

Inspection report for Southmead Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Wandsworth
Inspection number	383819
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
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Centre leader	Alison Strickland
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Southmead 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 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, representatives from the local authority, the governing body and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, for example health services and social care, parents and other users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

This phase two centre was designated in November 2009 and fulfils the full core purpose of services. It is managed by the governing body of Southmead Primary School on behalf of the local authority. Services are available from Monday to Saturday, 48 weeks of the year from the building located within the grounds of the school.

The centre is located in the West Hill ward of the London Borough of Wandsworth, and encompasses 10 super output areas, two of which are in the 10% most deprived nationally. The ward is one of great contrast where areas of social deprivation are adjacent to those where income levels are very high.

There are 1,070 children under five in the reach area. The area is very multicultural, with 24% from a White British heritage, and 22% from a Pakistani background with many other cultures making up the remainder. There is no recent figure for the percentage of children aged nought to four years living in workless households but it is estimated that over a third of children are living in homes that are income

deprived. The number of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, at 12% is below the national figure. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision across the reach area are below expected levels 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

The centre provides a good service for the majority of local families. Some aspects are outstanding, including the highly effective safeguarding procedures, coupled with excellent levels of care, guidance and support. This gives parents an unswerving confidence in staff and an excellent feeling of security. ‘I just couldn’t have done it without them’, was a common theme voiced during the inspection.

The centre has been very successful in encouraging families to access the services, especially those from a wide range of cultures, and the proportions from the key target groups who attend are high. Coupled with this is the excellent way in which those who use the centre have been encouraged to be involved in its life and development. Consequently, a great many parents are fully engaged in decision making and shaping services.

Children who attend the centre make good progress as seen in their ‘learning journeys’ but as yet, the number who are tracked when they move on to local schools is limited. The centre has not had ready access to Early Years Foundation Stage information from the local authority to help it support schools in narrowing the achievement gap, especially for the most vulnerable. Likewise, adults who attend the many training and skills courses frequently make good progress in the short term but the centre is not consistently tracking the longer-term benefits of its work.

The governing body and advisory board support the centre well. There is excellent representation from those who use the centre on the advisory body. However, the governing body is at an early stage of its involvement in strategic development matters, for example it accepts rather than looks critically at the operational plan.

This plan, while it is clearly based on accurate self-evaluation and has well-focused priorities, does not make enough use of data to set precise progress measures that help the centre take stock of the impact of its actions.

There is good capacity for sustained improvement because the centre has already secured good and sometimes outstanding outcomes for the majority of families and there is a very clear understanding of what the next steps for improvement are. There is a very constructive partnership with those who use the centre. Furthermore, the relatively small staff team is fully committed to bringing about sustainable improvement based on very high levels of well-founded confidence in the centre manager to provide the leadership to do so. A member of staff summed up all of their views by stating, 'Everyone who is here really wants to be here.'

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Support schools in narrowing the achievement gap, especially for the most vulnerable children, by:
 - working with the local authority to widen access to more detailed Early Years Foundation Stage data from schools and for individual children in the ward
 - tracking the progress of children when they move on to local schools.

- Strengthen the role of the governing body in its involvement with the centre's self-evaluation and enhance the centre's operational plan so that targets are measurable and specific by:
 - ensuring a robust system is in place to monitor, review and challenge the centre's self-evaluation and operational plan
 - using data more effectively to measure the full impact of the centre's work, particularly in respect of the longer-term achievements of adults and children.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre works effectively with families to help them be healthy, with a strong focus on their emotional and mental health. Close partnerships with the health services, especially health visitors, the nutritionist and speech and language therapist, mean that a large majority of families are engaging well with health services. Consequently, childhood obesity rates in the ward are declining and are better than the borough average. The weekly breastfeeding cafe is providing valuable support to help lift sustained breastfeeding rates. Many families report a greater awareness of how to lead healthy lives through understanding more about salt content and nutritional snacks, with targeted sessions for children related to nutrition and exercise having a very positive impact on their well-being.

Families who use the centre are unanimous in their view that they are extremely safe and very well protected there and that staff will work tirelessly to provide the support to get them through even the most arduous times. 'It has been my lifesaver', was how one parent described her contact with the centre. A great many report having much improved parenting skills and relationships with their children as a result of the many structured parenting courses. The centre has done much to involve and support Urdu speakers in the community by running a specific parenting programme in Urdu and setting up Aap Ka Wakt ('Your Time') for parents to learn new skills and support each other. Outstanding use of multi-agency support, for example through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process, has prevented a substantial number of frequently very vulnerable families from progressing to higher levels of support, such as child protection plans. In the small number of cases where children are subject to plans, the centre has provided very constructive guidance enabling them to move towards 'stepping down' to less intensive support.

