

Inspection report for Clapham Children's Centre

Local authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	386961
Inspection dates	12–13 July 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Ursula Taylor Lower 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.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, the local authority, the children's centre manager and members of the advisory board. They met with a number of representatives of services who work through the children's centre, including health visitors and outreach workers. Inspectors spoke to groups of parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, user evaluations and case study information.

Information about the centre

Clapham Children's Centre is a phase three children's centre that was established in 2009. It operates in the Clapham ward and is based on the same site as Ursula Taylor Lower School.

The centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre. The centre is managed by and accountable to the Spurgeons group on behalf of the local authority. The advisory board consists of representatives from partner organisations and key stakeholders that work with the children's centre, the local authority and parents.

The majority of the families who use the centre are from White British backgrounds but a growing number of families using the centre are of Eastern European origin. Data for the reach area places the user base in the bottom 50% nationally for deprivation. The children's centre has 488 children under five in its reach area. About 10% of children and adults who use the centre come from homes that are dependent on benefits and where no-one is in work. When they start early years provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are in line with those expected for their age.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of activities which include support at the local community baby clinic, an antenatal birth clinic, breastfeeding support and baby massage. The centre has links with health visitors, community midwives and speech therapists. It signposts families to a range of providers that offer adult education, volunteering opportunities and activities designed to support parents back into employment and training. The centre opens 50 weeks each year on weekdays from 9.00am – 3.00pm. The centre is used by breakfast clubs and after-school clubs outside of the stated hours.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The new contract holder took over the running of services in April 2012. Despite the significant changes and disruptions caused by such recent change, outcomes are satisfactory and the centre is delivering satisfactory provision for families and children. The new management team conveys a strong sense of purpose and direction. The centre is doing good work with individual families. It ensures that the various services operating from the centre are brought together to support families and their children in a timely manner.

Parents feel comfortable in the centre and know they will get a warm welcome from the staff. One parent expressed a view that was typical of many others, saying, ‘Staff are very welcoming and friendly, and it’s a great place to meet other parents and children.’ Safeguarding is given a high priority. There are good arrangements for multi-agency work to protect children and ensure good outcomes for their safety. Families feel well protected in the centre and are comfortable to talk to staff about any issues or concerns. However, the centre does not have a parents’ forum for users to contribute to decision-making. Currently, there are not enough choices of courses at different levels to help those who may want to volunteer.

The centre has maintained services in a climate of change. Healthy living is promoted well. There is a good emphasis placed on physical activity and a well-resourced outdoor play area. Good support is given to mothers who are breastfeeding and increasing numbers continue breastfeeding up to eight weeks after the birth of their

baby. Recent data shows that 66% of mothers have sustained breastfeeding, which is an increase of 12% from the previous year. Children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving but the gap between the highest and lowest achieving children is widening. Their progress is not routinely assessed or tracked against the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance to identify individual needs or achievements.

Satisfactory self-evaluation identifies the key priorities for development. However, it does not set precise and quantifiable targets for improvement. The number of families accessing the centre's provision has increased during the last year. Nevertheless, not enough lone parents and hard-to-reach groups use the centre's facilities.

Governance and leadership are satisfactory. Managers and staff form a committed team that is determined to improve provision and extend services to the wider community. They are appropriately focused on improving areas of weakness and gaps in provision and outcomes. The local authority supports developments well and there have been recent improvements in the centre's overall performance. This provides the centre with satisfactory capacity to further improve outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the assessment of children's learning and development needs and ensure that it is securely linked to Early Years Foundation Stage guidance, so that appropriate action can be taken to narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and their peers.
- Increase the participation rates of lone parents and hard-to-reach groups by engaging more effectively with them.
- Strengthen the rigour of planning and evaluation by using data and other information to produce precise and quantifiable targets for short- and long-term improvement.
- Ensure parents make a better contribution to decision-making and the governance of the centre by:
 - establishing a parents' forum so they have a more active role in the shaping of the centre's services
 - developing an easily accessible volunteer programme, which draws on the wide range of skills in the community.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Children and families who attend the centre benefit from well-promoted activities

