and ethnic groups to meet at the children's centre activities. The parents' forum provides excellent support to the centre and has a very active role in determining the range of activities provided. As a result of this, users make an outstanding contribution to the children's centre community. Because of the good management and governance of the centre, the good-quality self-evaluation, the high uptake of courses and good outcomes for users, the centre has good capacity to make further improvements.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve, further, the use of local authority data to identify community needs and to provide a basis for more formal targets to support evaluation and improvement.
- Encourage users to value and access the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR).
- Fully explore the reasons why there is a small minority of families who need encouragement to use the centre and address these reasons.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2

Children have a good understanding of how to live healthily and help themselves to a well-balanced selection of foods at lunchtime at the nursery. Adults say how much they have learnt from the food courses at the centre and how this has helped them plan healthy meals for their families. The PCT data show that breastfeeding has increased and is sustained for longer and that immunisation rates have improved. The children's centre staff have worked hard to achieve this, but more support is required to improve rates further. Users receive a lot of support to give up smoking and data indicate that smoking during pregnancy has reduced. The 'teen at risk' support groups are successfully reducing the incidence of teenage pregnancy in the ward. Children with special needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the effective early intervention work carried out by both the special educational needs coordinator and health professionals.

Children and adults are outstandingly safe at the children's centre and at all centre activities. Children say there is no bullying of any kind at the nursery. Local admissions to accident and emergency are decreasing, as are incidents of domestic violence due to the outstanding effectiveness of inter-agency working through the children's centre. Users say that they have a better understanding of how to keep their children safe through attending children's centre courses. In the words of one user, 'I didn't know any first aid especially when it came to my baby. I'm glad I took this course I now feel much more confident if there was to be an accident in the house.'

Children's enjoyment of learning is reflected in the good outcomes from the 'playing with words' project run at the nursery by the children's centre teacher. It is closing the gap between the lowest and highest achievers. Children's behaviour is excellent. Case studies show that adults who take courses really benefit from these, including improving their economic well-being for example through taking English courses. Users who wish to return to work receive good support from the back-to-work adviser and, as a result, a good number have returned to work and others are now claiming benefits they are entitled to.

Users make an outstanding contribution to shaping services offered at the children's centre. They greatly value centre services and are keen to support and develop them further. For example, one teenage parent living in temporary accommodation says that both she and her child do not feel so isolated and she is encouraging other lone parents to come to drop ins. A strong feature of the local authority is how much it values users' voice and participation. This is clearly reflected in the enthusiasm of the members of the parents' forum for both encouraging other parents to use the children's centre and in returning the support they have had from children's centre workers. For example, one user who completed a food course at college has come back to run a course for other users.

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| <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>2</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>2</b> |

## **How good is the provision?**

**2**

Overall, the centre makes a good assessment of the needs of the community in the reach area. Professionals have a good knowledge of the area and readily identify issues and problems and there is good contact with the vast majority of those families and others who need it. However, staff are aware of a small minority of families who are not being reached and are working hard to identify the reasons and address these.

There is excellent understanding of the needs of the most vulnerable families already identified by the centre. The Common Assessment Framework is used exceptionally well by all children's centre professionals. Some innovative approaches for supporting vulnerable families, for example the new 'early intervention locality panel' where professionals bring cases for discussion so that the best route can be found to ensure risks are reduced through targeting services effectively. The centre has coined the phrase 'team around the family'. This explains their approach to intervention work; no member of the family is left out of the needs assessment. This approach is particularly well illustrated by the careful and highly professional methods in dealing with child protection plans.

Adult users' achievements are celebrated at the end of every course with a party as well as certificates. When children at the linked nursery leave there is a full-blown graduation ceremony with caps and gowns. This event is cherished by children and their families for years to come and well reflects the ethos of the centre.

Children's centre services meet the needs of all users well. For example, lone parents are very pleased with the 'raising boys' course and felt this gave them a better understanding of how boys develop and their specific needs. Users with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive expert advice from professionals at Kaleidoscope, a joint venture with the PCT. Users also benefit from the expertise of 'support information guidance news for autism in Lewisham' (SIGNAL). The children's centre is good at taking services to where the people are and drop-ins

recently started at the local hostel are catering for good numbers of users.

All users benefit from the good advice available from centre workers. For example, dental services data show a decrease in the need to treat young children's teeth.

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

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

**2**

Day-to-day management is efficient and effective and all roles are well understood by staff. Good service level agreements have been set up by the local authority with all partners working with the children's centre. There is good accountability through the centre's advisory board and through representatives who attend other local authority management groups, thus ensuring the involvement of the wider community.

Children's centre staff have high aspirations for all users of services and, because of this, attendance on courses and completion rates are high. Children achieve well because of the high expectations of staff who work with them at the nursery. There is good management of resources and the centre provides an excellent role model to users for sustainability. For example, children love to observe the maintenance of the wormery and staff model the re-use of many materials on courses so users can see that they do not need to buy expensive materials to support their children's learning and development. The effective use of resources linked to the good outcomes means that the centre offers good value for money.

Staff monitor the ethnicity of those attending its services and, comparing this with PCT data for the ethnicity of the ward, all local groups are represented well. The centre celebrates diversity very well and parents and children really enjoy the opportunity to share their culture, food and clothing with each other on 'Diversity Day'. One user observed that, 'Going on trips together really helps children and the adults to interact with each other because you're meeting different people with different backgrounds and race.'

The centre has outstanding practice in ensuring that all children and users are safeguarded. All procedures are highly robust, For example, model policies provided by the local authority have been personalised to ensure they meet the needs and context of the children's centre. Safeguarding training is carefully monitored and updated as soon as this is required. The outstanding quality of inter-agency working



provides excellent support for safeguarding in the wider community.

The centre's high aspirations and good successes are evaluated well, although they would be improved further by more formalised action planning based on measurable success criteria. The local authority has a wealth of data which, although used to support professionals' good knowledge and understanding of the local community, has the potential, if used more, to make evaluation even more effective.

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| <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>2</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>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b> | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>            | <b>1</b> |
| <b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>  | <b>2</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>2</b> |

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

None.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Amersham Children's Centre on 19 and 20 April 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

First of all I would like to thank you on behalf of the inspection team for giving your time to talk with us about the work of the children's centre.

The children's centre is providing a good service to all the people it reaches in your area and it is great to see your enthusiasm for the activities and courses available. We think that you make an outstanding contribution to developing the work of the centre and this reflects the fact that your views are listened to and valued. We also think that the children's centre works exceptionally well with all its partners. It is very good to see how you have benefited from professionals from different agencies working with you, especially in the support they give you through difficult times in your family life. We are particularly impressed with the dedication of the parents' forum and how determined it is to get the good news about children's centre services to as many potential users as possible.

There is always more that can be done and we think that, although the centre evaluates its success well, there are data available from the local authority which could be used better to help with evaluation. We think that more needs to be done to encourage you to get your children immunised against measles, mumps and rubella and we also agree with staff that more should be done to attract the relatively small number of vulnerable families who still do not use the centre.

The children's centre is well led and managed and it uses the resources available very well. It is good to see that the parents' forum is given a budget to organise trips and special activities. The back-to-work adviser is an excellent resource and it was pleasing to hear how many people are benefiting from her advice about how to get the benefits you are entitled to and also in helping those that are ready to go back to work. Safeguarding procedures and policies are excellent. It is good to hear that everyone feels safe and also how the children's centre is bringing the local community together so that people understand each other better.

The inspection team would like to wish you all every success for the future, especially in taking a full part in further developing children's centre services.

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