

# Inspection report for Bellingham Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	London Borough of Lewisham
<b>Inspection number</b>	383632
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christine Davies HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Angela Peart
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	None
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	EY260743 Bellingham Community Nursery EY337137 Bellingham Community Nursery

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 leaders, managers and staff of the centre and representatives of partner organisations. They met parents and observed the centre's work. Inspectors looked at a range of relevant documentation, including case studies and parents' evaluations of activities.

## Information about the centre

The centre is located in a residential area near to Catford town centre. It was designated as a phase 1 Sure Start centre in 2006 and provides the full core offer of children's centre services. The centre is managed directly by Lewisham Council with an independent advisory board in place. At the time of the inspection, the staffing arrangements and programme of the centre were undergoing extensive change as part of the borough's transformation of early intervention services. The centre was in its first week of operation as the main hub of four children's centres in the south of Lewisham. The centre leader is supported by a receptionist, outreach workers and playworkers, and by administrators and a business manager whose services are shared with other centres. Daycare is provided by a private organisation, Bellingham Community Day Nursery, in linked provision for 48 children under 8 in an adjacent building and in a nearby unit for 21 children up to 2 years of age.

Bellingham is among the 20% most deprived areas in the country. Unemployment rates and the number of families on benefits are higher than the national average. The population is characterised by rapid changes in ethnic and linguistic groups with growing diversity in the last ten years. Two thirds of the population are White British and the largest minority ethnic groups are Somali, Turkish and people of West African heritage. The number of teenage parents and the rate of families' mobility in and out of the area are much higher than is found elsewhere in Lewisham. The proportion of adults who are illiterate is very high, and this is particularly the case among women. Children's skills and understanding are often low on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage and many speak little or no English.

## 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**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**2**

## Main findings

Bellingham is a good centre that has grown to be the heart of the community for many young families in an area of high deprivation. The centre's leaders and managers know the needs of groups and individuals in the area exceptionally well. Managers have built their understanding from their own comprehensive activity data and from up-to-date population data gathered by schools, the local authority, health and other partner organisations. From analysis of the information, the centre has put well-founded plans in place to continue the core health, family support and learning services. The views of partners and the community have been taken into account. Although a few users voice their disquiet about the loss of services, such as the toy library while services are relocated and while a re-commissioning process takes place, families continue to sign up and attend the continuing learning and recreation provision in good numbers. The majority of families are in favour of the support they get and the direction that the centre is taking.

The managers and staff have worked exceptionally well as a team to communicate with users and to ensure continuous support for the most vulnerable families. The health and emotional well-being of regular users improve and there is steady improvement against some key local health targets, such as a reduction in the number of low birth-weight babies born in the area. The work of the centre contributes well to safeguarding individual children through offering parenting support and regular play sessions that are part of child protection plans. Children and their families feel safe in the centre and many users turn to the centre first in times of family difficulty. The inclusion strategies and the warm, individual welcome provided by the centre promote a sense of belonging that gives many parents the confidence to express their views on the services provided for them. This continues to be evident as the centre embarks on the new phase of provision and the parents' forum is active.

Parents and children enjoy the centre's recreational and learning activities. Attendance rates have grown steadily over the last three years. All stay and play

provision has been running at or near full attendance capacity and parenting courses are oversubscribed. Children attending the centre make good progress from their starting points. The centre has made great strides in gathering information from partner schools to find that children who regularly attend the centre and the linked daycare, whose progress is tracked, do as well as their peers nationally and better than others in Lewisham by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre is developing systems but does not consistently track the progress of all regular attendees in all their crèche and play provision. Most parents show increased confidence in their own learning and development through participation at the centre. Parents say that they want more short workshop courses to enable them to make a start in gaining employable skills and later progress on to qualifications although few are planned by the centre at present. With good access to information, advice and guidance, some parents volunteer and go on to work, for example in childcare.