Early Years Foundation Stage results for the ward show an overall improving picture over time and in 2011, at 58%, were in line with national figures indicating good progress from children's starting points. However, the achievement gap between the lowest 20% of children and the rest has widened to a greater extent than seen nationally. Children, including those who have special educational needs, who attend the centre show very high levels of enjoyment and they achieve very well, especially in their personal development. The centre provides a crèche facility several times a week where children learn to separate from their parents or carers and sessions are well planned to cover early learning steps. Other highly popular open-access activities, for example Sticky Fingers and Baby Crawlers, also focus well on early learning and help parents to understand how to help their children. 'I'm constantly learning how to help my children learn', reflected how many parents felt. Highly constructive relationships are developed through the good adult role-modelling by staff, and children behave very well.

The outcomes for adults from the many courses facilitated or run by the centre are good and most participants report improved skills across a range of aspects but especially in their parenting and in boosting their confidence. This has led a high number, including those from target groups and those most in need of support, to go on to become very involved in the centre, either as a volunteer or peer supporter. The contribution made by families to decision making is excellent and their views are always taken into account, for example in establishing a music session. The level of parent representation on the advisory board is high and covers families from a wide range of target groups and ethnicities. This adds to the very high degree of respect that everyone shows to each other.

Well over half the families attending the centre are engaged in some form of training or adult learning and the outcomes for many are good, as retention rates are favourable and subsequent success rates are high. For example, from the 93% who completed parenting programmes almost 20% went on to volunteer in the centre, undertake further training or move to employment. The centre has been very successful in improving adults' confidence levels, English language skills and getting

them work-ready.

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

All target groups are well represented in activities and the centre has been particularly successful in engaging fathers through the monthly Saturday Dads' Club. Assessment and good knowledge of the local area are used well to meet the community's needs and the centre has identified its own target groups from this information. For example, noting that the number of Urdu speaking families coming to the centre was far lower than the numbers in the community, the centre established links with the local mosque, and set up Urdu language groups. This has led to rapidly and sustained numbers from this community accessing services. Consequently, there is a positive impact across all outcomes areas.

The wide range of activities and courses is effectively engaging most target groups including those who need most support. By raising aspirations and celebrating everyone's achievement well, families are encouraged to continue to expand their knowledge and then support others, for example as breastfeeding peer supporters. Formal celebrations of adults' completion of courses and photos celebrating children's 'Wow' moments encourage everyone to build on their achievements. This has a very positive impact on outcomes, as reflected in adults' outstanding contribution to the centre and the wider community.

Families who use the centre all feel that they receive excellent levels of care, guidance and support. This is especially so in times of crisis, for example, where there has been a domestic violence incident or threat of eviction. In such situations, staff use their specialist training and enlist the support of relevant agencies to help families. The outreach worker and centre manager have the complete trust of families who have failed to engage with other agencies and this has led to them being able to access very intensive support, for example, through the Family

Recovery Project managed by the local authority. Strongly effective non-judgemental support and targeted provision, for example Parents' Play, has had an excellent impact on families.

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

Leadership, management and governance at all levels are good. The day-to-day management of the centre is excellent and the centre manager sets very high expectations to which all staff subscribe. Professional supervision is very effective in improving the centre's performance. The local authority provides regular support and challenge and other key partners, for example health services, understand their roles in developing the provision. Consequently, outcomes for families are all at least good and improving strongly.

The governing body and advisory board have an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. There is awareness that more involvement by governors in the centre's strategic development and greater use of performance data to measure performance would aid their accountability.

Although the centre has a small complement of staff and has limited space, the resources are well managed, so the impact on families is at least good. The packed timetable of activities and the very high numbers who access the centre show that the best use is made of well-equipped indoor and spacious outdoor areas. Initiatives, for example the Forest School held on Wimbledon Common, extend families' experiences beyond the centre. All of this has a very positive impact on the numbers coming to the centre and gives good value for money.

