

Inspection report for Cambridge Road Children's Centre

Local authority	Southend-On-Sea
Inspection number	383644
Inspection dates	18–19 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Priscilla McGuire

Centre leader	Zoe Larman
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with advisory board members, leaders and managers from the local authority and the centre, centre staff, parents, representatives from partner organisations such as social care, childminders and the health services.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Cambridge Road Children's Centre is located near the town centre of Southend-on-Sea and serves a population that has high levels of deprivation. Four of the super output areas are in the 30% most deprived in the country and two are in the 10% most deprived. The number of benefit claimants in the reach area is high, as is the number of workless households. Most children start early years education with a level of skills and knowledge that is lower than what is expected for their age.

The centre provides integrated services that include health services, advice and guidance, outreach services, family support and crèche facilities. The centre manager reports directly to a regional manager for Family Action, the charity that manages the children's centre contract on behalf of the local authority. A steering group fulfils the duties of the advisory board.

Although the location of the centre's building is in a road of privately owned houses, many of the families within the reach area live in privately rented accommodation, local authority owned or social housing. Most of the families served by the centre are of White British heritage, but a minority of families are of Asian and Polish backgrounds.

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

Cambridge Road Children's Centre offers excellent provision for families. Outcomes for families are all at least good and are excellent in some aspects. Centre staff make a concerted effort to develop the capacity of families to make progress in their social and personal development and to progress from using targeted provision to using universal services. Through its outreach work, carefully targeted provision and effective assessment of need, the centre has been successful in securing high levels of participation from target groups, such as lone parents, teenage parents, families in workless households and the most vulnerable groups within the reach area.

The centre has established itself as a very welcoming and safe community resource and is highly regarded by families and partner organisations. Use of resources and accommodation are excellent. Decisive action is taken to either add or remove services if justified by the level of demand.

The promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion is excellent. The centre has made an excellent response to narrowing the achievement gap between boys and girls identified in the reach area, by setting up a 'Narrowing the Gap' programme of activities to promote good-quality learning and achievement for boys. The needs of the relatively few Muslim families in the reach area have also been taken into account and a room at the centre has been designated for use as a prayer room when required.

Deprivation levels in some parts of the reach area are very high and the centre has responded to this by making outstanding use of individual support, guidance, training and project work to improve the economic and social well-being of families and to develop their ability to improve their life chances. Guidance about safety and safeguarding practice, including multi-agency working, is excellent. Training in all aspects of safeguarding for children is of a very high standard.

Leadership and management of the centre are excellent. The links between Family

Action, which holds the contract to deliver children centre services, the local authority and the advisory board work well. Managers have high ambitions for the centre and do their utmost to provide services that meet the needs of target groups. The centre uses its links with health service partners to obtain as much qualitative data and regular information about health needs in the reach area as possible. However, the centre does not yet receive up-to-date data for all health performance indicators at reach level and is limited in the extent to which it can demonstrate impact across outcomes. The systems used by the local authority to provide data to centres have also recently changed and this has affected the way impact is monitored. The centre is also still in the early stages of using a new system to measure outcomes that relate to personal development and emotional well-being. The culture in the centre is one of continuous improvement of both provision and of staff who are encouraged to develop their potential. Leaders and managers have an excellent knowledge of their provision and take decisive actions to improve quality. For these reasons and because of the outstanding leadership and management, the centre has an excellent capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should build on its existing relationships with health partners to ensure the systematic provision of data at reach level that can support the centre in planning and monitoring the impact of health provision.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre has been successful in improving outcomes for families, including those from target groups such as the most vulnerable families, lone parents, teenage parents and children from workless households. Work with lone and teenage parents, both in the centre and through targeted support work in their homes, has helped to improve their emotional health. Parents have also received health benefits from learning how to prepare healthy meals for their families. One parent commented about the impact of her learning about healthy eating as follows: 'For the first time, we sat and ate a healthy meal together as a family. I cooked from scratch and we all ate the same meal ... I think my shopping bill was about £70 cheaper than when I bought convenience foods.'

