

Inspection report for South Bermondsey Children and Parents' Centre

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| Local authority | Southwark |
| Inspection number | 383719 |
| Inspection dates | 3–4 August 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Meena Wood HMI |

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| Centre governance | Local authority |
| Centre leader | Daisy Anderson |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
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| Linked school if applicable | Kintore Way Children Centre |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | |

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

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with: the head of centre and other staff; parents, carers and other users; health care professionals; the Southwark Works adviser; and representatives from the advisory board and the local authority. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, data and records of adults' and children's achievement.

Information about the centre

South Bermondsey Children and Parents' Centre is a local authority centre run by Southwark Children's Services and comprises a phase one children's centre, registered childcare provision and a maintained nursery school that share the same site. The nursery was inspected separately in February 2011. An advisory board provides support and assistance to centre managers. It is made up of representatives from centre staff, providers of services, parents, carers and other users and Southwark local authority. Governance and accountability lie with the local authority. With the exception of Southwark Primary Care Trust health visiting team, South Bermondsey Partnership team, Sure Start Children Centre locality team, locality midwife and the childminder network team, all staff working at the centre are employed by the local authority.

The centre's local link nursery school is Kintore Way Children's Centre with whom it shares a part-time teacher. The centre receives local authority funding for children with additional educational needs (AEN) and safeguarding concerns. Parents receive childcare costs from programmes such as the Common Assessment Framework and the Care to Learn Scheme which is supported by Connexions to enable young parents to study.

The centre is located in a housing estate in the heart of Bermondsey and has provided nursery care and education for more than sixty years. The local population is predominantly White British with a steadily increasing proportion of families from a range of minority ethnic heritages. The area the centre serves is within the 30%

most disadvantaged areas in Southwark. Its reach area covers seven lower super output areas with high deprivation and unemployment and has higher than the Southwark average for children living in low pay and/or workless households. Child poverty scores are high and characterised by long-term household overcrowding and lack of safe outdoor play.

Take up for pre-school provision is generally high. Most of the children enter childcare and the nursery with skills that are well below expected levels for their ages. The centre provides all the required elements of the universal offer including education, care and family services for children and families from birth to five years.

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

South Bermondsey Children and Parents’ Centre is a welcoming and friendly community hub with good quality resources and provides a good range of services to meet the diverse needs of its users. It is greatly valued and well regarded by those that attend. Supportive and integrated multi-agency relationships between the service partners, the managers of the centre and the local authority are sustained in the best interests of the families and individuals in the locality. The centre works with an increasing range of partners including secondary, nursery schools and faith groups, but has not yet developed wider links with the voluntary sector.

Children enjoy the broad range of activities on offer, making good progress in the crèche and outstanding progress in the on-site nursery. In particular, the centre has a good track record of improving children’s speech and language development, imagination and coordination skills through play, toys and film activities where parents and children learn new skills. Young children subsequently develop into more confident learners with a higher concentration span and can work well with others at the start of nursery.

The local authority and the centre’s leaders and managers have strong aspirations for the provision in the centre. Joint leadership and management of both the centre and its nursery are an asset and support children’s seamless transition through the

provision from their starting points. Their development is monitored well and assessed so that children make good progress. Service providers working with families ensure that they develop in confidence and, as a result, a good number of adults successfully make the transition from the first contact to fully accessing universal services.

Good safeguarding arrangements ensure the health, safety and well-being of all users. Excellent health activities carried out by the centre's health workers and midwife have resulted in highly successful outcomes in the locality. Levels of obesity in young children have reduced, more new mothers have chosen breastfeeding for their babies and the rates of immunisation for young children have increased. Parenting courses, with a focus on mental health, speech and language development and autism, have been enormously popular and have resulted in a wide range of benefits for these families.

The centre is raising the aspirations and confidence of its adult users by helping them to develop their skills for the future. Many adults enjoy and learn from the parenting activities and then become volunteer workers in the centre. A good number of these have then returned to education, gained qualifications and moved on to employment or started their own business. Some champion the centre's work, encouraging others to access services and in doing so make a positive contribution in their community. Especially impressive is the impact that the centre has had in its work with lone parents and fathers. The involvement of some in the centre's activities has resulted in the establishment of a thriving Parents' and Carers' Group. Developing support networks for identified local need is well established. The exemplary accredited Childminders' Network, run through the centre, has had a direct impact on the very high quality of childminding services in the locality.

