

Inspection report for Kensington Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Liverpool |
| Inspection number | 367820 |
| Inspection dates | 2 – 3 November 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Judith Elderfield |

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| Centre leader | Lyn Carey |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
| Centre address | Life Bank 23 Quorn Street Liverpool Merseyside L7 2QR |
| Telephone number | 0151 300 8420 |
| Fax number | 0151 300 8422 |
| Email address | kensingtoncc@parksoptions.co.uk |

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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | EY376559 - Life Bank Nursery at Kensington Children's Centre |

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector

The inspectors held meetings with the management board, the children's centre manager, nursery representative, staff, parents, carers and users and representatives of partner organisations.

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

Information about the centre

Kensington Children's Centre is a Phase one children's centre delivering the full core offer under the governance of Parks Options Ltd, which is ultimately accountable to Liverpool City Council. The Sure Options Board is a subsidiary set of the company which has responsibility for children's centres. The children's centre was designated in 2004 and moved to new purpose built premises in 2005.

The centre is located within one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Of the eight super output areas which comprise the Kensington ward, four feature in the bottom 1% nationally in terms of overall deprivation, two in the bottom 5%, one in the bottom 10% and one in the bottom 20%. A diverse range of minority ethnic groups are represented within the reach area, with families of Chinese origin representing the largest minority group at 20.5% followed by those of African origin at 20.1%. There is also a minority of Polish families in the area. In the Kensington ward, 76% of the minority ethnic population do not have English as their first language.

The worklessness rate in 2010 for all people living in Kensington was 32.2% and the most recent figures indicate that 445 children aged birth to four years live in out of work benefit claimant households. These figures are amongst the highest in the city. Around 48.7% of

unemployed people in the reach area have no qualifications. Significant social issues affecting the area include extreme poverty, unemployment, poor health, alcohol and substance misuse and crime.

There is an integrated nursery on site which offers care and education for up to 62 children from birth to five years and at the last inspection was judged good overall with some outstanding aspects. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with levels of development well below those expected for their age nationally, especially in communication, language and literacy and in personal and social development.

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

Kensington Children's Centre is an outstanding centre. It is the hub of the community, providing a very welcoming and safe environment for its users. Impressive provision and exemplary leadership and management are underpinned by a highly effective, very professional advisory board and extremely productive partnership arrangements. The governance is outstanding with clear lines of accountability. The advisory board supports and challenges the centre's work very effectively by setting ambitious targets. Expectations of all staff and users are very high and a strong 'can do' culture inspires confidence. The centre is making an extremely positive difference to the lives of children and families, particularly those most disadvantaged by economic and social circumstances. Users are very appreciative of the centre's work and its positive impact on their lives. A typical view expressed by one user is, 'Staff treat you with respect – no one judges you or looks down on you for the way you are. I feel they care about me – the centre has changed my life forever.'

Leaders are accurate and self critical in their self-evaluation. The centre has very effectively identified areas for improvement and sets itself very high standards for achieving outcomes and targets. This, together with the excellent leadership, means the centre's overall effectiveness, capacity to improve and its impressive, well evidenced record of continuous improvement to date are outstanding.

The outcomes for users are outstanding because provision is highly effective and relevant to the needs of those in the community. Children and adults learn to lead healthy lifestyles through the excellent advice they receive. For example, there has been a significant increase in the number of women breastfeeding from birth and an upward trend of those still breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. The Kensington ward is ranked second worst for the total number of smokers in Liverpool. However, almost 100 people attended the 'Fagends Quit Smoking' sessions ran by the centre and of these, a good proportion have subsequently quit smoking. A continuing upward trend of women who have ceased smoking whilst pregnant between 2008 and 2010 is well evidenced in the centre's data.

The centre has invested heavily to support eating healthy and healthy lifestyles. The 'Cooking in Schools' project which centre staff deliver in all local schools has proved very popular and is resulting in a small decline in the obesity figures. The centre has also printed 4000 copies of a 'Healthy Eating' cookbook which have been distributed to all participating households in the reach area.

Participation rates in activities and accredited education courses for adults are high. The friendships forged through regular contact encourage parents to support each other and become more independent and self-reliant. Parents participate eagerly in activities that strengthen their emotional resilience and improve their family's well-being. Courses enhance their academic and vocational skills. During 2010/11 parents achieved 172 accredited certificates and qualifications in language and literacy, mathematics, computing and childcare. A significant number of parents and carers have progressed to meaningful employment, university or volunteering. Many parents progress well towards becoming wholly independent of benefits. The centre's links and working arrangements with Jobcentre Plus are particularly strong.

Outcomes for children who attend the centre's childcare provision are outstanding. They have excellent opportunities to develop their confidence and independence. The gap between children from the very deprived backgrounds and the rest is narrowing but the centre understands there is still much more work to be done to narrow the gap even further. Award ceremonies, displays and newsletters in all the public areas celebrate users' achievements effectively. A high standard of parents' and carers' and children's art work can also be seen throughout the centre.

