

Inspection report for Victor Seymour Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Sutton
Inspection number	383566
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Reporting inspector	Sheila Browning

Head of Centre	Helen Matt
Centre Manager	Cathy Stiling
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Denmark Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 2JE
Telephone number	020 8415 5005
Fax number	020 84105004
Email address	victorseymour@suttonlea.org

Linked school if applicable	Victor Seymour Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Busy Bees Pre School

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
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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 co-located/partner primary school 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 one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, centre staff, members of the management group, and a range of providers, parents and carers, key partners and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed activities and looked at relevant documentation including the centre's operational plans, self-evaluation and data, key policies and procedures, evaluations and data about people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

The Victor Seymour Children's Centre is run from a detached building in the grounds of Victor Seymour Infant School. It is a designated phase two centre which opened in 2008. The area is predominantly White British with mixed parentage at 44.4% as the second highest minority ethnic group followed by Asian families. It is on the borders of three neighbouring children's centres. Pockets of higher deprivation are found particularly in the northern part of the locality. A high percentage of these families also attend other children's centres due to locality borders. A mix of privately owned and rented houses and flats are available in the area. There are some high levels of unemployment and 18.1% of children live in workless households. A high proportion of children from the reach area enter early years education with skills, knowledge and abilities below those expected for their age.

The centre has recently been commissioned by the local authority as a lead children's centre for The Grange Children's Centre where it delivers some services. Most provision is offered from the centre with signposting to local health clinics.

Governance is shared between the advisory board made up of school governors and partners that form a sub-committee of the full governing body.

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

Victor Seymour is an effective children’s centre. From the moment parents, carers and children enter the centre, very approachable and friendly staff ensure they feel welcome and secure. Families engaging in its wide-ranging services really value the contribution it makes to their lives. As one parent said, ‘it’s a lifesaver’. Leaders and managers at all levels, including the advisory board, have clear priorities and high expectations, shared by all staff and those working with the centre. Building on its own success, the centre is sharing its good practice and extending its working partnership with The Grange Children’s Centre nearby. It is strengthening services and provision for users, especially in providing services for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities in and beyond its immediate area.

The centre very successfully promotes equality and respect for diversity, which is why children and adults from many different backgrounds integrate so well with each other. The centre is most successfully narrowing the achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest. It meets the needs of families effectively, including those in target groups, and is successfully improving outcomes for the majority of families. This is because staff are skilful in designing and adapting centre sessions and resources, including outreach in the community, in response to families’ needs. Leaders use data, information about children's progress, and parents’ and carers’ views well to ensure families receive the right help. Individualised interventions and support, for example, in the ‘Stay and Play’ sessions for targeted families, help them learn how to support their child’s physical, mental and emotional learning development through play. As a result, children develop new skills and knowledge and grow in confidence.

Families using the centre gain in confidence and are supported to develop their child's language. They also develop knowledge and skills which further their independence, personal development, education and enable them to progress to

employment. Families show a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and demonstrate they feel safe. Robust systems ensure the safety of those who use the centre's facilities.

Careful decisions and insightful forward planning by centre leaders ensure sustainable good quality provision. Leaders are proactive in nurturing and promoting effective partnerships to improve outcomes for the community. The centre is also extending its capacity to offer advice and guidance to families where specific 'expert' input is not readily available. Despite substantial efforts, the centre has experienced considerable difficulties in establishing partnerships with local health services. To compensate, staff have organised health-related sessions closely linked to community needs. Leaders actively signpost families to the nearby health provision and promote local health services well.

