

# Inspection report for Cherry Tree Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Lambeth
<b>Inspection number</b>	383924
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jane Chesterfield

<b>Centre leader</b>	Regan Lacey
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Centre address</b>	8 Barston Road London SE27 9HE
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7926 8063
<b>Fax number</b>	N/A
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:ccbarstonroad@lambeth.gov.uk">ccbarstonroad@lambeth.gov.uk</a>

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	N/A
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Cherry Tree Childcare EY431645

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, local authority officers, the centre's core team, and a range of partners, health professionals and front line staff. They met parents and carers and other centre users, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The centre is situated in an inner-city area comprising mainly social and privately rented housing in the London Borough of Lambeth, and serves a multi-ethnic community. The largest ethnic groups are White British, Other White and Black or Black British – African. Lambeth is the fifth most deprived borough in London and the nineteenth in England. Life expectancy is below the national average. Unemployment is well above the national average and over 30% of the child population live in households dependent on benefits. The proportion of families with children known to be eligible for free school meals is high.

Cherry Tree Children's Centre was designated as a phase 1 children's centre in 2006. It provides families and children with a range of services including childcare and education, family support, outreach and home visiting, community-based health services, and advice on training, employability and benefits.

Cherry Tree offers the Early Years Foundation Stage in its childcare and crèche facilities. It is registered with Ofsted to provide 56 education and childcare places for children aged from 6 months to 5 years of age. Children may attend from 8.00am to 6.00pm 5 days per week for 48 weeks of the year. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision was inspected in November 2009. Most children enter early years provision with a much narrower range of skills and abilities than those expected for their age.

## 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 families**

**1**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**1**

## Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is outstanding. Cherry Tree Children’s Centre is very successful in meeting the wide range of needs of its very diverse community, and can demonstrate significant improvements in outcomes for its families, particularly those in target groups. Thanks to the exceptional quality of its leaders and managers and key staff, it has greatly improved its reach over the last two years since the current leaders took over. The excellent range and quality of its provision mean that its services are extremely popular and frequently oversubscribed, and that they make a marked difference to the lives of those in the local community.

The centre’s systems for monitoring and evaluation are exceptionally strong. Systematic, careful analysis of data and evaluations from families using services ensures that they are targeted to the areas of greatest need. The high demand for courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), for example, means that these courses are always available, with very successful outcomes. Of 29 learners who passed the course over the last 18 months, 25 have gone on to further education or employment. Learners who spoke no English at all when they started the course say that they now have the confidence to talk to others and be part of their community.

Staff morale is very high despite current uncertainties over funding, and front-line workers carry out their roles very competently. They are skilled in assessing the needs of families and recommending other services within the centre or others in the cluster which could be of benefit to them. Relationships between staff and families using the centre are very positive, and this helps families from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds to mix with one another and feel comfortable and welcome at the centre.

The centre has established excellent partnerships with other agencies for the benefit of its families. Integrated work with a group from the PVI (private, voluntary and independent) sector running a young parents group, for example, has seen the rate of teenage pregnancies in the borough drop from the highest in the country to below

the national average over the last ten years. Parents and carers are heavily involved with the running of the centre, and take an active role in questioning and suggesting through the well-attended parents' forums and the advisory board. One parent who became involved as an ESOL learner has recently run a sports course for families at the centre.

Parents and carers agree that the quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Outcomes for children on child protection plans have been very positive and the Common Assessment Framework is used very successfully. Safeguarding arrangements are exemplary. The quality and frequency of staff training are a particular strength, and parents and carers say that they are made very aware of the centre's policies and procedures, for example on the use of mobile phones.

The centre's continual striving for excellence means that the centre has correctly identified key areas where outcomes could be improved still further. Rates for initiating breastfeeding are high at over 90%, but those for sustaining breastfeeding after eight weeks do not match this, at 70%. The centre has recently introduced breastfeeding cafés in order to address this, but the impact is not yet apparent. Childhood obesity has been identified as a borough-wide concern, and the centre's popular 'Big Cook, Little Cook' sessions for targeted families have begun to have an impact on this, with a reduction of 1% over the last year. However, funding limitations have affected the delivery of this provision. Similar funding constraints have meant that the centre has shared delivery of Jobcentre Plus services with another centre in the cluster, so as not to duplicate services. However, negotiations are currently underway to bring more services to Cherry Tree, so that families using the centre can access them more quickly and conveniently.

