

Inspection report for East Peckham Children's Centre

Local authority	Southwark
Inspection number	383495
Inspection dates	15–16 September 2011
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Nell Gwynn Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and managers from the centre and the local authority, parents, members of the advisory board and the school's governing body, representatives from the health services, voluntary organisations and other partner organisations. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

East Peckham Children's Centre is a phase one centre that was designated in 2005. It is one of four Children's Centres which serves the families of the Peckham, Peckham Rye and Nunhead locality of Southwark. The centre is linked to and located at the Nell Gwynn Nursery School and managed by the headteacher of the school. It offers universal and targeted services for families. Some services are delivered at another site on the same street which is within walking distance of the centre. Other venues within the reach area are used for activities, such as swimming. Statistical data indicate that the centre operates within an area of high deprivation, high levels of crime and low employment. East Peckham is in the top ten 10% of the most deprived nationally. The most recent available data show that around 38% of under-fives in the area live in poverty.

Housing in the reach area is mainly on large estates of medium and high rise tower blocks and some old terraced houses. Most houses are owned by the local authority or private landlords. The majority of families in the area are from minority ethnic groups with many of African Heritage. English is an additional language for many

parents. Children's levels on entry to early years provision are below what is 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

East Peckham Children's Centre is well established in the community and provides satisfactory services for families. Leaders and managers understand their roles and work together satisfactorily to promote positive outcomes for families. Links with some partners are good but, for reasons beyond their control, centre staff and the local authority have found it difficult to build productive relationships with partners, such as Jobcentre Plus and with some health visitors. However, a new health visitor has been recruited in the area and will be designated to work with the centre.

Effective work with the local authority has led to a significant improvement in the quality of children's learning, which is good, both in the linked nursery school and in the children's centre. Parents benefit from participating in a range of activities and courses offered at the centre, such as 'Best start for babies' and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. They report that these have given them confidence and developed their skills. 'I read much more with my child now and am more creative,' was the comment of one parent, which reflects the views of many others.

The views of parents are highly valued and they are active participants in the operation of the centre. They are seen as partners who can contribute to the development of services and provision. Parents use the Parents' Forum to express their views and to contribute to the operation of the centre.

Families using centre services receive good support and care from staff. The ability of staff to understand and respond appropriately to the diverse needs, interests and, sometimes, the fears of families living in the community is a key strength of the centre. Parents talk highly of the support they have received to overcome problems,

such as managing the difficult behaviour of their children or finding suitable accommodation.

The centre offers an extensive range of services and activities for children and families. However, the increasing popularity of the centre, the increase in registration rates and the recognition of its role in the community as a key resource for families has led to a huge demand for services and provision that cannot always be met. The centre has not found an effective means of managing the limited accommodation it can use to meet the needs of an increasing number of users.

Equality and diversity are at the heart of the activities of the centre and a culture of inclusion is actively promoted. The centre is particularly successful at engaging children from minority ethnic families, children who are disabled or have special educational needs, and children from families that are considered vulnerable because of living with specific problems such as domestic violence. Arrangements for holding the centre and its partners to account are satisfactory. Leadership and management are only satisfactory because the systematic provision and analysis of data and evaluative evidence to demonstrate impact of provision is still developing. This limits the quality of the self-evaluation and development planning processes. The strategy of offering a seamless service to families without always a clear distinction between the functions of the nursery school and the children's centre has led to some loss of focus during self-evaluation on the specific strengths and weaknesses of the children's centre. The local authority acknowledges that this is an area for development and is committed to working with the centre to make improvements. This, together with the centre's own resolve and existing actions to respond to priorities, makes the centre's capacity for sustained improvement satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Centre leaders should work with the local authority to ensure the provision and analysis of data and qualitative evidence are systematically used as part of a rigorous process of self-evaluation, performance management and planning for provision.
- Centre leaders should work with the local authority to explore solutions to managing the demand for services and provision to ensure users and potential users are not excluded from activities and services offered at the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents' understanding of how to improve their health has increased as a result of their involvement with the centre. Breastfeeding rates are higher than the national average and activities organised by the centre, such as swimming and healthy

eating, promote healthy lifestyles. However, obesity rates in the area are higher than the national average and evaluations and data to demonstrate the impact of health-related activities organised by the centre are not available. Links with some parts of the health service are satisfactory. For example, a midwife works well with the family support worker to provide help to vulnerable families. However, effective partnership working with health visitors is still developing and has been impaired by staff changes and vacant posts within the health service.

