

Inspection report for North East Locality Children's Centres

Local authority	Westminster
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Portman Early Childhood 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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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 the centres' staff, senior representatives from the local authority and representatives of partner agencies including health services, social care, voluntary sector organisations and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Church Street Children's Centre which was designated as a phase one centre in 2004, acts as a hub for three additional centres in Westminster. These are Paddington Green, Maida Vale and Micky Star Children's Centres. Collectively the centres are known as the North East Locality Children's Centres. The merger of the centres was agreed in May 2011. All the centres are managed by a senior leadership team based at the Church Street site and offer early education and childcare provision, adult learning, access to health services and family support, outreach services and support for childminder networks.

The north-east locality of Westminster is a mixed area of high levels of deprivation and poverty in parts but pockets of affluence in other areas. The hub is based in an area that is in one of the poorest wards in the country, with families experiencing high levels of poverty. Approximately 1,230 of children, aged between birth and four years of age, live in workless households. The reach area is diverse with a high representation of families from minority ethnic communities mainly families of Arabic, Bengali and Bangladeshi heritage. Some families live in overcrowded accommodation, others in poor-quality housing. Across the reach area, there is a mix of social housing, local authority owned and privately-owned accommodation. Children's levels on entry to early years education are lower than expected for their age.

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

Leaders and managers share a strong sense of common purpose to improve the life chances of families in the community. Evidence shows that outcomes for the majority of families who use the centres are good. Data show that the number of families who use the centres exceed the number in the reach area, because the good reputation of the centres is such that many families travel across reach area boundaries to use its services. The centres are still in a stage of transition as they are governed by a local authority that is to be merged with two other local authorities. However, staff from the centres, leaders and managers are building on their existing strengths to ensure good provision continues.

The way the centres care for families, particularly the most vulnerable who in some cases cannot articulate their needs, is outstanding. These are families who, because of language and cultural barriers, feel socially and emotionally isolated. However, the centres provide excellent support and care for them.

Safeguarding and the arrangements in place to safeguard families are excellent. The safeguarding knowledge, skills and experience of the centres' staff and their partners are used exceptionally well to ensure early intervention is successful. Staff routinely reflect on their safeguarding practice to ensure it is responsive, timely and meets the needs of key target groups such as lone parents, families from minority ethnic groups and those affected by domestic violence or living in poor housing.

The commitment of the centres to secure equality of opportunity and inclusion for families is outstanding. Staff have an excellent understanding of the barriers faced by families who do not speak English as a first language or families who face other barriers because their children have additional needs. To ensure all members of the community can benefit from what the centres offer, services and activities are targeted at key target groups such as fathers or families with children who have additional needs.

Links between the centres and the local community are excellent and used productively to promote community cohesion. Through the Parents Forum and through their representation on the Strategy Board, which acts as the advisory board, parents make an excellent contribution to both the strategic and operational management of the centres.

The culture within the centres is one of continuous improvement. This is reflected in the structure of monthly delivery group meetings and the development workshops which are used to review and develop the service. Self-evaluation is a thorough process which involves partners, but lacks sufficient reference to data to help the centres demonstrate the full impact of provision. The delivery plan is detailed but not well linked to the self-evaluation process and lacks measureable targets.

Although some good quality data are available and used well, leaders and managers acknowledge the need to systematically collect participation data for all aspects of provision across the newly-defined reach area. Self-evaluation is accurate but does not include measurable targets and is not sufficiently linked to the centres' development planning. However, the ability of leaders and managers to evaluate provision rigorously, together with the good overall effectiveness of the centres and its good-quality leadership and management, means that the centres have good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

Improve the collection and use of data to monitor the impact of services. Specifically, the local authority should:

- work with the centres to ensure data are fit for purpose and can be used to monitor participation rates and the engagement of key target groups across the newly defined reach area
- support staff in developing the self-evaluation process to ensure it is clearly linked to development planning and incorporates measureable targets.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

'I never used to mix with people but now I feel very good about myself.' This comment from a parent exemplifies the success of the centres in improving outcomes for families. Parents and children overcome multiple barriers to make good progress in their education and personal development. Data show that the number of children who achieve 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is improving and the gap between children in the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is narrowing. Children develop good skills for the future and make good progress across all key areas of learning. Parents also make good progress in their personal development and their education. For example, as a result of gaining qualifications in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), many parents have improved both

their language skills and therefore their ability to integrate in the community.

