

Inspection report for Bridge Road Children's Centre

Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	383806
Inspection dates	3–4 May 2012
Reporting inspector	Christine Davies HMI

Centre leader	Helen Longstaff
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Woolenwick Junior School, 117322 Woolenwick Infant and Nursery School, 117323
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 co-located partner Woolenwick Junior 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, parents, the headteachers and key staff of the linked schools, members of the governing body, health professionals and representatives of partner agencies and the local authority. The inspectors held informal talks with children and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Bridge Road Children's Centre is a phase two centre and is one of six in Stevenage in Hertfordshire. The centre serves a mainly residential area, divided into distinct neighbourhoods by major roads and light industrial development areas. Hertfordshire County Council has commissioned Woolenwick Infant and Nursery School to manage the centre on a site shared with Woolenwick Junior School. A board appointed by the governing bodies of the two schools leads the work of the centre and an advisory partnership board is in place. The centre was designated in November 2007. The centre's main administrative site is located within a purpose-built extension to the infant school. The accommodation comprises an office and three meeting rooms. The centre delivers services from the main site and in outreach venues in the Symonds Green, Old Town and Woodfield areas. The centre manager is supported by one full-time and five part-time staff.

The centre's reach area includes areas of relative affluence, although there are families living in deprived circumstances throughout the area. A small part of the area served is among the 30% most deprived in the country. The population of

children aged nought to four years has grown by 10% to over 1100 in the last three years. A rising proportion (now 23%) live in households on workless benefits. The population of the area is predominantly White British (over 80%). An established group of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, and families of Indian and Tamil origin make up 12% of the area. An increasing number of African, African Caribbean and White European families, mainly from Poland, are moving into the area. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and abilities that are at or slightly below those 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

Bridge Road Children’s Centre gives good support to families in the area. The centre offers a warm welcome and a good range of services for family health, learning, and well-being. The provision of life-changing advice and guidance is a real strength. Children attending the centre are keen learners. They thrive as staff help parents to support their children’s development.

The centre plays an outstanding part in protecting families from harm, particularly where parents are young, have a disability, are facing economic deprivation, are bringing up children on their own or speak English as an additional language. Help is offered through courses, practical support and working closely with other agencies. Early identification of risks of harm and prompt help almost always prevent families from needing formal child protection plans.

The main site is small and has its limitations so that a significant proportion of the centre’s programme is delivered in partnership at other locations. Although numbers attending some activities have to be restricted because they are so popular, sessions are all integrated and accessible to parents and children with disabilities. Adult and family learning tutors, and health and social care professionals share information to help the centre understand the needs of groups and individuals. The outreach toy library at Letchmore School and stay-and-play sessions across the area increase the accessibility for families who have few facilities locally. The centre now regularly reaches 47% of children in the area and the proportion is rising.

Working with health practitioners, the centre helps to secure good health outcomes. Baby clinics run by health visitors at the centre are well attended, and families get good access to specialist speech and language services following early identification of children's developmental difficulties. Family learning about healthy lifestyles is good, and there has been a significant drop in the obesity of children by age six in the area; it currently stands at 5.8%, which is low.

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and are well prepared for the start of school. Young parents, including fathers and those who speak English as an additional language, gain confidence from learning alongside their children in 'Rhyme Time' and well-planned workshops. As a parent put it, 'Even toy library extends learning. You don't just drop in and go with your toy – you learn about what the toy teaches your child and that's what I'm here for.' The centre and partners tailor the programme well to needs that are identified in the area so that take-up of training and learning opportunities is good. Success is celebrated and families are encouraged to build on their achievements. A few parents notably go on to act as volunteers and mentors in schools and partner organisations, although few gain accreditation or qualification from this success. The centre is beginning to make detailed records of individuals' progress through the use of learning portfolios. Collation of the achievements of all learners and systematic analysis by the centre and partners to make good use of families' prior knowledge are at an early stage of development.