The centre is highly inclusive, with families describing it as 'the focal point of the community'. Equality and diversity are central to its vision as shown by the way it has worked extensively and successfully to encourage families from all ethnic groups to attend, as well as those who are most vulnerable. The building is fully accessible to all, and disabled children and those with special educational needs have equal access to services. The provision of high quality crèche facilities means that many more parents can access courses and activities such as Parent Time, where specialist speakers and skills such as arts and crafts greatly enhance achievements. This all successfully narrows the achievement gap for families by improving the quality of their lives.

Very regular and in-depth training for staff across all aspects of safeguarding, explicit policies and procedures and rigorous recruitment and vetting checks result in excellent safeguarding arrangements. For example, staff have received mental health and first-aid training and are adept in spotting possible signs of domestic abuse. Strong partnerships play a significant role in safeguarding children, and multi-agency work through the CAF process or the Family Recovery Programme ensures that the best tailored support is given to those who need it most.

Well-established and highly supportive partnerships exist, for example with the adult education service who deliver English language classes, and particularly with the health services. Baby clinics held in the centre and high levels of information exchange ensure that families receive tailor-made solutions to problems, for example, concerns about child development. Increasingly strong ties with the link school and a 'getting ready for nursery' structured play session also have a positive impact on helping children settle when they move on.

One of the most effective partnerships is with the families who use the centre. The annual survey, completed by a high number, shows 100% satisfaction with services, and families were very eager to share their unanimously positive views during the inspection. Families from all target groups are fully involved in shaping services and in helping the centre develop by providing highly valued time as volunteers, parent representatives on the advisory board or by supporting each other practically and emotionally. Families speak of the perseverance of staff to help those who find it difficult, to engage fully with the centre, with a very positive impact on outcomes for these particular families.

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

Findings from the concurrent school inspection in relation to attainment on entry, leadership and management, and safeguarding were taken into consideration.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Southmead Children’s Centre on 27–28 June 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. A number of aspects of the centre’s work are outstanding.

During our visit, we looked at your centre’s operational plan and numerous other documents. We spoke to a wide range of partner agencies working with the centre as well as staff, members of the advisory board, a governor, and representatives from the local authority. We also visited all the centre activities taking place during the inspection, for example Toddler Play, the breastfeeding cafe and the crèche, and spoke to a substantial number of families using the centre.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. It was very helpful to have your input and to hear how very positive you all feel about the centre, especially the commitment of the staff and how well you and your children are cared for, safeguarded and supported. You all feel extremely safe and secure there and have complete confidence in staff to help you, even in the most traumatic situations. Typical comments made to us were: ‘I just couldn’t have done it without them’ and ‘I always feel they have time for us.’

The centre is doing a good job in helping you to lead healthy lives and many of you say that you understand the importance of good nutrition and exercise. Strong links with the health services mean that high numbers attend the baby clinic and the breastfeeding cafe and benefit from the specialist advice there. There are high levels of enjoyment among adults and children at all the centre activities and contact with the centre has meant that many of you have a lot more confidence and greater self-esteem. ‘It has made me and my kids come out of ourselves’, was how one parent summed up the views of many of you. This has led a good number of you to volunteer, serve as parent representatives on the advisory board or get involved in community campaigns. Consequently families make excellent contributions to the

centre and are fully involved in shaping services, for example, requesting specific Urdu language groups or establishing a music session.

The range and high quality content of the adult courses on offer make a tangible difference to your lives. However the centre is not yet following up the long-term impact of these courses, for example how many of you return to work as a result of the input from the centre. Also, children's 'learning journeys' show they make very good progress when they are at the centre but it is less clear how well they do by the time they have finished their early years education. So we have asked the centre to work with the local authority to make it easier for them to track children so that the longer-term impact of the centre's work can be measured and local schools can be supported in making sure all children achieve well.

Centre staff have been very successful in encouraging large numbers from all different backgrounds and cultures to come to the activities. A large number of dads now attend on Saturdays and far higher numbers from the Pakistani community do so too as a result of the centre spotting that numbers were relatively low from this group. Parenting classes in Urdu and the Aap Ka Wakt ('Your Time') group have done much to encourage this rise in families' positive engagement.

The centre is very well led and managed on a day-to-day basis. The governing body monitors the work of the centre effectively, but is not yet fully involved in how the centre will develop and so we have asked that it plays a more active role in producing the centre's operational plan. We have also asked the centre to use the information that is available to measure the impact of actions more precisely. Leaders have a good understanding of the centre's performance and the next steps for improvement; as a consequence, its capacity to become even more effective is good.

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