Families feel safe at the centre and have a satisfactory understanding of how to stay safe. Safeguarding is adequately promoted at the centre and collaborative working with a range of partners by centre staff has helped families remain safe during times of crises. Referrals and signposting for specialist help in relation to safeguarding issues and use of the Common Assessment Framework at the centre are satisfactory. However, reliable data about the number of children on child protection plans has not been available and has not been used systematically to inform practice.

Children make good progress in the centre and are prepared well for the transition to school. There is a strong commitment by the local authority, the centre and their partners to ensure the success of children during their early years. A local collaborative project led by the local authority provides good-quality training targeted at parents to help them develop the skills and knowledge to become active participants in their children's learning and development, and to become mentors to other parents.

Data show that the number of children who achieve 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile has increased significantly over the last three years. The quality of early years learning provided at the centre and by the nursery school linked to the centre is good. Parents, particularly those from minority ethnic groups and those with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress in their personal and social development. One parent said: 'I was quite shy before I came here, but now I've come out of my shell.' Parents develop good parenting skills and identify positive benefits to their children as a result of their improved parenting techniques. The centre is very much at the heart of the community and the contribution of parents towards the operation of the centre is good. They actively contribute to decision making at the centre through their participation on the Parents' Forum and the advisory board. A significant number of parents use their skills on a voluntary basis and act as workshop leaders for workshop sessions, such as sewing and cookery.

Economic stability and independence is actively encouraged and parents using the centre are improving their economic stability and independence by, for example, setting up their own small businesses. However, data on parents' progression into employment or their participation in adult learning and training are limited. Links with Jobcentre Plus have not been productive and there is no regular involvement from its staff with the centre. However, parents receive satisfactory guidance about benefits, job-seeking and employment from the centre's partners. Case studies demonstrate that, as a result of their participation in courses and activities at the centre, parents

from key target groups such as those in workless households have made satisfactory progress in developing skills which they are using to find opportunities for work and to become less reliant on benefits.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	2
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.	3

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff and the partners they work with know their community well. They have a good understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by families but, as one partner said: 'We don't want children to be defined by the problems they face.' The centre actively promotes purposeful learning and empowerment of families. Provision is successful in reaching key target groups, such as parents who have disabled children or children with special educational needs. Personal development is encouraged at the centre, aspirations raised and achievement celebrated. For example, parents who complete sessions and workshops receive a certificate. Parents act as strong advocates for the centre and encourage other parents they know to use the centre for their own development and that of their children.

Staff and the partners they work with are passionate about improving the lives of the families in the area. They work sensitively and skilfully to meet the needs of families who face significant problems, such as domestic violence or who feel threatened by gang violence. Staff understand the barriers faced by parents who have a distrust of authority figures or who need support but are not entitled to statutory services because of immigration problems. The centre makes a real difference to the lives of these families and staff work effectively with a range of agencies to provide an integrated package of care, guidance and support for the most vulnerable families. Case study evidence and personal testimonies from parents demonstrate the centre's success in, for example, helping parents with disabled children receive appropriate and targeted guidance and support, which has resulted in their receiving, for example, more suitable housing for their families or specialist learning support for their children.

The popularity of the centre has led to increased demand for services and demand now exceeds supply of service provision. Although centre staff try to ensure that the most vulnerable families are prioritised for access to activities at the centre, some parents have to be turned away from oversubscribed sessions because of limited accommodation. They are signposted to other centres or services elsewhere. Outreach work is effective in engaging new users and there is constant exploration of how best the centre can engage the harder-to-reach groups within its key target groups, such as teenage lone parents.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leaders and managers within the centre and the local authority ensure that management of the centre is satisfactory and that arrangements for governance and management are understood by all stakeholders. Performance management is satisfactory and provision is planned to meet priorities agreed with the local authority. The advisory board is actively involved in the governance of the centre. Staff work satisfactorily with partners from the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. Quarterly reporting and service level agreements are used adequately to ensure partner organisations are held accountable and contribute towards centre priorities, particularly in relation to key target groups.

