

Inspection report for Cherry Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	383484
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Cherry Lane Primary School
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.

An inspection of the 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, front line workers, the headteacher of the partner school, the Chair of Governors and the Chair of the Advisory Board. They also met with groups of parents and representatives of statutory and voluntary partners and the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Cherry Lane Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was originally designated in October 2007 when it operated from rooms within the partner school. In June 2010 it moved into purpose-built accommodation on the school site and was re-designated to provide its full core purpose by offering an integrated range of services. It opens from 8.00am to 5.00pm daily for 48 weeks each year. Most of its activities are based within the centre, although a few take place in the local community at Bell Farm and on a Travellers site within the reach area.

There are currently 967 families in the reach area with children aged under five and 897 of these are registered at the centre. The centre is in one of the 30% most deprived wards nationally and around one in three children of school age are entitled to free school meals, which is much higher than average. A large number of families are dependent on benefits and a significant minority of children live in workless families. Part of the reach area serves the Heathrow villages where the population is transient and often isolated. The school serves a diverse community. About one in three families are of White British or Irish heritage. The remainder are from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, with the largest groups being of Indian and Polish heritages. The centre also works with Traveller families. Children's skills

and understanding on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are often well below average, notably in the area of language and communications, with a number of children speaking little or no English.

The local authority has delegated responsibility for the governance of the centre to the governing body of the school. The centre is also supported by an advisory board which has representation from a range of partners.

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

Cherry Lane Children’s Centre is a good centre. It is at the heart of the community and is largely successful at meeting the needs of its families and improving outcomes for children in the area. It is extending its influence and more than nine out of ten families in the reach area are engaging productively with its services, including very high proportions from its target groups. One parent from one of the target groups commented, ‘We love it here. It has turned my life upside down and has made a big difference to my family.’ This was typical of the views expressed by many others.

The centre is a very harmonious community where people from a wide range of backgrounds get on very well together and new friendships are forged. As a result, social isolation is reduced and community cohesion enhanced. Without exception, parents expressed the view that they are treated with dignity and respect. The safeguarding of children, staff and vulnerable adults is a high priority and, as a result, everybody using the centre feels safe and secure.

The centre offers a wide range of services which are of good quality and extremely popular. Centre leaders know the community well and are successful in engaging its target groups through, for example, the prioritising of a high proportion of places on activities and courses for them. Staff are also flexible in addressing the needs of its potentially vulnerable groups. For example, recognising that the Traveller community was reluctant to attend the centre, staff now run a highly successful ‘stay and play’ session at their site.

The impact of the centre's work is evident in rising attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the closing of the achievement gap for the lowest 20% and the rest. School staff also report that children are much more prepared for school than was previously the case. Health outcomes are also improving securely and a large majority of families, notably from the target groups, are engaging with health services.

Parents report that their engagement with the centre has improved their confidence and independence, which in turn has led to a better quality of family life. There are examples of some families improving their economic stability as a result. However, only a small minority are engaged in training or have been supported in finding suitable employment. There is parental representation on the governing body and the advisory board, but the parents' forum is only now being re-established. As a result, parents' involvement in governance and decision making is currently limited.

The centre staff and their partners regularly evaluate the impact of their work. Parents are part of this process and there are many examples of activities being adapted in response to issues raised by parents. An opportunity is lost, however, to ask parents to assess the impact of their involvement on their families in the short or longer term. The centre manager is using data with increasing effect to demonstrate the scope and impact of its work. Nevertheless, the local authority acknowledges that the data available are not refined enough at a local level for the centre to use the data fully to demonstrate the differences it is making.

The centre manager and her staff are ambitious for the centre's further development, which is reflected in challenging targets. They are well aware of the gaps that still need to be addressed from their detailed knowledge of the community they serve and accurate self-evaluation. This, together with the considerable progress made since the centre opened, shows that it has good capacity to continue to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of parents accessing training and being helped to return to employment in order to improve the economic well-being of their families.
- Establish the parents' forum to enable parents to make a stronger contribution to the governance of the centre.
- Develop systems for evaluating the impact of the centre's work by:
 - working with the local authority to refine the use of data to demonstrate the centre's impact in all target areas
 - capturing the views of parents more effectively to illustrate the impact of its services.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents and their children really enjoy the opportunities to interact with others, through the highly popular 'play and stay' sessions for example. This is enabling children to become more independent to develop social skills and to become inquisitive learners. They behave well and are aware of their own safety and that of others. They make good progress in the different aspects of their learning. This is helping to prepare them well for school. One parent commented, 'Stay and play has really encouraged my son to interact with other children and I have noticed a real change in his behaviour.'

