

Inspection report for Aerodrome Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Croydon
Inspection number	383753
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2012
Reporting inspector	Joan Lindsay

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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Aerodrome Primary School, 135225, last inspected on 3–4 July 2012
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.

Report published: July 2012



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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 care and commissioned services, 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 action plan.

Information about the centre

This phase two centre was originally designated as the Duppas Children's Centre in March 2008. Following the amalgamation of two schools and their governing bodies it was renamed Aerodrome Children's Centre and re-designated in March 2010. Services are available six days per week for 48 weeks of the year and two days per week for the remaining four. The centre operates out of a new one-storey building which opened in June 2010 and is set in the grounds of Aerodrome Primary School and is managed by the governing body of the school on behalf of the local authority. The centre fulfils the full core purpose of services. It has recently become the coordinating centre for a collaboration that includes The Bourne, Purley Oaks and Purley Nursery Children's Centres. The interim centre manager has been in post since May 2011, following a period of upheaval in the centre's leadership.

The centre is located on the Waddon estate in the London Borough of Croydon, and encompasses 10 lower super output areas (SOA) that extend slightly beyond the Waddon ward, into Central Croydon. Six of these are in the 20% most deprived, and

two SOAs are in the 5% to 10% most deprived areas nationally. The number of children under five in the reach area is 1,573.

The area is very multicultural, with 48% from a White British heritage, 29% from a range of minority ethnic groups and 23% from Black and minority ethnic groups. There are 85 different languages spoken by pupils at the school. At 16.8%, the percentage of children aged nought to four years living in workless households is slightly lower than the national figure but higher than the borough average of 13.7%. The figure for the number of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit is not available. 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 families. There are excellent safeguarding procedures which, coupled with the outstanding care, guidance and support that families receive, ensure families have extremely high levels of confidence in staff and feel very safe there. Comments that sum up families' views are: 'the best help I've ever had' and 'They saved my sanity.'

The centre has been through a prolonged period of leadership change and reorganisation within the local authority. However, the work of the committed staff and interim centre manager has led to good outcomes overall for the increasing numbers who access the services.

The progress that children make in their early learning and development, and the way parents and carers are supported in helping their children, are good. A high number of adults are involved in some form of training or adult learning through the centre, particularly related to their parenting skills. However, the centre is not yet monitoring the longer-term impact of the work it does with adults especially where it signposts to other agencies.

The centre is highly inclusive and has been particularly successful in engaging with Black and minority ethnic groups, disabled children and the most vulnerable families. Families feel that their views are listened to but there is no formal method to sound them out as there is no parents' forum. In addition, although there is parent representation on the advisory board, some target groups, such as fathers and a range from different ethnic groups, are not represented.

The centre has already secured good or outstanding outcomes for families in most aspects and there is a very clear understanding across all staff, leaders and managers as to the next steps for improvement. Plans for the future are well targeted and are responsive to the changes brought about by the collaboration. Partnerships are good and especially strong with the link school in relation to supporting the most vulnerable families. All of this, coupled with an accurate analysis of families' needs, means that there is a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Involve families in the strategic management and governance of the centre so that their views are formally taken into account by:
 - setting up a parents' forum
 - ensuring there is more representation from target groups, for example fathers, on the advisory board.
- Develop a consistent method to track the achievement of adults who have accessed the centre to measure the longer-term impact of its work.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre promotes healthy lifestyles well through cooking classes, exercise and nutrition groups for parents of toddlers and staff trained to help adults stop smoking. A large majority of families engage well with health services as can be seen by the very high numbers attending the baby clinic at the centre. Consequently, the percentage of reception-age children considered to be a healthy weight, according to the measure used by the local authority, is 78%, compared to the borough average of 76%. Additionally, sustained breastfeeding rates are improving in line with the centre's target, up from 36% to 40% this year. The centre has been successful in improving the mental and emotional health of families through its close work with health services, for example to identify and support those with depression. High numbers have accessed courses, for example baby massage and baby signing which parents say have been very effective in helping them bond with their babies. This has led to positive outcomes for a large number of families, including those who are most in need of help.

