

Inspection report for Stifford Children's Centre

Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	383817
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2012
Reporting inspector	Daniel Grant

Centre leader	Dave Petrie
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Stifford Primary School Parker Road Grays Essex RM17 5YN
Telephone number	01375 387894
Fax number	01375 754741
Email address	dpetrie@thurrock.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Stifford Primary School 114885
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Belmont Childcare EY416230

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.

Report published: May 2012



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

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

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with parents and service users and representatives from the local authority. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Stifford Children's Centre is a phase two centre which opened in September 2010. It is managed by the local authority and is on a site shared with Stifford Primary School and Belmont Childcare. Governance is through an advisory board which also oversees four other children's centres in the area. The centre leader has responsibility for the day-to-day management of five centres.

The centre serves one of the 70% least deprived areas in the country, with pockets of relative deprivation. Stifford is located close to the south-western edge of Essex close to the River Thames. The proportion of children aged under four years who are living in workless households and those on benefits is low. The large majority of families within the area served by the centre are of White British heritage.

The centre provides a range of supporting services, incorporating midwifery clinics, parenting courses, and information giving. Most children enter early years provision with a range of skills, knowledge and abilities that are above 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

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

4

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of Stifford Children's Centre in meeting the needs of users and in demonstrating the capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate. Leadership and management are inadequate and are failing to secure improvements to the provision. The local authority has not clearly identified the area to be served and the centre does not keep a register of families who use its services. Shortly after the centre opened, the local authority reorganised services for children and families and the role of the centre has never been fully established. The impact of changes in service delivery and limited management capacity mean that the centre is not meeting the needs of users.

The centre is not effective in targeting and promoting its provision to those families and groups most in need of early intervention and support. Signage for the centre is poor and too few people know of the centre's existence and what it has to offer. The number of families engaged with the centre's activities is low. Partnerships are inadequate because services are poorly integrated and do not lead to sufficiently improved outcomes for families. Care, guidance and support are not sufficiently focused on the children and families in the target groups. Provision for equality and diversity are inadequate.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. The local authority provides clear policies, procedures and training for safeguarding. Key partners, including health visitors, midwives and social workers work effectively with the centre to ensure families are protected. However, the centre is not routinely notified of children who are on child protection plans. The parent outreach workers have sufficient skills and experience to work effectively to safeguard families referred to them. They deliver a satisfactory range of parenting programmes and workshops in neighbouring centres and families who live close to the centre are encouraged to attend. Families who do engage with the centre enjoy good quality services from the midwives and from Belmont Childcare. Health outcomes are satisfactory overall.

The centre's self-evaluation, including the support it receives from the local authority

to measure performance, has accurately identified many of its weaknesses. However, this has failed to sufficiently improve provision or outcomes for families. The quality of data supplied by the local authority is poor because it is not consistently up to date or focused closely enough on the area where the centre is located. Leaders do not sufficiently analyse management information related to outcomes such as low birth weight and obesity in order to set targets for improvement. There is no coherent strategy to establish effective arrangements to support adults seeking to improve their education and job prospects. Although some benefit from the provision, there are no tracking arrangements to monitor their progress.

The centre does not sufficiently seek the views of users in order to develop the provision. There are too few local parents on the advisory board and the centre does not have a parents' forum. Consequently, families are not adequately involved in decision-making about shaping the centre's services. Resources are not deployed effectively and efficiently to meet families' needs and are having little impact on improving outcomes. As a consequence, the centre does not provide adequate value for money.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve equality and diversity by actively promoting the engagement of key target groups, including those families in most need of intervention and support.
- Ensure that families are more involved in decision-making about the centre by establishing a parents' forum and making sure that more parents from the reach area are involved with the advisory board.
- Increase the number of families benefiting from the centre's services through more effective promotion and marketing, clear signage and establishing an effective registration process.
- Improve outcomes for families by establishing more effective partnerships which better integrate the delivery of services.
- The local authority should support the centre to improve by:
 - clearly defining the area to be served by the centre and making sure this is communicated clearly to partners
 - providing high quality data about the population
 - ensuring adequate staffing arrangements both to manage and deliver services
 - increasing the rigour, challenge and frequency of the monitoring, quality assurance and quality improvement arrangements for the centre
 - establishing clear protocols with children's social care to ensure the centre receives full details of families where children are subject to child

protection plans.

How good are outcomes for families?

4

Outcomes overall are inadequate. However, midwifery services are well attended and help to improve outcomes for those who attend. Breastfeeding and obesity rates are around national averages. One parent said, 'It is really handy having the midwife clinic here.' The centre offers a good range of information relating to healthy diet, exercise and immunisation but is not clear how many people use this information. There is a very narrow range of services directly available from the centre itself but families do attend workshops in neighbouring centres. The centre adequately helps to improve health outcomes for the majority of families.

Safeguarding outcomes are satisfactory. The centre prioritises its work with families who are referred by the local authority because of concerns or the need for structured support. Staff have adequate understanding of procedures for keeping families safe and engage effectively with other professionals to support families in need. Parents and children who met with inspectors feel safe at the centre and a few families benefit from structured parenting programmes. Staff work well with partner organisations to use the Common Assessment Framework, but the centre does not routinely receive information about children who are subject to child protection plans. Children in sessions behave well and families demonstrate respect for each other.