The success of the centre and the pace of its development are down to the vision and ambition of those who lead, manage and govern it. Systems for day-to-day running of the centre are highly efficient, self-evaluation is sophisticated and accurate, and relationships with staff and families are excellent. The centre is highly inclusive and demonstrates a clear commitment to equality and diversity which strongly underpins its work. Consequently, its capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Build upon the success of current initiatives for:
  - sustaining breastfeeding
  - reducing childhood obesity
  - increasing adult access to advice on training and employment.

## How good are outcomes for families?

1

The centre works exceptionally well to improve outcomes for its families. High levels of breastfeeding ensure that babies get the best possible start in life, and children are given excellent healthy, home-cooked, nutritious meals. Adults as well as children make the most of opportunities to be active. The centre recently ran an exercise group exclusively for Muslim women, which was well attended and much appreciated by participants. Although childhood obesity rates are not as high in the centre's catchment area as elsewhere in the borough, family cooking groups have been fully subscribed and participants say it has made a difference to their eating habits.

Children are kept very safe in the centre, and show from their behaviour that they feel secure and settled. Babies, toddlers and pre-school children all form positive relationships with the adults working with them, and readily turn to them if they need help. Parents and carers using the childcare facilities say that they value the continuity and consistency in staffing, and that they feel confident their children's needs are well known to all staff. High take up of first-aid courses for adults has enabled them to feel confident about keeping their children safe.

Children learn and develop exceptionally well at the centre. Over the last five years there has been excellent improvement in the proportions achieving at least 78 points across the early learning goals, with at least six in each of the scales in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. This has risen from 26% to 63%, so that it is now above national figures. During the same period, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest has narrowed by 10%. This has been as a result of an increased focus on continuing professional development, and an overhaul of planning and assessment of children's learning and development needs. Adult education outcomes are also very positive, particularly the ESOL course described above.

The centre plays a significant role in the life of the community, bringing together families who might not otherwise meet and mix with one another. Those who use the centre show respect for other users and show interest in their different and shared experiences. Children show a clear awareness of others and are rapidly learning to take account of their needs. Children's views are systematically taken into account, for example in deciding on the new name for the centre and designing its logo. Parents of all backgrounds play a very active part in the life of the centre and are well represented on the advisory board. At the last summer family fun day, for example, a number volunteered to organise stalls, while the Muslim women's group offered face painting for the children.

Children develop excellent skills for their future, evidenced by their improved levels of literacy, numeracy and social skills. Parents and carers value the opportunities to improve their education and increase their employability, and this is leading to increasing success amongst parents and carers finding work. Individuals say that personalised support from staff with their applications has made the difference in helping them secure employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target 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, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, 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, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>2</b>

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

<b>1</b>
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Excellent use of data means that the centre is able to target services very accurately against a wide range of needs. Over the last two years, the centre has been very successful in increasing its reach amongst its target groups, thanks to this careful analysis of data, and the pro-active work of the outreach services going out into the community and drawing people in. The use of the centre's services has increased threefold, with almost 1,500 contacts made last year compared with around 500 the year before. Of these, contacts with lone parents, minority ethnic families and fathers have shown a significant increase. Contacts with lone parents, for example, rose to over 200 last year from around 50 the previous year. As a result, the centre's groups and courses are frequently full to capacity with adults from a diverse range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, including fathers and grandparents.

Learning and development opportunities for children in the childcare provision have not formed part of this inspection. They are described in full in the inspection report for the registered childcare provision dated November 2009. Learning opportunities for children with their parents and carers are excellent. There is a very good balance of universal groups and targeted groups, all with a focus on helping parents to help their children with physical, social and language development. 'Busy Bees' and 'Baby Rhyme Time' cater for all, while 'Young Parents' Stay and Play' and 'Hummingbirds' for disabled children target particular groups and enable them to access other services and health professionals through the centre. Although numbers of disabled children in the centre's catchment area are low, the centre has been conspicuously successful in attracting families from other areas who are prepared to travel some distance to the 'Hummingbirds' group.