Safeguarding practice for children and vulnerable adults is exemplary. All legal requirements are met and there are meticulous systems in place to check visitors to the centre. Early intervention for vulnerable children and families and the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) far exceeds the anticipated level of support. The centre has a very empathetic approach to safeguarding for groups with specific needs relating to their culture or religion.

Parents and carers are enthusiastic about the well maintained premises and resources and highly value its committed team of staff and volunteers. Comments such as, 'They have been my lifeline.' typify the impact of the work of the staff. Parents and carers make a

significant contribution to the work of the centre through the parents' forum, which consists of a mixed ethnic group of parents and carers. However, the advisory board is not currently representative of the diverse cultures that make up the users of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Include further representatives on the advisory board from the diverse community that the centre serves.

How good are outcomes for families?

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Evaluations of activities in the centre and outcomes from outreach support give compelling evidence of users' increased emotional well-being, confidence, self-esteem and knowledge of how to keep themselves and their families healthy. The large cafe at the centre is very popular with families and provides a healthy eating lunch twice a week for minimum cost. It is a popular meeting place for parents and offers a bright, clean welcoming environment.

Safety and safeguarding are key priorities for the centre. The risk assessment of premises, activities, services and trips is exceptional. Early intervention is outstanding and a dedicated family support worker based within the children's centre team provides excellent support to families. The CAF process is used highly effectively to ensure there is swift access to support. Case study evidence demonstrates that parents and carers with alcohol and substance misuse problems have received excellent support from the CAF team. During 2010-2011, the number of CAFs opened by the centre increased dramatically. Through the CAF process, parents and carers are encouraged to attend wider children's centre activities as part of their plan. Detailed progress records of all the work undertaken are reviewed and monitored by the centre manager and the family support worker. Staff also attend case conferences and work very effectively with families who have children on child protection plans or interim care orders.

Teenage pregnancies in the Kensington Children's Centre reach area are higher than the national average. However, recent figures show a slight downward trend. The centre works well with teenage parents through home visits and a targeted weekly drop-in and activity group. The group is consulted about programmes they would like the centre to provide and members of the group also participate in a cookery class. Many teenage parents have attended activities in the centre other than those specifically designed for them. For example, four teenage fathers attended cookery sessions and two teenage parents spoke at a Liverpool City Council conference and to a delegation from the Royal Thai government who came to the city to learn about partnership work in addressing teenage pregnancies. Evidence shows that some teenage parents have progressed to further and higher education, gained employment or become involved in volunteering at the centre.

The centre demonstrates a very high level of success in helping parents develop economic stability. A dedicated area in the centre provides information about employment and training opportunities, adult learning courses, support for lone parents and information for childminders. The 'Job Cafe' operates weekly in conjunction with Jobcentre Plus and provides guidance and advice about employment and benefit claims. The centre has a successful English for speakers of other languages programme (ESOL). A parent mentor from the Chinese community has played a large part in encouraging this once isolated community to attend activities in the centre. The use of an interpreter has proved to be instrumental in motivating parents and carers to attend ESOL classes. The use of the free crèche at the centre provides excellent support for parents who attend accredited courses. An Open College Network accredited course on 'Parenting Skills', for those parents and carers of children with behavioural issues is proving very popular. Of the 58 children with special educational needs and/or disabilities identified in the reach area, 56 became involved in the centre. The parents attend a 'Talking Together Group' in the centre and find this gives them and their children confidence. They exchange ideas and problems and say they find the time spent talking to others with similar problems empowering. Parents also like the idea that whilst they are talking, their children can play with children who do not have disabilities, in the crèche.

The Early Years Foundation Stage scores for the six schools in the centre's reach area show a significant improvement between 2009/2010 in narrowing the gap. The centre has worked successfully with the schools to improve their scores. The family link worker and the early years teacher work very effectively with each school to identify their priorities from their Early Years Foundation Stage scores. The centre has offered dedicated support to all schools in the reach area that have identified specific areas where they need support or in the development of further understanding of the needs of different cultural groups. Also through initiatives such as 'Cooking in Schools,' 'Dads and Children Cooking sessions', 'Bookshare' and 'Story in a Suitcase' parental involvement in school activities are being encouraged. The early years teacher has participated in training with school staff and staff attend training sessions at the children's centre. The children's centre programme promotes excellent opportunities for parents and carers to play with their children. Children are very well behaved and engage well in play and learning activities.

Children's ideas and views are listened to and incorporated into the weekly planning of activities. Parents are consulted regularly and a well established Parents Forum meets monthly. Parents are also taking an active role in fundraising activities for the centre and are active members of the advisory board.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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| The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them | 1 |

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| The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| 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?

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The quality of provision is outstanding. Through excellent partnership working, outreach initiatives, high quality data analysis and strong community links, the centre gathers excellent qualitative and quantitative information about its reach area in relation to teenage parents, fathers, families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, minority ethnic groups and lone parents. In particular, staff make extremely robust assessment of the needs of the families, particularly the needs of the most vulnerable families and provides a package of support that is highly pertinent to individual needs. The range of services and activities offered is impressive and the centre can demonstrate excellent participation, attendance and retention rates. Reports show careful recording of attendance and retention rates for all activities, which are referenced to Every Child Matters outcomes and clearly demonstrates increases in use of services. The centre has reached 99% of the children in its area, of which 81% engage meaningfully in activities.