All parents using the centre say they feel safe and are confident to share their concerns with staff who they find helpful and understanding. Parents are becoming increasingly aware of the potential dangers facing their families. For example, there has been a high take-up of safety equipment for the home offered by the centre. Those who have particular needs are well supported, through the speech and language service for example. One parent reported that her daughter was now much more confident and that her speech and language had improved significantly. There are good examples of families facing challenging circumstances showing improvements in their parenting skills. As a result, there is evidence of improved outcomes for most of the children on protection plans and those subject to the Common Assessment Framework.

Parents enjoy the opportunities they have to take part in language courses and practical activities such as the jewellery making. These provide them with opportunities to socialise and develop their skills. It has also improved the economic stability of a few as they are now selling some of the jewellery they have made. There are some striking examples of parents being helped back into employment in the centre itself for example. Although the centre has strong links with adult education, the examples of parents accessing training and returning to work, as a result, are limited. Currently, parents are reluctant to engage with accredited courses. The centre is looking at more creative ways to address the poor level of literacy and numeracy skills of many adults in the area by relating this specifically to helping their children. Many parents contribute their views through evaluation and the suggestion box, for example, but their opportunities to take part in the governance of the centre have been more limited.

Health outcomes are improving as most families in the reach area are accessing the many services provided. A feature of some of the 'play and stay' sessions, for example, is the meal time and it is evident from the food they brought that parents are carefully considering healthy options for their families. The centre's strong championing of breastfeeding has been successful and is enabling more mothers to sustain breast feeding after six to eight weeks. Parents really enjoy the aerobics and Zumba dancing sessions, which are not only helping them to stay fit but they also report are focusing them on ensuring that their families have an active lifestyle. They also say that the yoga sessions help them to become calmer and more reflective in their interactions with their children.

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	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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre leader and her staff use their extensive knowledge of the community to provide a good range of services to meet the needs of the large majority of families in the reach area. This is reflected in the high levels of engagement, particularly among the target groups. There is a wide range of health-related activities which also develop parenting skills well. The centre makes the most of its partnerships to provide support for young families to become confident parents. For example, the health services deliver very popular midwifery sessions and baby weighing clinics, while the partnership with the National Child Trust provides ante-natal clinics. The centre is also innovative, being the first children's centre in the country to pilot the 'Milton Monkeys' programme, a pre-school circuit training programme. The evaluation of this work showed children making good gains in their physical development and coordination.

Outreach work is a strong feature of the centre's work and the highly respected family support worker liaises closely with social services, the health authorities and the police to respond to the needs of the families facing crisis or challenging circumstances. The centre also works in partnership with the Bell Farm Christian Centre to provide the 'Doorway' service to support parents on matters related to housing and finances. One parent using this service told inspectors how it had really helped to sort out her problems. She also said how supportive the centre had been in times of crisis adding, 'I don't know how I could have coped without them.'

Effective use is made of both the inside and outside resources to develop children's enjoyment and engagement in a wide range of activities in all areas of their learning. The range of activities are well thought through, providing different opportunities for children from birth to school age as well as scheduling some sessions specifically for

boys or girls. Parents are clear that this differentiation of services has helped the development of their children. Fathers, specifically, have the opportunity to play and learn alongside their children in the Saturday morning 'play and stay' sessions.

The range of activities clearly enables parents to develop social skills and increases their confidence in parenting skills. It also offers opportunities for them to learn new skills, for example through the jewellery making course. They are also signposted to adult education, and advice on training and qualifications is offered through 'Next Steps', although only a small minority of parents have taken up opportunities for further training and education and subsequently returned to the job market.