that help them lead healthy lifestyles, such as 'Cooking Together' where parents and children learn the benefits of cooking and eating healthy foods. Breastfeeding rates are increasing and are above the local average. Obesity rates are lower than average for the area. Fortnightly weaning sessions are supported by good information booklets to help parents understand that children using bottles are more likely to have tooth decay and that these children may not consume enough solid foods to meet their nutrient needs. A parent commented, 'My baby struggled with eating food, I received great help and support.'

The environment is safe and secure for all users. Vulnerable groups receive both practical and emotional support and families feel safe enough to openly share their concerns with staff. Children are safeguarded well. Home visits ensure support is tailor-made for vulnerable families. High numbers of families participated in the 'Road Safety Week' promoting good awareness of road safety amongst children. Those who are subject to a child protection plan, looked after children or 'Child in Need' referrals are effectively supported and, consequently, their outcomes are good. The support for children subject to Common Assessment Framework processes is good.

The 'Learning Together' activities are highly valued. A childminder said, 'The children I bring always have a great time and really enjoy themselves.' Playroom facilities are varied and children enjoy their time using the good resources available at the centre. The 'Play and Language' shop is popular with Eastern European families attending sessions. Families using the centre make satisfactory progress in developing their skills including parental skills and demonstrate improvement in their educational and personal development. However, although data shows that the percentage of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile has increased, the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest rose in two of the three schools in the area last year.

The centre contributes positively to the local community, taking part in events such as the Clapham Show and school open days. Parents sponsored a toddler assault course event raising £80 for 'Comic Relief.' Children are well behaved and they form positive relationships within the centre. Although 'Parent Champions' forward comments about activities, there are limited opportunities for parents to shape the services offered by the centre. Families improve their financial stability and independence through the individual support of family workers. For example, young parents in particular increase their budgeting skills, which many find difficult, partly because of their inexperience. The centre has helped a number of families to access the two-year funding so they can return to work or take up further education. However, there are limited progression routes for adults who may wish to seek volunteering opportunities.

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
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The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
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	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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The assessment process is effective in identifying the needs of families and pinpointing which targeted service will improve outcomes for the family. The centre works appropriately with other agencies, for example health visitors and social workers, that contribute to well-integrated provision for the most vulnerable families. Effective joint working with a nearby centre means teenage parents access specialised provision at the other setting. The centre offers a variety of services and activities that satisfactorily meets the needs of families. They include 'Busy Bees' activity sessions that include walks in the woods and dancing and singing sessions. Outreach services are suitable and targeting identified needs in the wider community. However, the centre's engagement of lone parents and hard-to-reach groups is not yet developed sufficiently to involve more of them in the centre's activities.

Learning, development and enjoyment are satisfactorily supported through inclusive and supportive strategies to support all learners as well as a satisfactory range of activities, such as 'Learning Together' and 'Story and Rhyme Time.' Parents attending family learning sessions say they are better able to support their children's early language and literacy development through play. Appropriate resources that are age-related and interesting encourage children's engagement and promote purposeful learning. For example, a parent said, 'My son loves the songs and he enjoys reading the books at home.' However, the centre does not currently have a system to assess and measure children's progress against the developmental stages in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The quality of care and support for vulnerable families is good. Families express high levels of satisfaction with the level of care, guidance and support offered by centre. They report that their lives are better for having had the help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives. A parent who was feeling down and has benefitted greatly from the support and social interaction at the centre said: 'I feel I can really share my views and worries with staff and know that they care and will listen'. The centre works productively with the specialist family support services for vulnerable children and their families to ensure their particular needs are met. Good quality information, advice and guidance mean families are effectively signposted to

the appropriate support services.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Satisfactory governance arrangements and day-to-day management help to ensure that the centre's work is making a difference to the lives of those users who access its activities and services. Satisfactory performance management and monitoring systems hold staff to account and assure the work of the centre's partners. The centre staff have a 'can do' attitude and are focused on improving outcomes for all children and families. Self-evaluation satisfactorily identifies the centre's strengths and weaknesses. This has resulted in changes to the provision so that the centre increasingly meets the needs of families. Key priorities are identified and the centre has an appropriate development plan that includes clear intentions. However, there are insufficient quantifiable targets for improvement to measure its performance.