The centre's work to keep families physically and emotionally safe is outstanding. The centre provides a secure environment for families. Information about children on child protection plans is also used effectively to identify how best the centre can respond to their needs and those of their parents. Parents who attend the 'Mothers on Their Own' (MOTO) programme or who attend the 'Freedom Programme' which is targeted at victims of domestic violence, particularly value the emotionally safe environment of the centre. 'You can open up here without feeling your children are

going to be taken away,' was the comment of one parent which reflects how safe parents feel at the centre. Parents can also give very specific examples of how their understanding about safety has equipped them with the knowledge and confidence to take decisive action to keep themselves and their children safe from harm.

Through participation in activities at the centre, children and adults make good progress. The gap between children who achieve 78 points on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and the rest is narrowing significantly. Through the work of staff in the crèche who plan activities that take account of the individual needs of children and which link clearly to Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes, the centre is making a good contribution to the development, enjoyment and skills of children. Parents also make good progress in developing effective parenting skills and personal and transferable skills in areas such as confidence, self-esteem and time management.

The centre is well established in the community. Parents' groups comment on the improvement in their children's behaviour as a direct result of knowledge and skills they have acquired from the centre and from support received in their home from family support workers. Families positively contribute to the work of the centre and contribute to its improvement by expressing their views through evaluations and through their verbal feedback given to staff.

Centre staff are involved in excellent work to tackle poverty in the most vulnerable homes. For example, the centre has been commissioned to work on an 'income maximisation and financial education project' which is helping families become economically stable. In addition, through their participation in a range of activities at the centre, a large majority of families in the reach area, including those from identified target groups, are involved in some form of adult learning or programmes. Parents are developing confidence, skills and knowledge which increase their employability. Their aspirations are being raised, they develop ambition and are highly motivated to seek employment and to further their education. Jobcentre Plus and other agencies provide high-quality personal advice and guidance to families about benefits, job search skills and employment opportunities.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
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

1

How good is the provision?

1

'Without the centre, I wouldn't be as strong as I am,' was the comment of one parent which reflects the views of many. The centre provides an excellent range of services for families, especially those from target groups such as teenage parents, lone parents, children and parents with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and the most vulnerable groups within the community. Programmes such as MOTO and BUMPS ('Better Understanding of Motherhood and Parenting') are specifically designed to respond to the needs of groups such as lone parents and teenage parents.

The promotion of purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for families is excellent. Programmes are expertly and sensitively designed to meet the needs of adults such as lone parents and young parents. There are also excellent links with agencies which provide a much specialised service at the centre to help, for example, parents with substance misuse problems learn how to improve their parenting skills. The centre is very conscious of its responsibility to promote independence of families and seeks to empower them through high-quality activities to help both children and adults develop their knowledge and skills.

The centre knows its community well and has been very successful in using outreach and other work to engage its key target groups of lone parents, teenage parents, families from workless households, black and minority ethnic groups and families in most need of intervention and support. Assessment of the needs of families is good and services are adapted to meet the needs of target groups. For example, mothers who progressed from attending the MOTO programme of activities valued the opportunity to meet as a group of lone mothers and requested an additional programme. The centre responded by setting up a MOTO 'Stay n Play' group.

The quality of care and support for families is outstanding. Some of the families who use the centre have faced multiple barriers in the past and many are still trying to overcome the consequences of having lived with domestic violence or other problems that seriously affect their well-being and that of their children. Through its effective work with other organisations, the centre is able to offer a well-integrated package of care and support for families. The 'respite' crèche is an excellent resource that is used well on a referral basis for parents who have interviews or appointments outside the centre or who just want a break for a couple of hours from caring for their children.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leadership and management are excellent. The cycle of performance management is very effective, well understood and is leading to positive outcomes across all areas. Regular reviews of performance at all levels and excellent reporting mechanisms ensure that managers and leaders at all levels have an excellent overview of the performance of the centre. Managers and leaders within Family Action, the local authority and the centre are fully committed to improving the life chances of families within the reach area. Governance and accountability arrangements are well understood and lines of responsibility are clear.