All families spoken to during the inspection stated they have complete confidence in staff and of how their parenting skills have been developed extensively through contact with the centre. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep their children safe through structured parenting and ongoing first-aid classes, and visits

from the police and fire services to guide them in home safety. Staff have been highly successful in securing funded places for the most vulnerable two-year-olds with very positive outcomes especially for lone parent families. They also very successfully instigate and manage multi-agency support through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF); their involvement in supporting families where children are subject to child protection plans has meant that there has been significant and sustained improvement for most of those children.

Early Years Foundation Stage results for the area show an improving picture over three years although at 55.7% in 2011, they are still slightly below the national level of 59%. However, the achievement gap between the lowest 20% of children and the rest has decreased substantially to 21.6% which is much narrower than the national figure of 31.4%. Very good links with the early years lead at the Aerodrome Primary School mean there is joint planning, shared sessions and a focused group helping children prepare for starting school. Initial tracking in the school's nursery, and 'learning journeys' for targeted children show they make good progress as a result of accessing the centre. Most adults using the centre are developing their skills in some way, with many talking about 'the huge difference' to their self-esteem. Parents from all target groups feel well supported in helping their children learn and develop, through sessions such as the highly popular Creating a Confident Child. Very high levels of enjoyment are evident at these sessions and constructive relationships develop well because of good adult role-modelling. Consequently children behave very well.

The majority of families make use of avenues to express their views, for example via the suggestions board and during evaluations undertaken after courses, and high numbers respond to surveys and consultations. Their opinions are taken into account, for example, in relation to trips and where an afternoon activity was requested. However, families' more formal contribution to the centre is limited to the number who volunteer and the number involved in governance, as there is no parents' forum. The centre is increasingly becoming part of the local community through joint activities with the school, for example the Cultural Carnival, and this is having a positive impact on how families from all walks of life mix together and treat each other with respect.

Well over a third of families using the centre are engaged in some form of training or adult learning and outcomes for families in relation to improving their confidence and especially their parenting skills are good. Where the centre does not directly deliver courses, for example English language or literacy classes, it signposts elsewhere. However, it is not yet following up these families so it can show the impact of that initial work. Nevertheless, where families have been supported directly by the centre, there have been good outcomes, for example in having benefits awarded or moving on to employment in the school or apprenticeship in the centre. This has led to demonstrable improvements in their lives, especially for those most in need of support.

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	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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Very recent changes to the centre's reach area increased the number of children under five substantially. Prior to that change, most children were registered with the centre. Participation rates are good and all target groups are well represented at centre's activities. The centre has been particularly successful in engaging with fathers through the Dads' Time group running every Sunday. The number of disabled children and those with special educational needs using the centre has increased substantially due to support from well-trained staff, links with specialists at the school and the excellent sensory room. Outreach services have been very effective in providing one-to-one support for those who need it most, increasing the number of vulnerable families who access and benefit from the centre's services.

Activities to develop children's early learning are adeptly planned in conjunction with the school and focus strongly on children's communication, language and literacy skills and personal development. The spacious outdoor and indoor areas, including the soft play and sensory rooms, engage children from all target groups well with a positive impact on their enjoyment and achievement. Adults' personal development and achievement are celebrated by the awarding of certificates and they are encouraged to build on their successes although the centre is not consistently following up outcomes where it has signposted elsewhere.

The quality of care provided by the centre is excellent and is reflected in how safe and secure families feel there. The personalised support and guidance families receive, especially in times of crisis, for example where there has been a domestic violence incident or where families with disabled children are struggling to cope, leave families feeling exceptionally well supported. 'I've had 200% support from them... I couldn't have asked for anything more' summed up the views of many parents. Often staff will galvanise the advice and guidance from other agencies, such as through a CAF, and the excellent way they manage such support has done a great

deal to improve the well-being for a large number of the most vulnerable families including a high number of lone parents.

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. This is despite the turbulent period of two schools amalgamating, the centre changing its name, and becoming the lead for a newly formed collaboration. The enthusiasm, skill and highly effective partnership of the centre leader and interim manager, as well as dedicated staff have steered the centre through this period very effectively and outcomes for families have improved as a result. The action plan sets out key ambitious priorities clearly and takes into account the views of partners and families. Professional supervision at all levels has also been very effective in improving the centre's performance. The local authority provides good levels of support as well as rigorous and accurate evaluation of the centre's work. The governing body is effective in monitoring the work of the centre.