Activities for adults are of a high quality and focus on helping them develop their

parenting and employability skills. The running of work clubs is shared with a nearby children’s centre, but regular sessions to provide advice on benefits and tax credits take place at Cherry Tree and are valued by families. Parents and carers speak highly of the level of personalised support and guidance they receive, irrespective of their different needs. Mothers attending the breastfeeding café, for example, were full of praise for the encouragement they were given to persevere with breastfeeding, including home visits. They were particularly happy that the local centres coordinated their café service, so that mothers could visit any or every day of the week if they wished. Case studies show that children’s needs are exceptionally well met through close liaison with other health and social services, and clear procedures for sharing information.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>

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

**1**

Leadership and management of the centre are exceptionally strong, and staff at all levels share a common vision for improvement and success. There are excellent arrangements for supervision, and staff are full of enthusiasm for their work and praise for the centre. Clear structures for performance management and an emphasis on well-targeted professional development mean that staff feel confident about doing their job. The current focus on reducing childhood obesity, for example, has been supported by training for the whole staff on how to promote this. The local authority gives highly effective support to the centre and is scrupulous in holding it to account.

The centre makes excellent use of the data available from the local authority, and its service development plan is thoroughly grounded in the analysis of the needs of the area. Priorities for improvement are quantifiable, so that the centre’s success in reaching them can be clearly measured and outcomes for the majority of families are very positive. Rigorous self-evaluation and prioritising have led to the centre’s successes in improving outcomes for both children and adults, and in increasing its reach to make services more widely used, especially by target groups. Regular evaluation of commissioned services ensures that funding is well spent, and the head of centre is skilled in seeking out new sources of funds. Consequently, the centre offers outstanding value for money.

Partnership workers value the centre’s facilities, the welcome they receive, and the



quality of communications from the centre. They feel included in decision making through consultation and involvement on the advisory board, which works very efficiently. The centre is very pro-active in seeking out new partnerships. In order to support the increasing numbers of Spanish and Portuguese speakers moving into the area, for example, the centre has made contact with the church which many attend, and is beginning to attract members of this community to its groups. Parents and carers are very happy with the centre and feel that they are very well involved and informed.

Equality and diversity are exceptionally well promoted, and any form of discrimination is not tolerated. The diverse nature of the community is widely reflected in the families using the centre, and all groups have equal access. The centre actively promotes equal opportunities, for example in providing work experience opportunities for students with disabilities who have found it hard to get placements elsewhere. The centre has been successful in increasing its contact with fathers. It has listened to their request for family events rather than fathers-only activities, and organised family fun days open to everyone.

Procedures for safeguarding are excellent. Required recruitment checks have been carried out on all adults who have contact with children, and these are renewed every three years. All staff have undergone training on safeguarding, and have a very clear understanding of the steps they must take if they have a concern. Records show that these are followed rigorously. Training on domestic violence has also been carried out, so that staff can give support to families where necessary. Risk assessments are robust, and parents and carers are involved in compiling them. Liaison with other agencies to protect children is close and swift. Security procedures and the attentiveness of staff mean that children are kept very safe on site.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>meet its core purpose</b>	
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>1</b>

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected Cherry Tree Children’s Centre on 13 and 14 September 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Many thanks to those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups, or spoke to us about the centre. We were very grateful for your help with the inspection and interested to hear your views.

We found that the centre offers you an excellent range of activities and services, and you told us how helpful and supportive the centre is, particularly if you are in difficulties. Staff at all levels are exceptionally good at finding out what the needs of the local community are, and developing their range of services to be of even greater use to the community. We know that you particularly appreciate the wide range of services, and that all the groups and courses run by the centre are very well supported. We visited ‘Busy Bees’, ‘Baby Rhyme Time’ and the breastfeeding café, and saw and discussed the benefits to you and your families from what the centre provides. We were impressed with the commitment and knowledge of staff and the quality of the resources available.

The centre is making an excellent contribution to improving the health, education and well-being of people in the local community. To help improve the centre’s excellent outcomes still further, we have asked senior staff to work with the local authority on increasing the rates of mothers continuing breastfeeding after eight weeks, on reducing levels of childhood obesity and on increasing access for adults to advice on training and employment. The centre will be pleased to hear your views and suggestions on this.

The senior staff do an outstanding job in the way they run the centre. They have created a bright, clean, well-resourced environment where all are welcome. They are particularly skilled in monitoring the work of the centre to see how it can be improved further. Procedures for safeguarding are excellent, and all legal requirements for this are fully met.

You told us that you feel the centre values your views and ideas, and we know that a significant number of you are involved in the running of the centre, through the

advisory board, the parents' forums or by running groups such as the family sports course. Many of you have gained new skills through the courses and groups run by the centre, including ESOL and first aid. We hope that you will all continue to enjoy the benefits of what the centre offers you and your families, and that you will continue to recommend it to others.

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