The centre refines its programme continually. Parents contribute routinely to evaluation of the centre's work. Development plans are well founded on the available information. Outreach, for example to Traveller families, ensures that services are adjusted to meet families' needs. Based on the good and improving outcomes secured and intensive involvement of partners at every level, the centre has good capacity to improve outcomes further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In order to help all children and parents achieve as highly as possible and progress in their personal development and to tailor activities even more effectively to meet their needs, the centre should:
 - use children's and parents' records of learning and achievement more systematically
 - ensure that parents' records of learning include information about achievements gained through other organisations
 - work with the local authority and partner agencies to ensure that a higher proportion of parents gain recognition or qualification from their learning and participation as volunteers or mentors.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Learning about health is incorporated imaginatively into arts, crafts and messy play. As a result of 'Let's Get Cooking' sessions, families take up and sustain cooking from scratch with affordable fresh ingredients. Feedback to the centre shows that families improve their sense of well-being through enjoyable picnics, walks and active sessions. Although sustained breastfeeding rates are low (47% when a baby is six to eight weeks) the emotional well-being for targeted isolated and inexperienced parents improves through the support of 'New Start' breastfeeding group and continues in 'Movers and Shakers' for parents with children aged nought to 15 months.

Families feel safe and supported in the centre. Parents develop excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe from hazards through the role model offered by staff, direct teaching and one-to-one home support offered by staff. To date, over 80 parents have completed the 'Protective Behaviours' course with measured outcomes showing exceptional changes in parents' attitudes and skills. Parents successfully complete first-aid courses. Well-established partnerships between the centre, health and social care professionals ensure that families receive timely help because they use the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child processes effectively. Outcomes for children subject to child protection plans are excellent and the centre continues support when plans end by providing outstandingly well developed advice and guidance and further courses on health, safety and family matters.

Although the proportion of children in the area reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is slightly below the national percentage at 57%, it is improving strongly. The attainment gap for this age group, particularly for targeted boys, is closing rapidly. At 30% in 2011, the gap fell below the comparable national level (31.4%). Learning for parents is linked to children's activities in crèches during English and mathematics courses. Parents gain confidence in understanding, for example, comparative and positional language in mathematics classes. As one parent said, 'We are all here for the children. I can carry on helping my child to learn at home.'

Families develop a sense of belonging to the centre which parents from a variety of backgrounds describe as 'like my family'. Parents lead the celebration of diverse cultural events, for example during Diwali. The good numbers taking part in workshops, training or learning opportunities regularly contribute to evaluation and planning. Many parents gain confidence from succeeding in formal learning and volunteering. Notably, some parents facing multiple challenges in their lives achieve very highly, and some have gone on to paid employment or to lead groups in the community.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

After a basic registration process, staff skilfully observe and build up 'traffic lights' assessment records for vulnerable and targeted families. Health and social care partners share detailed information to help the centre identify specific services for families. The centre and partners collate attendance and course completion information through an electronic database well enough to plan and locate activities. Currently, the centre collates few individual development portfolio records to help all families understand their progress securely and build on their past achievements.

As a result of consultation with parents and partner organisations, the centre has increased provision to support weaning, boys' learning and young parents with evident improving outcomes. Travellers influenced the cessation of playbus provision on their site in favour of individual home visits. Young parents are fully involved in planning the content of workshops. Herts Adult and Family Learning Service designed 'Play and Talk' courses to build on parents' existing skills with an 88% pass rate from low starting points. The quality of staff interaction with children and parents is good. Practitioners vary their teaching styles and content, for example, to enrich parents' enjoyment of stories and rhymes.

The centre is at the heart of the community and has a reputation for constant support that is highly valued by parents, particularly those who are inexperienced, isolated or at risk of harm. Staff introduce guidance on parenting issues adeptly throughout 'Stay and Play' sessions. The expertise of the centre's staff and partners guides parents through routine challenges in health, financial, housing and education aspects of their lives. Personalised and well-coordinated support is effective in times of crisis for formerly hard-to-reach families and often serves as a platform for them to attend further services. With support from the centre, childcare settings and childminders who are doing less well demonstrably improve their inspection grades.