The centre systematically assesses and records outcomes in terms of progress made by parents and children at the start and completion of activities or courses and also in relation to interventions and user satisfaction rates. Ongoing evaluation of each activity and every outreach visit is used very well to supplement the assessment of needs. This information is used very effectively to reshape service delivery, to ensure continued usefulness and to ensure that the impact on outcomes demonstrate that services provide value for money. As well as extensive data gathering and analysis to evidence impact, the centre provides compelling evidence of the less measurable but highly positive outcomes arising from the provision. For example, parents report significantly increased awareness of their child's emotional needs following attendance at the parenting classes. Feedback from parents and the records of their learning journeys testifies to the users' significant enjoyment and the positive impact their participation has had on their lives.

Excellent care, guidance and support are offered, both in-house, through highly effective partnership services and through sensitive and skilled outreach and family support. The centre distributes information and guidance effectively about its services through a variety of media including leaflets in a range of community languages, signs, cartoons and a plasma screen. Use of excellent quality data and information supports the centre's priorities to reduce smoking, obesity and substance misuse rates and to increase breastfeeding rates and awareness of home safety. Families undergoing intense hardship or crisis told

inspectors of the life-changing support given by the centre. As a result, users are enthusiastic ambassadors for the centre and consider it to be a 'brilliant place to go for help and advice.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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| 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 outstanding and wholly focused on improving the outcomes for those most in need. Governance arrangements are extremely well established. The advisory board is very effective in its role. It evaluates its own impact and strives to improve further. The local authority provides an excellent level of support and rigorous challenge. Self-evaluation is accurate and well informed by the rigorous monitoring of the impact of the services upon the users achievements and the frequent gathering and analysis of feedback from users. Very rigorous and highly effective processes of monitoring and assessment are in place. Partnership arrangements with other agencies and community organisations are excellent, and make a significant contribution to the services users enjoy at the centre. The leaders' identification of the many areas they seek to improve demonstrates their reflective practice and commitment to continuous self-challenge. This provides strong evidence for the centre's outstanding capacity to improve.

The centre manager provides high-quality leadership and sets very high expectations for the centre. Other members of the senior management team work well together with the centre manager to set and achieve ambitious targets. Services are reviewed to ensure high levels of efficiency in providing services and to maximise use of resources. Excellent use of data analysis provides an accurate view of where best provision and outreach work should be targeted. As a consequence, best use is made of resources to ensure all the identified target groups are supported and this results in the centre providing outstanding value for money.

Safeguarding practices are exemplary and are given the highest priority by all at the centre. Staff are tenacious in their approach to ensuring families receive high levels of appropriate support. Communication between key agencies and the centre is excellent. The suitability of all adults who work or volunteer at the centre is rigorously checked. Staff and users demonstrate an excellent understanding of child protection. All staff have up-to-date training and take part in regular review and development activity to update their knowledge. Very effective safety procedures have been established for the reception team to follow in

relation to ensuring safe and secure access to the building. Child protection is well publicised in all rooms to ensure staff know what procedures to follow if they have any concerns about a child's welfare or safety.

The centre is highly inclusive and the promotion of equality and celebration of diversity are excellent. Staff are sensitive to the needs and cultures of those who use its services. There is a high level of registration from all groups, particularly fathers and male carers, who attend a very popular 'Dads club' twice a month on a Saturday and also attend many other activities in the centre. The centre actively promotes community cohesion. The key target groups and most vulnerable receive excellent support which is tailored to their needs and delivered through strong partnership working.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| 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.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Kensington Children's Centre on the 2 - 3 November 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with you. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities provided through the centre. The centre does many things very well. You told us that staff are friendly, hard working and give excellent support. We agree with you. We found the centre to be welcoming to all families and buzzing with activity and children's happy laughter. The staff have high levels of expertise and offer good practical and emotional support to families who need it. Staff provide excellent care, guidance and support for all centre users and especially to families in times of difficulties or crisis. Their highly inclusive approach means that families from different parts of the community are all made very welcome.

All the professionals from the different agencies work exceptionally well together to make sure you receive the right advice and support. The centre makes an invaluable contribution to improving families' health and parents, carers and children's educational achievement. You told us you feel safe at the centre. This reflects the very good work the centre does to promote safety and welfare and the secure safeguarding arrangements. Children are well behaved and play, explore and learn confidently. You also make a very good contribution. We were very impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and with your children and also how many of you believe you are making progress in your lives.

The senior management team at the centre provide strong and highly effective leadership. They are well supported by the local authority and the advisory board. All staff have high ambitions for everyone in the community. They all work hard with great enthusiasm. They have a really good understanding of your needs and are constantly striving to improve the quality of provision that they provide for you. There is only one area we have asked the leadership team to work on in the immediate future which is to include more parents from the wider community on the centre advisory board.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and we wish you every success in the future.

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