The advisory group that monitors the centre's work was formed in the previous year and terms of reference have yet to be fully finalised. Therefore members lack clarity about their roles and the extent of their responsibilities. Advisory members, along with the newly formed Parents' and Carers' Group, are highly enthusiastic and passionate about the work of the centre. The local authority acts as the centre staff's accountable body in all legal and financial matters. However, line management responsibilities of the centre management are not sufficiently well understood by all, especially in the light of the very recent transfer of responsibility for commissioning of services from the local authority to the centre. Centre management ensures that it rigorously monitors and evaluates the services and involves all partners and service providers. These valuable data are not always presented to staff, the advisory board and the service providers in a way that can systematically inform decisions about establishing new courses, or measure the success of existing courses. Nevertheless, the centre's self-evaluation and development plans are detailed and rightly evidence strengths and areas of development. Moreover, strategic objectives are well researched in relation to reach and locality.

The centre knows its users well and is focused in trying to reach groups that are least inclined to make initial contact. A range of imaginative approaches, such as an

online map of extended services and termly newsletters, is disseminated widely, and fun days and community events well organised. The tireless dedication and enthusiasm of the highly-committed Parent Development Coordinator is clearly evident through her outreach work with service providers. At this stage, the centre has not developed a strategy and action plan of promotion and outreach that would enable it to fully realise this potential.

Effective referral systems ensure that families facing challenging circumstances and those at risk receive further support. There is a good record of adults being helped to navigate their way through the services ensuring that they receive their full entitlement to benefits and in signposting them towards employment, education and/or training with positive outcomes. These examples of good practice are having an impact on reducing child poverty in the area.

This well-run, established children's centre is effectively run by the centre manager and the programme manager and staff and is successfully meeting its users' needs from diverse backgrounds. Its concerted effort to improve areas of weakness, with some notable successes, places it in a good position to continuously improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that leadership develops a strategy for outreach and promotion of the centre's services and its activities, and this is consistently informed by the data and users' views gathered on the quality of its services and activities.
- Develop consistently precise and measurable targets for future improvement across all the strategic priorities, so that the centre can more accurately measure its success towards achieving them.
- Ensure that the local authority creates clear communication channels and that roles and responsibilities and governance arrangements are fully understood by everyone.

How good are outcomes for users?

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Outcomes for children are good and improving. Through a good range of activities in Stay and Play and the crèche, young children are making good progress in their social and emotional development and in their language, literacy and communication skills. They are well prepared for transition to the outstanding nursery that is on-site, or to other nurseries in the community. Local headteachers report that those who attend the crèche have a head start and make good progress, when they start nursery and move on to school. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile results show children's good levels of achievement during their time at the centre.

An excellent and popular range of courses such as Parents and Partners in Early Language, Best Start for Babies, Toys for Talking and In the Picture have helped parents develop their babies' and young children's language and speech through play

activities, toys and film activities. Parents and carers receive helpful guidance and advice on how to replicate activities that promote talk and independence at home. This contributes to their children's accelerated progress.

The centre has made an outstanding contribution to its users' mental and physical health. Healthy eating and regular exercise are promoted through all contacts with parents and families. For example, families on courses are given free fruit and daily menus in the centre kitchen are designed by parents and their children. Moreover, mums-to-be attending the Healthy Bump course reported positive changes in eating habits. Especially successful are the supportive activities for postnatal depression that have enabled mothers to bond with their babies. Of note, regular and close contact between the centre's health workers and midwife with local families has resulted in significantly reducing levels of obesity in young children, encouraging breastfeeding and ensuring higher rates of immunisation for young children.

Safeguarding arrangements are highly rigorous and comply with latest guidance and requirements. Premises are safe and secure. All who use the centre say that they feel at ease and one single father with four children reported that he felt the 'centre was his second home'. Vulnerable families have their needs identified quickly. Referral systems work well and as agencies work together they are responsive and put in place the necessary support. Common Assessment Framework plans are completed within expected timescales and there is good evidence of improved outcomes for children on child protection plans.

A range of accredited adult courses that focus on literacy, numeracy and language skills have resulted in successful outcomes for individuals in entry and level 1 qualifications. Their portfolios of work demonstrate a good understanding and written command of their language skills in everyday contexts. In addition, they demonstrate effective skills in the production of paper and fabric nursery rhymes and story books, thus helping children develop language.