The centre's actions to promote greater equality for different groups are satisfactory in removing barriers and are effective for children and families with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The ethnic breakdown of users shows that it is broadly representative of the local area.

Procedures for safeguarding are good and, together with the centre's effective early intervention and multi-agency cooperation, ensure that families feel safe and that their emotional and social needs are effectively met. Checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are thorough and child protection arrangements are secure and updated regularly. Robust risk assessments are undertaken regularly and good records are kept. Training of all staff, particularly in relation to child protection, domestic violence and for those working with children or adults with disabilities is of good quality.

Services generally deliver coordinated provision for families, which has a positive impact on their lives. Staff work effectively in different aspects of the centre's provision, such as in reception and the playroom. Relationships between most statutory partners are increasingly clear and understood. Productive links with social workers, health workers and midwives are increasingly meeting the needs of families. Satisfactory outcomes and provision that engages increasing numbers of families indicate that the centre's resources are adequately managed. This represents satisfactory value for money.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
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	3
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	3

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Clapham CC (Bedford Borough) on 12–13 July 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to speak to inspectors. We enjoyed talking to you and found your comments very helpful. Your children's centre is a welcoming place and provides you and your children with good facilities. Staff have worked hard to build a positive relationship with you and others in the local community. The groups run by the centre encourage children to be healthy, to have fun playing and learning and to cooperate with each other. The centre gives you advice on the best way to prepare healthy meals for your children, to stimulate them at home and how

to keep them safe.

Children's learning and development are improved by attending the centre. You told us that you enjoy coming to the centre and in particular letting your children take part in messy activities and discovering new ways to help them learn. 'Baby Massage' sessions are popular and help you learn the positive value of physical stimulation including holding, movement, touch and relaxation techniques. Your children behave well at the centre and benefit from playing with other children and from using the good quality toys and other resources. Staff understand your needs well and are very good at providing individual support and advice if you need them. You told us how much you value their support and guidance and how this has made a difference to your lives. The parent and family workers help families who are dealing with difficult circumstances well.

Parents and children benefit from the satisfactory provision at the centre. Some of you are keen to attend classes to improve your skills. These must be enjoyable because we noticed that there is regular attendance on these courses. Suitable sessions are organised for you to improve your parenting skills and for your children to develop the basic skills they need for the next stage in their learning. This means that you gain more confidence and expertise and your children are appropriately prepared to start nursery school.

Those of you who use the centre are much better now at staying safe and looking after your families. We know this because many of you told us of what you had learnt. Staff have worked hard to make it very safe for you and your children. The centre works effectively with other agencies, such as the health service and social services in particular to help vulnerable children and families. We agree that the centre is a very welcoming place to come to. Comments such as: 'Staff are very friendly, they can't help you enough' and 'I feel I can share my views and worries with staff and I know they care and listen,' are typical of the views you communicated to us.

We have found a few areas that require improvement and the centre's management are already aware of these. We are recommending that managers set clear and measurable targets for improvement in the centre's development plans. We have recommended that the centre makes assessments of children's starting points to show and increase the progress they make in developing new skills, to help narrow the achievement gap between the highest and lowest achievers. We have asked managers to increase the number of users using the centre's services from lone parents and hard-to-reach groups. We are also asking managers to increase opportunities for you to contribute to the development of the centre's services and engage more as volunteers.

We wish you every success for the future.

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