

Inspection report for Tilbury Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Thurrock |
| Inspection number | 383734 |
| Inspection dates | 13–14 September 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | Steve Nelson |

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| Linked school if applicable | |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Neptune Nursery |

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 locality 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, users' evaluations and case study information.

Information about the centre

Tilbury Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre. It operates in the Riverside and St Chad's wards from one site.

The locality manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre and is supported by the deputy children's centre coordinator. 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. A growing number of families using the centre are of Black African origin. Data for the reach area place the user base in the bottom 10% to 30% nationally for deprivation. The children's centre has 1199 children under five in its area. About 32% 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 below those expected for their age.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of activities, which includes support at the local community baby clinic, 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 and carers back into employment and training. The centre opens 52 weeks each year on weekdays from 8am to 6pm.

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 children's centre provides good support to children and families in its area. Outcomes are good and families enjoy the many good sessions provided. Children achieve well in all areas of learning and make good progress over time. Trusting and strong relationships throughout the centre and outreach areas contribute effectively to the good provision.

The environment is safe and secure. Priority groups and those children and parents identified as in most need of support are making good progress in overcoming barriers in their lives. All families comment on the warm and welcoming environment and the quality of the support they receive from all staff who work in the centre. One parent commented: 'The centre has supported me through the hardest times of my life. Having staff that are the same, when everyone else's change has been my greatest support.'

The locality manager and deputy children's centre coordinator know the area very well, as does the dedicated, well-trained and established team of parent outreach workers. 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: 'The centre is a safe haven, and the staff are so friendly.' Parents appreciate the good range of activities at the centre and they talk positively about the benefits. The centre provides good opportunities for parents to improve their parenting skills, develop confidence speaking English and to gain further skills which help them gain qualifications. However, the centre does not provide enough opportunities to involve

fathers in their children's learning.

Partnerships with the local community and other agencies are effective in securing good outcomes. Nevertheless, the centre's work with health services is not sufficiently developed to deliver a fully integrated breastfeeding service. The advisory board provides effective supervision and support for leaders and managers to improve provision. Senior leaders and managers know the centre's major strengths and areas for development. However, the development plan does not use data to set measurable targets for improvement. The centre's engagement with families accessing the centre's good-quality provision is good.

The centre's capacity to sustain improvement is good overall. Managers and staff form a committed team that is determined to improve provision and extend services to the wider community. They are focused on improving areas of weakness and gaps in provision and outcomes. The strong teamwork of staff and high levels of commitment by all stakeholders contribute effectively to improved outcomes for users. The local authority and advisory board support developments well and have good systems to monitor outcomes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the numbers of mothers continuing to breastfeed at six to eight weeks by working more closely with health services to promote the benefits of breastfeeding.
- Use data more effectively to evaluate the centre's effectiveness and to set measurable targets for improvement.
- Provide more opportunities for fathers to play and learn with their children by extending activities for them.

How good are outcomes for families?

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Health outcomes for families are good. Data supplied by the centre show that, although below average for last year, increasing numbers of mothers, including those from priority groups, are continuing to breastfeed. High numbers of mothers attend postnatal health clinics where they gain valuable information about how to keep their children healthy. One parent said, 'I learnt that a healthy start is the best start.' The 'Buggy Walk' group has led to improved health outcomes and active engagement for teenage parents and young mothers. Emotional well-being is an important aspect of the centre's work. The weekly counselling service provides effective support for parents experiencing family breakdown and helps them through difficulties.

Families using the centre make good progress in developing their skills, including parental skills, and demonstrate improvement in their educational and personal

development. Services offered by the centre are popular and groups have high levels of attendance. The centre is taking effective action to identify and narrow the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest. The weekly 'Play2gether' sessions have story and song times that provide structured opportunities for parents and children to play together. A parent said, 'My son loves coming and has improved his communication and social skills really well.' Children are well prepared for transition into nursery.

Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. For example, they help tidy away toys in the play areas. They show an increasing awareness of the importance of risk assessing situations themselves and know how to use equipment safely. Staff supervise children well throughout the day. They help parents develop good observation skills to ensure their children play safely. A parent said, 'I now have increased my awareness and confidence on how to keep my child safe.' Intervention for children subject to child protection plans is effective, and the support for children assessed under the Common Assessment Framework, including looked after children, is good.

The parents' forum plays an active role in the community. It organises regular open fun days throughout the year; 150 families attended this summer's event where £1000 was raised. Children and families show good levels of respect, care and concern for others. Parents, including those from priority groups such as lone parents, have many opportunities to express their views. As a result, for example, the timings of some sessions have been adapted to ensure an even better match with the needs of families. Training and both formal and informal education programmes for parents have improved their self-confidence and work-readiness. A growing number have progressed on to paid work. Forty parents have completed the English for speakers of other languages course in the last year. Advice to families on debt management and benefits has improved their economic stability.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| 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 | 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 | 2 |
| The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 2 |
| The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment | 2 |

How good is the provision?