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

There are clear and well understood procedures in place for the professional supervision of all staff which are linked to ongoing support and professional development. Staff understand the strategic goals of the centre and are strongly focused on improving outcomes for families. Governance and accountability arrangements are clearly understood and the advisory board, with its wide-ranging expertise, ensures that all statutory and private partners understand their roles in supporting the objectives of the centre. As a result, services are integrated well. The centre uses its accommodation and staff well to maximise their impact. Private partnerships enable the centre to commission services elsewhere. For example, the Bell Lane Christian Centre is used to provide the award-winning toy library. The centre also works in close partnership with other local children's centres to share expertise and avoid duplication of services.

The inclusion of all families, irrespective of their background or needs, is at the heart of the centre's work. This has resulted in significant improvements in the involvement of all families, notably target groups, and there are no groups who are under represented in its work. Children and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully included and staff are trained and supported to meet their needs. This respect for all is underpinned by robust safeguarding arrangements. All staff, volunteers and partners are vetted to ensure their suitability for working with children. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding and are alert to signs of abuse. Good cooperation with other agencies ensures that the protocols for sharing information are clearly understood to reduce the risk of harm to children.

All families express high levels of satisfaction with the centre and its staff. Their views are sought regularly and there are many examples of how this feedback has been used to shape services. The centre has been extremely successful in reaching out to targets groups and increasing their day-to-day involvement with the centre and its activities. Outcomes are good and improving, which represents good value for money. However, the centre has not yet devised an effective strategy for parents to report the impact of their engagement with the centre on the lives of their families. While the centre has an abundance of data about Hillingdon, some of this information is not yet refined enough to enable them to demonstrate the impact of their work, for example in the reduction of obesity. As a result, the target setting, to improve outcomes, is challenging but not always based on reliable and up-to-date data.

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	3
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 team took account of information provided by the inspection of Cherry Lane Primary School. Specifically, it was found that attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving and is now close to the national average. It was also noted that children's skills and understanding on entry to the school were rising.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cherry Lane Children's Centre on 15 and 16 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We really enjoyed our two days at Cherry Lane Children's Centre and I would like to thank all of you who took the time to speak to us during the inspection, particularly the group that met with us.

All of you we spoke to said how much you valued the centre and many of you told us what a difference it has made to the lives of your children and families. You told us how welcoming and friendly everybody is and that you were always treated with great respect. We found the centre to be extremely friendly and harmonious and that people from a very wide range of backgrounds get on very well together.

The centre has been very successful in getting more families involved in its work and now more than 90% of families in the area are now registered at the centre. This shows how important it is to the community. You also told us it is so popular it is sometimes hard to book into the activities you would like!

You told us how safe you feel at the centre and we found that everybody gives the highest importance to making sure that you and your children are kept safe at all times. We also found that very good support and advice is provided for you who are facing particular difficulties.

We found that the centre provides a good range of activities to promote the learning and development of your children. We found that this is having an impact on helping them to be better prepared to start school. Many of you told us how the centre had helped them to learn and play with other children and to become more independent. For many of you this has had a good effect on your family lives.

We also found that you really enjoy the opportunities you have yourselves to take part in activities like the Zumba dancing and aerobics, which are helping you to stay fit and healthy. You also have the opportunity to learn new skills, for instance jewellery making. You have been less enthusiastic to take part in activities to improve English and mathematics skills and the centre is looking at new ways to approach this to make it more interesting to you. This should help more of you to go into training and to get back into employment if you need to.

The centre works well with other agencies such as health and social services to provide you with the help and support that you need. It also works well with private

partners like the Bell Farm Christian Centre to provide you with the toy library and advice about housing and financial problems.

You told us that staff at the centre listen to you and that your views are taken into account. We found that there are many opportunities for you to feedback on the centre's activities and to offer suggestions. We would like you to have more opportunities to note down the differences the different activities have made to you and your families. The centre is also setting up the parents' forum again and we hope that this will give many more of you an opportunity to contribute to the running of the centre.

The centre has come a long way since it opened only a few years ago. The centre leader, the family support worker and all the staff are keen to improve it even further. They are collecting a lot of information about how well they are doing and we have asked the local authority to provide them with even more information to help with this. We are confident that the centre will continue to get better and better.

Thanks again for all your help with the inspection.

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