The balance of outcomes for children and adult users is good. Managers have maintained good day-to-day management of the centre through a very intense period of change. Policies and procedures ensure that premises and staff provide safeguards to users. The centre's staff and leaders are passionate about inclusion. Strong partnerships have helped the centre to sustain their programmes and make a smooth transition to the new structures. With good strategic vision in place, good resources, exemplary teamwork and a solid track record of improvement to build on, the centre has good capacity to improve outcomes further.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Implement systematic tracking of the achievements of all users, particularly children who attend activities regularly, to promote the greatest possible learning and development for all participants.
- Improve the potential for economic stability for more users, the centre and its partners to improve information and access to courses and training opportunities that:
  - meet the needs of those parents who have been hardest to engage, for example by offering short and taster courses for them
  - provide routes to qualifications.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>2</b>
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The groups and individuals most vulnerable to poor health outcomes are very well served by universal services, which are coherently planned with good consideration of users' economic and cultural needs. Take-up rates of health checks and some immunisations for children are good. With the support of a midwife and peer advisers, good numbers of mother initiate and sustain breastfeeding. Targeted families learn to cook and eat healthily. Parents seek advice on their children's health and development at the centre and get prompt access to specialists either through

health visitors or referral to the child development centre. In an area where isolation is a major problem, the centre contributes significantly to improved social contact and well-being of young families.

With the support of skilled staff, children behave well at the centre and play safely. Staff are vigilant to changes in, and difficulties for, families using the centre and promptly refer children in need of protection so that they are effectively safeguarded. Parents feel safe in the centre and use it, as one parent said, 'As first port of call if I have any worries.' Staff contribute detailed reports to help ensure the effectiveness of protection plans.

Participants enjoy the variety of family learning, stay and play, messy play activities and particularly outings that the centre has organised. With the broad range of experiences offered, children, including those with English as an additional language, and special educational needs and/or disabilities, develop good communication skills. Transition to school for regular users and those in the linked daycare is well planned and children settle in quickly. Parents gain skills in weaning and feeding their children and in managing their behaviour well.

Relationships between staff and families are highly positive. The centre strives for the inclusion of all groups in the community. Most parents contribute to evaluations and the parents' forum is active. Parents' voices have been central to shaping services. The centre can demonstrate some notable examples of parents involving themselves increasingly in the work of the centre and the surrounding community. Parents say they enjoy the diverse company of others and respect for each others' languages and cultures is notable in the centre.

The economic well-being of families using the centre is satisfactory. Some parents have developed their skills from their first participation in the familiar setting of the centre and have gained employment in nurseries and schools. Many take the first steps in learning through courses, such as paediatric first aid. Fathers told us that they thought this was an ideal way for them to gain skills to help their families. Take up of basic education and English classes is satisfactory, although parents would like more modular courses to help them to progress through to qualifications.

*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>2</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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups,</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</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>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

The centre knows the families who use the centre very well and good continuity planning ensures that relationships between the users and staff continue. Health and child development specialist provide robust information to help the centre plan and target its activities, for example around nutrition and healthy food for some families. The centre uses tracking and monitoring procedures successfully to evaluate how well users are doing in some areas of its work but this is not, at this time, systematic for all users.

Services within the centre have transformed over time to meet local needs and the range continues to be good. Strong partnerships with health, schools, private and voluntary providers and council services have been key to the centre continuing to provide a broad range of services. Good interim arrangements are in place for continuing essential specialist health and family support services. The range is not cut but completely reshaped to focus on successes, such as Stay and Play, which add most to improving outcomes. Some services, such as the toy library, will be recommissioned after a tendering process. Specialist health services, such as smoking cessation support and the nutritionist, are no longer commissioned but will be provided in response to need.

In an area where some families stay only for a short while and many are socially isolated, parents say they enjoy meeting new friends and trying new activities.

Provision to help children to learn and develop is good and is fully accessible for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the play area and main building. The centre has created a sensory environment that benefits the learning of many of the targeted groups of families. The locations are carefully considered to be, as one parent put it, 'at the heart of the community'. The ethos of the centre provides purposeful settings that encourage adults and children to learn together. Parents attend courses in good numbers and their achievements are appropriately celebrated and fostered.

Skilled early years professionals provide good-quality activities and care in the centre's settings. The quality of the linked daycare is good and the nursery recently won a prestigious national press 'inclusion award' for its partnership work in the area. Information on a range of family interest and concerns is readily available. Staff have good knowledge of local resources and advise parents well on how to access them.

*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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**2**

Changes in the centre's programme and organisation have been managed and led well with services that are increasingly focused on the local authority's priorities for young families. The development plans are based firmly on analysis of an exemplary range of information about local need from all key partners. Roles and relationships are well understood. Plans draw on the centre's accurate assessment of its own past performance and users' evaluations to provide good continuity. Expertise among staff has been retained. There is good teamwork and staff are deployed well, under new arrangements, to make the best use of their knowledge of the area established in previous roles.