Leaders continue to develop systems to ensure they have the information necessary to drive improvements. The centre's accurate self-evaluation procedures are informed and modified by evidence of impact. Consequently, leaders have a good capacity to sustain further improvement. Strong links with families who use the centre, members of the governing body and a 'Parent Forum' support and challenge leaders in fostering further improvement. However, too few parents and carers actively engage in the advisory board to influence strategic decisions of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- With local authority support, establish closer working partnerships with local health services.
- Increase the membership of parents and carers on the advisory board so that they are involved more directly in making decisions about the services the centre provides.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Children and their families enjoy and benefit from the range of services the centre offers and from its outreach sessions. For example, in 'Time 4 Me', parents and carers discussed their problems and were supported by staff and each other. They received advice about college courses and were encouraged to join other courses to aid their development. Children in the crèche have explored lifecycles and watched chicks hatch from eggs in incubators. They enjoyed dressing up and talking about their outfits and improved their coordination skills when mark making, using play dough and playing in the outside area. The centre has evidence that shows that children in Nursery and Reception who have accessed the centre improved their learning and development above those typical for their age. The percentage gap at

the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage between the lowest attaining 20% and the rest is reducing fast.

In 'Around the World' sessions held for families who speak English as an additional language, parents and carers said, 'the sessions have helped me and my child to learn English' and 'there are great toys and books for the children to use'. Flexible scheduling encourages many fathers to attend 'Men behaving dadly', 'SoCom', a social communication group, and 'Musical Maestros'. All help families to learn together, and strengthen relationships and communication skills within families. Families using the centre treat each other with respect and contribute well to the positive atmosphere. Parents and carers evaluate the centre's services, which influence change and developments in provision. However, the potential to involve families more in the strategic lead of the centre is not fully utilised through the advisory board.

Evidence shows that the achievements of the majority of children who have accessed centre services demonstrate its good impact. 'Tiny Treasures', a support group for babies up to eighteen months, and parent and toddler outreach sessions encourage parents to learn and use sign language, for example in music and rhyme sessions. Health-related activities reach a large number of targeted groups, whether through oral hygiene, baby massage sessions or through signposting to local services for weaning and other services. Families from key targeted groups have attended cooking skills and healthy eating sessions.

In partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the centre runs activities to develop families' economic stability and independence. Training courses and skills workshops have helped a large majority of parents and carers to gain certification and employability skills. Childminder drop-in sessions promote their professional development and this has led to a rise in childminder registration. The job vacancy board is regularly updated and the proportion of under fives living in households dependent on workless benefits is reducing.

Children are well protected and safety is given a high priority. Detailed and thorough records and case-study evidence show clearly improved outcomes for those identified as most in need of support. Many families benefited from the centre's 'Child Safety Awareness Week' with events such as safe fitting of car seats and paediatric first aid courses. All staff are trained in child protection procedures and risk assessments are robust. There are currently no children subject to the Common Assessment Framework or looked after children known to the centre. Children with disabilities and their families, or those with additional and sometimes complex needs, attend the specialist provision at The Grange Children's Centre and access support groups at Victor Seymour.

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

How good is the provision?

2

Local authority data, the centre's own information, evaluations by its users and website activity confirm that staff understand the needs of the community and serve it well. Participation rates of different target groups of families are good and registrations are rising fast. The centre works in close partnership with a wide range of professionals, volunteers, centre users and the advisory board. The centre is successful in promoting purposeful learning for both children and adults. The family support worker is available on a weekly basis to support families with behavioural issues. 'Stay and Play' sessions provide many opportunities for social interaction and a chance to share problems. Staff are involved in the Every Child a Talker (ECAT) programme and professionals from the local authority assist with planning and attend sessions to support parents, carers and local childminders. My Special Family sessions, a joint venture with the local authority and Sutton Woman's Aid, help families and children in the wider community who have additional needs. The centre hosts weekly anti-domestic violence support groups. The school's early years practitioner delivers sessions and the 'Learning Together' programme has helped children achieve outcomes across the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents and carers have contributed to learning journals that are used on transfer to the nursery. One parent said, 'I have gained confidence and now know what she is learning'.