Through a range of health promotion activities, such as clinics and healthy eating sessions, the centres make an active contribution to the improving health of the community, particularly for those in its key target groups such as lone parents, parents from minority ethnic groups and from the most vulnerable groups. Data show that breastfeeding rates are high across the locality and, at 84%, are higher than the national average. Meanwhile, at 8%, obesity rates for Reception year children are lower than the national average. Health visitors also report that the work of the centres to support new mothers has had a significant impact on reducing postnatal depression rates.

Families feel very safe at the centres and staff and the partner organisations they work with are exceptionally skilled and successful at identifying welfare concerns. Evidence from case studies, partners and data demonstrates the outstanding success of the staff in safeguarding families. Staff use both the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and pre-CAF assessments to identify the needs of families and to prevent problems from escalating. They make a swift response to safeguarding issues when they arise and work productively with families who have children on child protection plans. Data show that the number of children on child protection plans in the locality is reducing.

The centres actively promote economic well-being of families through good work with partner organisations such as Jobcentre Plus. It offers a fortnightly full-time service at the Church Street site. Families receive good-quality advice and guidance about debt management from Jobcentre Plus and other agencies. In addition, local projects have been used to target the most vulnerable groups in the area and develop their employability skills. Outcomes from one project led to 43% of participants from a childcare course gaining employment.

'We talk, they listen, they note and they act,' was the view expressed by some parents about the response of staff to their suggestions. Their comments reflect the contribution parents make to decision making at the centres. Parents who use the centres or have used them previously are strong advocates for their services and make a significant contribution to their community and to the centres through volunteering. The centres inspire others to volunteer and the promotion of community cohesion is excellent. For example, volunteers from a local five star hotel are working with parents on a 'Stitches in Time' project to make a silk wall hanging that will be displayed in the hotel.

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	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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centres' staff know and serve their community well. They use data, local intelligence and input from partners to assess the needs of families. They also use their strong partnership work with different service departments within the local authority, such as the early years service, to conduct research into the needs of the community. This results in greater targeting of provision to meet the needs of key target groups such as fathers, lone parents and minority ethnic groups. For example, through monitoring of use of the service, it emerged that members of the Bengali community were not accessing services. In response, a Bengali-speaking outreach worker was recruited and, as a result, the participation of families from the Bengali community in a range of activities has increased significantly.

The provision of services and activities is varied and includes indoor and outdoor sessions for children, activities for parents, trips using the centres' minibus and adult learning opportunities. The individual assessment of families' individual needs is also effective and results in families accessing the most appropriate service and activity.

The centres promote purposeful learning for children and adults well and activities for parents and children to learn together are of good quality and well planned. Good links with Westminster Adult Education Service ensure that parents can access good-quality courses that lead to qualifications. Take-up rates are good on adult learning courses such as ESOL and retention rates are also good. Attendance at activities from families within the key target groups is good.

The quality of care and support at the centres is outstanding. Through its Family Support Panel, which is led by a senior manager, the centres offer specialist support to families from professionals such as social workers, psychotherapists and a senior practitioner for family support. Case studies and personal testimonies from families demonstrate the excellent arrangements the centres have in place to give high-quality support and care to families, some of whom have to overcome significant barriers.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance and accountability arrangements are good and staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They also have a strong sense of direction and share a vision to improve the life chances of families in the community. Leaders and managers know the strengths of the centres and also know what action needs to be taken to improve provision. In the delivery plan, issues about the quality and use of data have been recognised. Communication internally and externally with partners is good. Monthly delivery group meetings are used effectively as part of an overall improvement planning strategy. This is supplemented by the local authority's performance management framework, which includes the annual conversation that is used to monitor the centres' progress. Some data are being collected and used well to monitor the impact of provision and participation rates, but use of data to inform self-evaluation is not well established.