The services planned in the new arrangements form part of a highly coherent overarching strategy with a strong emphasis on inclusion of those who have not previously accessed services. Activities take place at the main premises and in other centres, schools and community settings in the southern area of the borough where needs are known to be greatest. Outcomes for families, including those in the most deprived wards, are generally good. Services are carefully integrated so that established and effective partnerships with health providers have a marked effect on users' health and well-being. Children and vulnerable adults using the centre are effectively safeguarded through the activity of the centre and partners. Parents take part in, and contribute to, local life in increasing numbers. The learning and development of children in the area, particularly regular users, are improving strongly. Economic stability is improving well for some groups, such as young parents who are targeted for support by the centre and partners.

The main centre premises, the under fives play area and the linked daycare achieve high standards of safety and a welcoming environment. Although not all other premises are specifically designed for young families, they are made safe and secure. The value in the dispersed premises is proven by parents' appreciation that they are local and convenient so attendance is good. Policies and procedures ensure that staff working with families are vetted, well trained and well qualified for their work. Professionals work closely together through established protocols to ensure that adults and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those in need of protection, receive prompt and effective support. Locality panels formalise and strengthen previous methods of the centre and partners working well together to share resources.



Managers and staff worked exceptionally well as a team to keep up communication with families during the changes. Parents' contributions are regularly sought in questionnaires and through the parents' forum, and more targeted work in the new arrangements has identified individual and street-level groups that are not accessing services well. The views of existing users are well known and have helped to shape the good interim arrangements and future commissioning plans. Evaluations have helped with decisions about the location of services in health centres and schools.

*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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</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>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>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</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>2</b>

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

None.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bellingham Children's Centre on 18 and 19 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We thank the parents and staff of the centre for being so helpful and welcoming to us when we visited at such a busy time. We hear that it was the first week of the new arrangements for the centre. We would particularly like to thank the parents who came in especially to talk to us at times when they would not normally come to the centre.

You told us that Bellingham Children's Centre is at the heart of the community. The attendance numbers at stay and play sessions in all of the centre's locations have been good in the past. You say you will carry on attending although many of the staff have changed.

You told us that you particularly like the under-fives play area. You enjoy meeting new people in the safe, enjoyable surroundings. Going to the play area helps you to feel part of the community.

Some of you told us you would miss the toy library because it has closed in the local shop. You are looking forward to the re-opening, although the centre does not yet know where that will be.

The centre management team knows the needs and concerns of families in the area very well. The centre works closely with schools, the local authority, health and other partner organisations to provide services that you find convenient. Many parents tell the centre that they really appreciate having the health visitors on hand in the same building.

Because midwives, nutritionists and other specialists like speech and language therapists visit the centre, families get good support with their health and well-being. Many families take up active lifestyles because of the centre's encouragement.

Families see the centre as a safe place to be and many people turn to staff there first in times of family difficulty. The centre helps families to learn about safety and to keep themselves safe. The centre works well with other organisations to protect children.

The centre staff give everyone a warm, individual welcome. This gives you the confidence to express your views on the services provided. Your views have been influential in shaping up the new services. We were pleased to see that the parents' forum is active.

Children attending the centre regularly make good progress in their learning and development. They behave well in the centre and many do very well in language and communication. They are well prepared for school when they have been in some

groups regularly or in daycare. We recommend that the centre makes better records to track how well all children that attend are doing so that all can learn as well as possible.

You find the parenting courses helpful and most parents' confidence increases when attending the sessions. You say that you want more short workshop courses to make a start in gaining employable skills and go on later to qualifications. We have asked the centre to plan more of these.

The centre gives satisfactory support to you for employment and training and to manage your finances. With support, some parents volunteer and go on to work, for example in childcare.

The range of services, although changing, is very broad. Provision is good quality and, because services work closely together, you get good access to information, advice and guidance.

We found that the centre has gone through an intense period of change. Most of you support the direction that the centre is going in, although it has been difficult for a few families to come to terms with the changes. We assess that with the support of partner organisations the managers and staff have the skill and passion to continue providing good-quality services that help parents to improve their families' lives.

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