Excellent evaluation and review of provision has led to the increased focus of the centre on meeting the needs of specific target groups. A performance, achievements and outcomes review by the local authority and the annual conversation are used exceptionally well as management tools to monitor the centre's performance against outcomes and to identify priorities. The quality of data provided by the health services has improved significantly in recent years but some gaps remain in the provision of data which are specific to the centre's reach area. The centre has started to use the 'Family Star' system to improve the way personal development skills are assessed. It is too soon for outcomes for all families to be measured.

The centre is managed in a way that makes the best use of resources and provides excellent value for money. For example, the centre works collaboratively with neighbouring centres such as Blenheim Children's Centre to share resources, expertise and good practice. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The promotion of inclusion for all families is excellent. The needs of families with disabled children or those with additional needs are very well met. For example, the centre uses the 'Marvellous Minders' service to provide specialist childminding support for families who find it difficult to access childminding home-based support because of the complex needs of their children.

Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. The use of referral and signposting as an integral part of multi-agency working to safeguard families is excellent. 'Cause for Concern' records are used very effectively to identify early signs of safeguarding issues. Through the 'Freedom' programme, a structured training programme for victims of domestic violence, and through partnership work, staff provide excellent support to safeguard victims of domestic violence. Staff have an excellent

understanding of the boundaries of their work and know when early intervention is required but also understand when the needs of families extend beyond what the centre staff can support.

Partners work productively with centre staff to improve the lives of families. Relationships with partners are well understood and well managed. User engagement is excellent and the voice of families highly valued. Feedback and suggestions from users are used to ensure provision matches their need. Satisfaction levels from families who use the centre are very high.

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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	2
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	1

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cambridge Road Children's Centre on 18 and 19 October 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to speak to us and for contributing to the inspection process. You told us how much you and your children enjoy coming to the centre and also told us how highly you think of the centre. We know from talking to you and also from looking at some written evidence, that the centre is making a positive difference to the lives of families in the area.

The management of your centre is excellent. Staff are well qualified for their roles, have high ambitions for the centre and want the best for you. They work well with staff from other organisations such as the health services, childminding organisations and Jobcentre Plus.

Both you and your children are making good progress as a result of your participation in the centre's activities. We know that your children make good progress in the crèche and that you also make good progress in developing skills. Some of you have benefited much from attending sessions about healthy eating and, as a result, you now provide healthier meals for your families.

We were impressed with the excellent range of services at the centre. We especially like the way that some of the programmes, such as the MOTO and 'Bumps' groups have been specifically designed to support families who face particular challenges. We also know from talking to some of you, how much you appreciate the opportunity you have at the centre to meet up with people in similar situations to your own.

The centre's work to promote safeguarding is excellent and making a very positive difference to the lives of many families. Your safety and that of your children is a priority for centre staff. We know that the staff take swift action to find solutions when problems arise that could affect your families' safety. Some of you gave us some brilliant examples of how what you learnt about safeguarding helped you to make decisions that have improved the quality of your lives. We also know that staff work exceptionally well with other organisations to help you stay safe.

We know that the staff work really hard to analyse statistics about the area and that they already monitor how well different families participate in the centre's activities. We know that it is not easy for the staff to get hold of statistics about the health of the community but we have asked the local authority to help the centre obtain all the statistics it needs to monitor the health of the community.

We believe that staff at the centre really care about you and we believe that the way they care and support families is outstanding. At those times in your lives when you feel particularly vulnerable or need help, the centre is there for you.

Once again thank you so much for taking time out from your busy lives to speak to us. We wish you and your family all the best.

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