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 suitable and work effectively. The centre manager has given strong direction, focusing on clear priorities with plans that are aligned well with strategic plans for Hertfordshire. Supervision enables practitioners to share and improve practice. The external professional supervision in place for the manager and support worker has excellent impact on the centre's exemplary safeguarding practice.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of diverse needs through working in very well established partnerships. Services are thoughtfully integrated in detail at the local level through the STEAM partnership of six Stevenage children's centres to ensure inclusion of targeted groups. The centre works closely with schools, early years settings and adult education tutors to improve outcomes across the board. The centre's evaluation of its own performance is accurate and incorporates the views of partners. The views of parents are routinely taken into account in planning activities, although the centre recognises that it does not yet involve enough parents in planning the future development of the centre. Overall performance is at a good level and the centre's engagement of families, particularly in the most deprived areas and targeted groups such as young parents, is improving rapidly towards the centre's ambitious targets. The centre leader's involvement in the local early years network has had a major impact on improving Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly boys' achievement and communication skills, and arrangements for transition to school.

Day-to-day management of the centre is good and there is a strong emphasis on safeguarding. Managers and practitioners ensure that all the premises at the main site and in the community are safe, welcoming and accessible. Vetting and security arrangements are effective. Staff spread their expertise well as a team to ensure the programme works well. The centre's resources are used effectively to ensure the inclusion of groups and individuals.

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	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	2

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

An inspection of the linked Woolenwick Infant and Nursery School was carried out in September 2009 and the overall effectiveness of the school was good. A copy of the report is to be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bridge Road Children's Centre on 3–4 May 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who came to talk to us about the work of the centre, especially if you came in to see us at a time when you would not normally be at the centre. Thank you for letting us sit in on the enjoyable toy library and workshop sessions. Here is a summary of what we found.

Bridge Road gives you and your children good all-round support. The care, guidance and support that staff give to you, particularly to help you keep yourselves and your

families safe, is outstanding. Through courses, practical support and by working closely with other agencies, the centre helps you to gain skills.

You told us that you appreciate the warm welcome and that you trust the information and guidance given by staff. As one of you said, 'I hadn't a clue until someone introduced me here. This is like my family. Families treat each other with respect and enjoy making new friends at the centre.'

Provision is of good quality. Staff ensure other partner organisations continually adjust their programmes to suit your needs. Activities are accessible to all parents and children, including those with disabilities. Although the small main site is generally full up, the centre sets up more activities in the community. The number of families served by the centre is growing well.

There are good links with services provided by health visitors, midwives and specialist speech and language professionals so that many of you say your health is improving. Groups like the 'New Start' group and 'Movers and Shakers' help build emotional well-being and confidence. Some families are doing very well in taking up healthy lifestyles, and the obesity rate for six-year-olds locally has dropped to among the lowest in Stevenage.

You understand the purpose of activities. A father said, 'Toy library extends learning. You don't just drop in and go off with your toy – you learn about what the toy teaches your child – and that's what I'm here for.' We agree that the centre helps you to extend your children's learning at home.

You told us that you enjoy the focus on language and communication as much as your children do in 'Play and Talk' and 'Rhyme Time'. Children make good progress from their starting points in their Early Years Foundation Stage learning. Although attainment is below the national average, it is improving, particularly well for boys as they catch up with girls. The work that the centre does with other schools and settings to reduce the difference in children's levels of skills and knowledge is helping children to catch up rapidly. Children are well prepared for the start of school.

You take up courses in good numbers and some of you achieve your goals and go on to work. You give your views regularly and some of you are making sure that your views are taken into account by governors. Some of you gain qualifications from your learning and participation as volunteers, but we have asked the centre to work with the local authority and partner agencies to ensure even more of you can do so.

The centre is well run on a day-to-day basis, and partner organisations strongly support the centre. We have asked the centre to help you and your children achieve better progress in personal development and learning and to tailor activities even more effectively to meet your needs. The centre has the capacity to go on improving well.

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