The views of parents are highly valued and well represented through the Parents' Forum. Outreach work to ensure families from a range of groups within the community engage with the centres is excellent and exceptionally well organised. The impact of outreach work is routinely monitored and measured to ensure its effectiveness. As a result of the excellent user engagement, satisfaction rates are excellent.

Staffing resources have been reduced as a result of the merger and this had an impact on the workload of staff. However, value for money is good because resources and accommodation are used well, user engagement is excellent and outcomes are good and in some cases outstanding. Partnership arrangements with a wide range of organisations and companies from the statutory, voluntary and private sector are also good. Staffing resources from these partner organisations are well matched to needs, particularly of the most vulnerable groups within the community. Through their attendance at the delivery group meetings, partners are actively involved in the development of provision.

The community served by the centres is one that is rich in cultural diversity and this is celebrated. For example, at an 'international day event' which incorporated Black History Month, staff and parents dressed up in costumes and contributed food which represented their respective cultures. Both this type of celebration of diversity and the promotion of equality are outstanding. The centres can demonstrate with a range

of evidence, such as provision that targets and successfully engages fathers and targeted work with families who have children with additional needs, that work to promote equality and inclusion is excellent and significantly exceeds statutory requirements.

Safeguarding arrangements are excellent and procedures such as recruitment checks of staff and volunteers are rigorously applied. Staff have an excellent knowledge of what procedures to follow if they feel a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of harm. The Early Intervention and Access Team work in a focused way to identify families at risk before they reach the stage of needing a CAF assessment. In addition, support and training for staff in using CAF and for other aspects of safeguarding are provided on a regular basis. The centres can demonstrate highly-effective multi-agency working to safeguard families and the impact of this is seen in the excellent progress families make after early intervention and support are provided. Safeguarding is also highly responsive to needs within the community. For example, families who have been affected by domestic violence are referred to a Talking without Fear therapy group which provides group and individual support to both parents and children.

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	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

The inspection report for Portman Early Years Childhood Centre (based at Church Street site) was considered.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the North East Locality Children's Centres on 22 and 23 November 2011. We judged the centres as good overall.

We appreciate the time you took to talk to us during the inspection and want to thank you for contributing to the process. During our visit we were able to observe some of the activities that you and your children enjoy and could see how much you enjoy being at the centres. In fact some of you told us that the centres are like a 'second home' for you.

We judged that the role that the centres play in the community is exceptional. The way the centres welcome families from a wide variety of cultures is impressive. No matter what backgrounds people come from, staff work hard to give everybody an equal opportunity to improve their lives. This commitment to promoting equality for families is another key strength of the centres.

We also like the way the centres support families who face particular barriers because they have moved to England from other countries. For example, we were very impressed with the transport course that is offered to help you understand how to use transport to get around London. The individual support you get from professionals who work with the centres is excellent and is really making a difference to the quality of the lives of families in the community.

We know from talking to you, and looking at case studies, that some of you have been through some really difficult times. However, when life gets tough, we know that the staff do their very best to keep you and your families safe. In fact you told us how much you feel safe at the centres and we believe that the skills, knowledge and experience of staff and their links to other organisations are used exceptionally well to safeguard families.

During our visit we looked at data and could see that health of the community is improving. The way that the centres work with partners from the health services to provide opportunities for families to improve their health is good. We know that the centres not only help children to learn and develop but also help parents to improve their learning. In fact, many of you have benefited from attending classes which have helped you to improve your English language skills and also gain qualifications. The centres offer a good range of opportunities for you to learn and improve your skills and knowledge. We know from talking to you that the opportunity you have at the centres to make friends and socialise is something that you also like about the centres.

We know that the centres have been through a challenging time because of the recent merger and everybody is still getting used to the new structure. However, we think that for the near future, staff need to improve the way they gather and use information about the characteristics of the community. We also think that if staff monitor more closely the different types of families that participate in different activities, the centres will be in a better position to check that activities match what is needed in the community. We have therefore asked managers to improve the quality of the statistics they use and to use these to review the services the centres already provide and to plan what they will provide in the future.

Once again, many thanks for your help during the inspection and we wish you all the best for the future.

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