The centre gives good value for money as resources are managed well and staff are very effectively trained and deployed across a range of areas, for example running specific courses and outreach work. The well-resourced building is used effectively by an increasing number of families from across the extended reach area. The timetable of activities strikes a good balance between groups established to support those who require targeted help and activities open to all. The warm, friendly and homely welcome that all receive ensures that families who find it difficult to access services are engaging well with the centre.

The centre is highly inclusive with some families travelling considerable distances because of the support they get for specific needs, for example a child's medical or learning difficulties. The make-up of the community is accurately reflected in those who use the centre especially in the numbers from Black and minority ethnic groups. The weekly 'Around the World' play session for families with English as an additional language, celebrating other cultures' festivities such as Chinese New Year, as well as support with translation for families accessing specialist services, ensure all cultures are fully included. The Sunday session for fathers and crèche facilities for those on courses also open access to more families from various target groups. All of this has led to a narrowing of the gap between different groups and a positive impact on outcomes overall.

Safeguarding, not only of those who use the centre but also the staff, is paramount across the centre's work. Recruitment and vetting processes are rigorous. Excellent levels of staff training across many aspects of safeguarding, for example domestic abuse and child protection issues, ensure that families receive tailor-made solutions to often complex and highly emotive problems. The excellent links that exist with the school ensure a seamless flow of information and support to help families who also have older children.

Other well-established and highly supportive partnerships also add to positive outcomes for families. These include the Pre-school Learning Alliance, which runs the fathers' group, and the Mulberry Nursery, which provides placements for children on the two-year old funded programme. Very strong links with the health services and social care ensure that the most vulnerable families receive high quality support. Families seeking work benefit from monthly sessions run by Jobcentre Plus although the centre is not yet following this contact up.

Families who use the centre are extremely satisfied with the services and increasing numbers from across all target groups are engaging well with activities and courses. However, this engagement has not yet developed to ensure they are fully involved in the governance of the centre. Nevertheless, the centre does routinely seek their views and children's preferences are recorded and taken into account when planning activities such as the focus for Stay and Play sessions.

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	2

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

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Aerodrome Children's Centre on 4–5 July 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. There are a number of outstanding features, for example the care, guidance and support you receive, safeguarding arrangements and, therefore, the way you are helped to keep yourselves and your children safe.

During our visit, we looked at your centre's action 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, two governors, and representatives from the local authority. We also visited activities taking place during the inspection, for example Creating a Confident Child and baby massage, and spoke to a substantial number of families using the centre.

Thank you very much 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 and support 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 difficult and emotional situations. Typical comments made to us were: 'They offered advice, sympathy and encouragement' and 'I've had immense help and relief.'

The centre is doing a good job in helping you to improve many aspects of you and your children's lives, for example, understanding how to lead healthy lives and how to help your children to learn and develop. Many courses, for example Cook 'n Learn and parenting courses, are available to support you in this and help you to understand how to cope with your children's behaviour, how young children learn and how to keep them safe. As a result of more and more of you coming to the centre, the outcomes for families from all walks of life are improving in many aspects. One area we have asked the centre to develop further is the way that you are more formally involved in the running of the centre. You all feel happy that your views are listened to and taken into account, for example where to go for your summer trips. However, there is no formal group, for example a parents' forum, and

the number who represent families on the advisory board does not cover a wide enough range of the families now coming to the centre.

Children make good progress as a result of coming to the centre, especially in the way their confidence and language skills develop, and adults also greatly improve their confidence and self-esteem. One person summed up many of your views by saying, 'I used to have very low self-esteem but coming here has made a huge difference.' However, the centre is not yet tracking the longer-term improvements it is making in the lives of adults when it directs them to do courses such as English language classes elsewhere, or if they access services such as those provided by Jobcentre Plus. This is also something we have asked the centre to look at so that the good work it does in laying the foundations for you to improve your lives can be measured.

The centre has been through a disruptive period with changes in the leadership, a name change and alterations made to the geographic area it is responsible for, as well as how it will now lead other children's centres in collaboration. Despite this, the staff have continued to improve the numbers coming to the centre and have also done much to improve outcomes for many families, especially those who are most in need of help. This is because of their commitment, coupled with the strong leadership of the centre leader and interim manager, as well as very good links with the Aerodrome Primary School and effective links with other partners. There is a clear understanding of what still needs to be done to improve the lives of families even more and this means that the centre is well placed to continue to improve.

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