Staff are very sensitive to the needs of hard to reach groups within the community and investigate any barriers to their involvement. They use a range of communication methods such as post, phone and email to identify families' needs. Staff adapt and adjust sessions skilfully to meet the needs of most families. Signposting, leaflet drops, and weekly visits to a local clinic to update information folders all help forge links with the local general practitioners and other health professionals. Evaluations are used well to gauge achievements and to evaluate the quality of the sessions offered. Parents and carers feel confident to turn to the centre at times of crisis. One parent said, 'if they don't know they find out'. As well as effective signposting, staff help families to access services not provided directly by the centre. They offer individual guidance regarding benefits, help them complete

paperwork or use the information technology point to print necessary information.

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	2
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?

2

One of the strengths of the centre is the seamless management between the school and the centre. Consequently, the day-to-day management of the centre's activities is good. Governance and lines of accountability are effective, clearly understood and governors hold leaders to account. The advisory board and 'Parent Forum' have clear terms of reference. The structure of the board is being further strengthened as it merges with the advisory board of The Grange Children's Centre. Although parents and carers help influence planning, they are not active members of the advisory board.

Working relationships between key partners and multi-agency cooperation are very well established with the exception of links with the health service. Centre staff and leaders at all levels are extremely proactive in developing partnerships to extend and integrate services. These make a strong contribution to meeting a wider range of needs in the local area. The centre is increasingly seen as the hub of the local community. It has developed relationships with local charities and organisations and works with the local Salvation Army group and the local authority disability team. The inclusion of children and their families is central to the centre's vision. Many examples illustrate the success of the centre in removing barriers to access. This has led to increasing engagement of key target groups and has also had a positive impact on users' emotional health and well-being. Inclusive practices and zero tolerance of any discrimination are central to the centre's vision. Centre staff successfully gather the views of users and of those who might not otherwise use the centre. Staff continuously evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of the services offered and use all available information to prioritise improvement actions and set ambitious targets.

Staff are well deployed, and ensure resources and provision are focused and of good quality. Resourcing of outreach sessions has been carefully developed to meet the needs of the community and centre, for example laptops are used effectively for employability workshops. The centre provides good value for money because outcomes for most of the families, including those in the target groups, are good. The centre works successfully with some of the most vulnerable adults and children,

including those with disabilities. Plans are in place to build on the specialist additional needs provision at The Grange Children’s Centre.

Safeguarding procedures and policies are good. All staff receive safeguarding training and all regulations are met. Health and safety and risk assessments are systematic and staff recruitment and vetting checks are securely in place. Staff fully understand child protection and are alert to any risks and concerns. The centre is very proactive in using its many links with other professionals to protect children. This includes regular meetings and transition discussions with the family support worker and other agencies to secure early intervention and support.

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	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
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	2
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	2

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

The inspection of Early Years Foundation Stage provision at the centre, 4–5 October 2011.

The inspection of childcare on non-domestic premises provided by the centre, 25 May 2011.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Victor Seymour Children's Centre on 10 and 11 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with staff, the local authority, a member of the governing body, various key partners and some of you.

Your children's centre serves you and your community well. Many of you told us that the centre plays an important part in your lives and that of your children. You receive good guidance and expert advice on a whole range of things from helpful play activities, language support to child development and health matters. Staff at the centre work very hard to make the service, guidance and support they give you personal to your particular needs. Many of you spoke of the trust you have in the centre and how it is a safe and happy place. You also told us how you feel so well supported during times of crisis. We were impressed by the centre's commitment to helping you and your family achieve well and were pleased to learn about all the benefits the courses bring you. Various activities at the centre are helping you to develop healthier lifestyles for you and your families. The centre is also helping you to keep your children safe and provides special courses to help you to protect them.

The range of activities for you and your children is good. Many of you have done very well and been awarded with certificates and/or have completed accredited courses or secured employment. We know that the centre regularly asks you for your views on the services it provides. The centre's leaders are very careful in their planning to try to make sure the services are adapted to meet your needs. To this end they are working very well with different organisations and professionals.

You play an important role in representing the views of families and we would like some of you to take a more active role as parent and carer representatives on the governing body so that you can more directly influence the centre's work. The centre has already arranged health-related workshops for families and we know that it provides information about all the local health services really well. However, we have asked the local authority to help the centre forge a closer working partnership with the health service.

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