Volunteers working at the centre report huge gains in their learning and skills and talk proudly of the difference that the centre has made to their lives as well as the valuable contribution they can now make through encouraging others to join activities and benefit from the services. Many develop mentoring skills; a good number progress to employment, whilst a small group have successfully started their own business. Notably, inspectors observed the Parents' and Carers' Group effectively using problem-solving skills and confidently negotiating with centre staff in the planning of a fun day event.

Participation rates on courses have increased in the last few months and are mostly good. The centre is effective in seeking users' and their children's views and acting upon them, in most cases, to establish further provision or to improve existing courses. Although, at present, this is not sufficiently consistent. The advisory board members and the Parents' and Carers' Group enthusiastically work with the centre at operational level and inform course planning through their views.

The involvement of Southwark Works at the centre, as a local replacement agency for Jobcentre Plus, evidences some impressive examples of its success in assisting users in navigating their way through services and progressing to further education, training and employment. This is improving economic stability and independence for families. For instance, over the last four years there has been a 24% reduction in the number of lone parent claimants.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, and 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 and employment | 2 |

How good is the provision?

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The centre has a good understanding of its users' needs and demonstrates some notable improvement in outcomes for adults and children, in particular for speech and language, childminding services and progression to employment and training. The quality of care for young children in the crèches and outdoor play areas is good. These excellent facilities shared with the nursery are used extensively by parents and carers participating in workshops, training and other activities. For instance, student parents supported on further education courses through the centre's daycare provision and by the Child Care Affordability Programme (CAP) and Care to Learn have then progressed to employment.

Accredited and non-accredited adult courses for literacy and language skills are well attended with good outcomes. All adults are rewarded at a celebration of achievement ceremony upon completion.

The range of health services at the centre has had an outstanding impact on families and their children in terms of healthy living, mental health and speech and language development. Referrals to preventative services are effective and have resulted in outstanding outcomes in mental and physical health for parents and their children, for instance, reduction in levels of obesity, along with higher rates of immunisation in young children as well as lowered levels of postnatal depression. Most groups are benefiting from the centre's services so that the core offer is being met.

There are varied opportunities for families to have fun, learn new skills and spend quality time together. A range of parenting skills courses are greatly valued and have resulted in positive outcomes for babies and children, in particular more effective speech and language development. The accredited Childminders' Network has had numerous benefits in the locality, not least in ensuring that the majority of domestic childminding services have been judged as good or outstanding through inspection. Training and support activities at the centre help childminders develop highly effective skills and to realise fully their responsibilities in relation to the learning, care and the safety of babies and children.

Centre staff are friendly, work in an integrated way and quickly win the trust and confidence of users. The centre systematically gathers written and verbal feedback from users, but is inconsistent in its use of this information to assess needs and negotiate future services. The centre uses on-line and paper-based promotion materials and targeted outreach that has been effective in reaching a good range of users. An excellent example of this has been the high take up for the dads' group, run in conjunction with the local football club. This has resulted in positive benefits for those needing health referrals through the health visitor. Moreover, at least one of these users, a long-term unemployed father, received supportive advice and guidance and successfully gained employment as a football coach in a local school.

The centre has been particularly successful in reaching its target groups of lone parents, parents and carers with literacy and mental health issues, fathers, parents with English as an additional language and parents with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. For instance, courses such as Early Bird have successfully targeted parents with children who have autism. The very popular Hands on Dads sessions attract male carers, including fathers and grandfathers, a priority group for the centre. There is less evidence of the centre helping teenage parents and parents experiencing domestic abuse and substance misuse, although a Cessation Smokers session regularly takes place. One young ex-smoker reported that she could 'now taste her food again'. Consequently, the centre is prioritising work to increase numbers of these individuals accessing its services.

Assessment is used well to ensure services meet users' needs. Participation rates are steadily increasing on most courses. The quality of information and guidance for users on accessing support, benefits and seeking work is particularly good through Southwark Works. The quality of care and support for families in crisis is good and families report that through referrals to relevant agencies and bespoke support, the centre has helped them to resolve problems, raise their self-esteem and confidence.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| 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 |

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| 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?

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The leadership is strongly focused on promoting good-quality services that reflect the needs of the users. Links between strategic planning and service provision have had positive outcomes for users in education, health and care. Staff work enthusiastically as a cohesive team and are committed to providing the best possible services. The advisory board and the Parents' and Carers' Group are recently established and represent a diverse range of users. Both contribute effectively to publicising the centre's activities through outreach events. Professional supervision and management arrangements are in place. However, communication channels between the local authority, centre staff and the advisory board are not sufficiently clear about roles and responsibilities and, consequently, not clearly understood. All partners are well supported by the centre staff in understanding their roles in supporting and developing integrated services.