Data from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile indicate children's achievements in the area are above national averages. Some families from the area attend a variety of workshops at other centres to help support their child's development. The gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and the rest is narrowing slightly. There is evidence that the centre and its partners are making a satisfactory contribution to this improvement. The centre does not set targets for, or monitor the progress of, users. Adult education and support for those seeking training or paid work is underdeveloped.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	4
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic	4

stability and independence including access to training and employment	
---	--

How good is the provision?

4

The range of services, activities and opportunities is inadequate because it does not meet the needs of families, including those in target groups. The centre does not have a sufficiently clear understanding of the population to help it plan provision to meet its needs. For example, the centre is unaware of the number of children with disabilities who live in the area, or the number of families where English is a second language.

The children's centre has satisfactory partnership arrangements with Belmont Childcare which provides good quality services to local families. However, the centre does not work to support or develop other childcare settings.

Outreach services are inadequate. The centre does not have the capacity to undertake early intervention work within the community, such as one-to-one support or home visiting, other than for the very few families who have engaged with parenting courses. Individual needs are not recognised because key partners do not routinely share important information with the centre. Several of the key professionals informed inspectors that they have little confidence in the centre because it is generally ineffective. Care, guidance and support provided by the centre are inadequate and not sufficiently focused on target groups. Users have access to a satisfactory range of information displayed at the centre.

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	4
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	4
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	4

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

Governance and accountability arrangements are inadequate. The centre leader has wide-ranging responsibilities for other services and insufficient time and resources are used to develop and improve the centre. There is insufficient management capacity to build key partnerships, clarify protocols, develop an effective outreach service and focus on improvement. The accommodation is too small to enable the centre to deliver a wider range of services. However, the staff have made it attractive and welcoming. The centre does not provide value for money because too few people benefit from the services it offers, outcomes are inadequate and the quality of provision is poor.

Equality and diversity are inadequate because although the centre fulfils its statutory duties, it does not have relevant insight into the needs of different groups of users. The centre fails to actively promote the engagement of some target groups, such as lone parents, those from minority ethnic groups and families with disabled children. The centre does not measure its impact on community cohesion.

Partnership arrangements with the midwifery service are well established and effective. One parent told us, 'I prefer coming to the centre to see the midwife because it is so relaxed.' However, partnerships with other key organisations such as schools, other local authority departments, Jobcentre Plus and providers of adult learning are generally poor and are not having sufficient impact on improving outcomes. Users and partners are not sufficiently involved in evaluating and developing the provision.

Self-evaluation does not lead to improvement. Management information and data provided by the local authority are of poor quality, and there is no useful analysis to help the centre begin to establish the needs of the local population. The local authority does not have effective arrangements to improve the quality of the centre's work because there is no critical challenge or rigorous assessment of the impact of the centre's work.

Safeguarding is given a sufficiently high priority and families are, therefore, adequately safeguarded. Systems for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment of staff are effective. Guidelines and procedures are effective and staff have undertaken appropriate training for their roles, including safeguarding vulnerable adults. Security arrangements, such as a record of visitors to the centre, are implemented to protect users in the building.

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	4
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	4
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	4
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	4
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to	4

meet its core purpose	
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	4

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

The findings from the most recent inspection of Belmont Childcare were taken into account when formulating judgements for the outcomes section of this report.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Stifford Children's Centre on 25–26 April 2012. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Those of you who attend the centre for appointments with the midwife receive valuable support because the centre works effectively to make sure your needs are met. We are aware that many parents travel to neighbouring children's centres to attend a range of activities relating to health, development and learning.

The centre has not established itself thoroughly enough in your community. The local authority has not told the centre who it should provide services for and not enough is being done to promote the centre or encourage people to use it. There have been staff changes and cutbacks which have led to the centre not understanding or meeting the needs of all families in the area.

Those of you we met value the services available from the centre. It offers you an opportunity to enjoy time with your children and you receive practical advice that you appreciate. The outreach service has helped a few parents with difficult issues and this has been done sensitively.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre and we found that the centre has very clear procedures in place to make sure the activities and the building remain safe for you.

The centre is not yet working effectively enough to support those of you who are interested in seeking paid work or who wish to attend training or education.

The centre is not providing enough opportunities to involve families in making decisions about the way it is run. There is only one local parent on the advisory

board and there are no formal groups such as a parents' forum for you to get involved with. We have asked the centre to improve this so that you are given more opportunities to have your say.

We found that although the centre has all the appropriate policies in place and is keen to promote equality and diversity, it is not actively targeting the families who most need support.

The staff who work with you are dedicated to making the experience of families a good one. However, because of the staff shortages there is not enough care, guidance and support available for families. We have asked the local authority to make sure that there is enough staff so that families in most need are identified and offered the one-to-one support that they might need.

The local authority and the centre staff want to improve the work of the centre but currently we are not confident that it will be able to do so. We have recommended that the local authority monitors the work of the centre more closely and provides resources to help the centre reach realistic targets for improvement. We have also asked the local authority to share more information with the centre.

Thank you for talking to us and helping with our inspection. 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.