User engagement is satisfactory and families are viewed as partners. Their input to the operation of the centre is valued and levels of satisfaction with the centre are high. The self-evaluation process incorporates both the nursery school and the children's centre but evaluation of specific centre-related services and activities in relation to outcomes and improvement planning is still developing. However, the centre manager has been involved in discussions with similar providers in the area and methods to ensure a rigorous single self-evaluation process that takes full account of the needs of both the nursery school and the children's centre are being explored.

The management of resources and value for money are satisfactory. All outcomes are at least satisfactory and some are good. The centre makes good use of the skills and expertise of its own staff and that of staff within partner organisations. The centre operates within a very diverse reach area and the range of families using the

centre is very representative of the local community. These families feel very welcomed at the centre and have good relationships with each other and with centre staff. The centre promotes an inclusive culture and successfully engages the participation of groups that could easily be marginalised or that face specific barriers that could inhibit their progress. For example, ESOL courses offered at the centre help parents develop their language skills and understanding of British culture. They are then better equipped to progress onto other activities and courses at the centre and elsewhere. A well-attended group has been organised to allow fathers and their children to participate in activities and meets every other Saturday. In addition, a Muslim Women's group has been set up in response to the needs and interests of users.

Safeguarding is satisfactorily promoted at the centre and Criminal Records Bureau checks, vetting, staff training and other procedures to protect children and vulnerable families are satisfactory. Early intervention to protect families from harm is appropriate. Referrals to the most appropriate agencies, particularly in relation to the high incidence of domestic violence in the area, are timely and effective in protecting families. However, reductions in funding within one of the centre's partner organisations have affected the level of specialist support that can be provided to families living with domestic violence.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
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	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
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	3

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

None.

The inspection took into account the findings from a concurrent inspection of the nursery school.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the East Peckham Children's Centre on 15–16 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We know from visiting your centre that it is a very welcoming place and very popular within the community. The range of activities on offer at the centre is impressive and we like the fact that there is so much to do and so many opportunities for you and your children to learn. There seems to be a course or activity to suit everyone within the community. This is because staff at the centre know the community really well and have built up good relationships with the families who use the centre.

The care and support offered by staff and the organisations they work with is a real strength of the centre. Some of you have faced particular challenges in your lives but have found the centre to be a place you can turn to when you need help.

We know from talking to you that the centre has also helped many of you to learn how to help your children with their learning and how to help them behave better. Some of you gave us specific examples of how you now spend time reading or singing with your children as a result of what you have learnt at the centre. The statistics we have seen prove that children in the area make good progress with their learning and development, and are well prepared for school. We feel that the quality of learning that is available to your children at the centre is good. We recognise that, as parents, many of you have also benefited from the learning opportunities that are offered to adults. We like the certificates that you receive after attending courses at the centre, which is a real celebration of what many of you have achieved.

Your community is very diverse and the centre is good at encouraging people from different backgrounds, and living in different circumstances within the community, to use the centre. The respect that is shown for the families who use the centre is something we recognise and value. We like the fact that so many of you are involved in supporting the centre and contribute in a very positive manner to the way it operates by being involved in the Parents' Forum, the advisory board or by volunteering to support other parents.

We think that the centre can do much more to try and monitor the quality of what is offered and so we have asked centre staff to work with the local authority to do more to try and find out what it is the centre does well and not so well, and to use

this information to improve the centre. We know from visiting the centre that, because the centre is so popular with families, sometimes there is not enough space at the centre for everyone to attend activities and sessions. We share the disappointment some of you feel at not being able to attend sessions because of the lack of space. We have therefore asked the centre and the local authority to try and find a solution to this problem to make sure nobody is ever sent away from the centre because of lack of space.

We appreciate the time you took to talk us during the inspection and also appreciate your honesty in telling us how the centre has helped you overcome problems. Thank you for being so helpful.

We wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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