The service partners and the health, employment and housing agencies pull together to respond swiftly and appropriately to users' needs. Despite some highly responsive outreach working and promotional leafleting, the centre recognises that it has further potential to increase the volume of users. Regular monitoring of access and participation levels of users and evaluation of users' views inform future priorities for improvement. This, in turn, has informed the centre's development plans, strategic objectives and actions. The centre recognises that systems using this wide range of data are new and not yet refined sufficiently to maximise their effectiveness. Therefore, not all ambitious targets agreed by the local authority and the centre are quantified with sufficient precision. Nevertheless, all staff are effectively working towards encouraging more parents to use and benefit from services through widening community links.

A systematic programme of performance management and staff development ensures that staff improve their skills supported by access to appropriate training. The Southwark Pathways to Quality programme enables improvements in the quality of the care and learning programmes. The centre supports and promotes users in gaining further qualifications. For example, a training company based in the local university delivers literacy and language skills accredited courses for parents and their children.

Resources are well used to deliver the core offer and the impact on improved outcomes for users is generally good. The leadership and management have maximised the available resources on site, taking into account fully the need to develop sustainable resources, especially in relation to use of nursery facilities and staffing for the crèche and Childminding Network.

Users' and staff safety and security are a priority and the centre adopts recommended good practice across all areas of its work. Rigorous safeguarding checks on all staff, combined with very good working relationships between the centre and its partner agencies, enable effective communication and information sharing to reduce the risk of harm to children. The centre is fully inclusive and promotes community cohesion well by encouraging involvement from all groups. For example, single parent fathers and families from all minority ethnic groups are frequent users of the services. The facilities are adapted to enable families with special educational needs and/or disabilities to access services. All staff working with children are trained in using Makaton so that they are skilled in working with those who are deaf and blind. The vast majority of the users speak highly of the centre and its services and are appreciative of all that it provides.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood | 3 |
| 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 section 5 inspection of the nursery school carried out in February 2011 was judged outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the South Bermondsey Children and Parents' Centre on 3 and 4 August 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre staff are extremely caring and well-qualified professionals. They provide you with the high-quality resources and services that are designed especially to meet you and your children's needs, whatever these may be. Your safety and that of your children is given the highest priority. Some of you told us how marvellous the staff are and how they have helped you out in times of crisis. You also told us how very much your children enjoy coming to the centre for activities, childcare and the nursery. We were pleased to watch them all having fun in activities in the Triple Ts Stay and Play session and the crèche, and we know that many of you have really appreciated the Toys for Talking session and the Best Start for Babies where you were able to learn how best to develop your child's language through play and toys. In particular, the health activities, together with the excellent guidance and support of the health visitors and the midwives at the centre, have meant that more of you new mums have been encouraged to breastfeed your babies to give them the best start in life. Those of you with young children are making sure they remain healthy through a good diet, exercise and regular immunisations.

Your centre makes sure that you too have a great time when you join your children for sessions, and the centre staff help you to develop your skills as parents and carers really well. The centre staff and other professionals who provide services help you and your children through pooling their skills, so that you receive good support and advice. The centre is especially good at encouraging fathers to join in activities and is rightly acknowledged for its excellent work in supporting childminders.

Your children make good progress at the centre in the crèche and move on to nursery and then school with ease. This is because the professionals check how well your children are doing as they grow. We were impressed with how well your children behave at the centre and how well you get along with each other and staff. This is because the staff warmly encourage you and celebrate your achievements with you. Some of you have been able to return to education and work because the centre has helped you develop greater confidence and supported you. Staff listen to your feedback. We agree with the centre that even more parents could benefit from the services and the learning courses but, as yet, staff do not have written detailed plans to ensure this happens. So, we have asked them to set more precise targets for improvement that will be easier to measure and to think more about ways of publicising the centre's services and all the good things it does for your local community.

The centre's managers, members of the advisory board, the Parents' and Carers' Group and the local authority officers are committed to achieving the best standards of education, care and services for you. As the arrangements for managing the centre with the advisory board are quite recent, some of the areas of joint working are not very clear, we have asked the centre and the local authority to communicate these more clearly to everyone.

We would especially like to thank you to those of you who gave up your time to talk to us and meet with us as it was so important to hear your views. We are confident that your centre will continue to thrive and hope that you will continue to take full advantage of all that it has to offer and contribute as much as you can. We wish you and your families the very best for the future.

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