2

Health and education professionals work closely with the centre to assess and review the needs of families. Good links with local schools, nurseries and other agencies ensure that the centre has the necessary information to plan for and meet learners' individual needs well. Strategies have been developed successfully to meet the needs of priority groups. For example, the centre delivers outreach 'Play and Learn' sessions for families living in local high-rise flats. A parent who attended a parenting course said, 'The centre has helped me to overcome anger issues I had with my son.' However, services do not provide enough activities to involve fathers in their children's learning.

The centre promotes learning and development well through sessions such as 'Baby Massage' and 'Play and Learn'. Crèche facilities ensure parents can leave their children safely to attend parenting courses. Young parents are integrated well. Children enjoy engaging in activities such as the 'Worlds of Discovery' sessions. A parent commented, 'It is a great place to learn, have fun and explore new and exciting things with my child.' Case studies and individual parents highlight how they have positively changed their attitudes and behaviour following attendance at courses and that this has made them stronger people and better parents.

Good tailored support develops families' well-being. Families express high levels of satisfaction with the level of care, guidance and support offered by centre. They know that the centre is somewhere to turn to in times of crisis and that it has helped many to turn their lives around. The centre knows its families well and uses this knowledge effectively to shape its provision so that outcomes for all groups are at least good. The centre works well with the speech and language therapy team. It provides good support that encourages positive modelling of practice for parents to develop their children's language and literacy. The centre works productively with the specialist family support services to help vulnerable children and their families and ensure that their particular needs are met.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| 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 | 2 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are consistently good. Senior leaders have a clear vision for the development of the centre and ensure that the centre is effective in

improving the life chances of children and their families. The local authority provides good supervision as well as support to the centre and has ensured effective governance. Links between strategic planning and service provision are effective. Good performance monitoring systems assure the work of the centre's staff and partners. Morale is high, and belief in the centre's success is evident at all levels. Self-evaluation satisfactorily identifies the centre's strengths and weaknesses. This has resulted in changes to provision so the centre increasingly meets the needs of families. However, the centre does not use data to set quantifiable targets for improvement to measure its performance.

Procedures for safeguarding are good and, together with the centre's effective early intervention and multi-agency cooperation, ensure that families, including those experiencing domestic violence, feel safe and that their emotional and social needs are 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 prior to all activities. Staff training is regularly updated.

Effective strategies to promote greater equality have improved engagement and outcomes for priority groups, such as disabled children and those with special educational needs. The centre has contributed effectively to narrowing of the achievement gap of the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage in the area.

Outreach services are highly effective in engaging with 90% of the families in the area. They have been successful in engaging priority groups such as lone parents and workless households. Relationships between key partners and voluntary organisations such as Women's Aid are effective in securing good outcomes. However, the centre's partnership working with health services is not yet developed to ensure a fully integrated delivery of breastfeeding services. Resources are well managed so that good-quality services are consistently engaging and improving outcomes for families. This represents good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| 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 | 3 |
| 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 | 2 |

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| adults | |
| 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

The inspection took consideration of the Neptune Nursery Ofsted report which judged the overall effectiveness to be outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Tilbury Children's Centre on 13–14 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us, sharing your views and contributing to the inspection of your children's centre. Those of you who use the centre benefit from good-quality provision. The centre is a warm, welcoming place. It provides you with very good, practical advice on care and safety that you say you find invaluable in helping you support your families at home. Those of you who attend the good-quality parenting courses say that these have helped you to manage your children's behaviour and support their learning and development. You said that you feel safe at the centre because staff are very supportive and that they look after you and keep your children safe. We found that staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and that they all have up-to-date training.

Your children's behaviour at the centre is good. Many of you find the cookery and keep-fit activities really interesting and enjoyable. They help you and your children learn about how to stay healthy. We found that children have fun and enjoy the many activities the centre offers. They make good progress in their learning and are prepared well for school. You enjoy sessions such as 'Play Babies', 'Little 1's' and 'Play and Learn' with your children. The centre works with adult learning and training providers so that you improve your own education and employment opportunities.

We found that the centre tries hard to help everyone. It is keen to promote equality and diversity. It is particularly good at making sure young parents are supported well and have good opportunities to achieve well. The locality manager and deputy children's centre coordinator and all staff are working hard to support every family.

Many of you have benefited through the good support it offers when families need help quickly. You told us directly how the centre has given you confidence in various aspects of your lives and, in some instances, has been a 'lifesaver' and changed your lives considerably for the better.

The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities it offers. It encourages you to organise activities such as fun days, trips and social events that benefit families in the area. We were particularly impressed to learn that you raised funds with the local authority to develop a community park next to the centre for the children and families of Tilbury.

We have found a few areas that require improvement and the centre's managers 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 asked that the centre's managers increase opportunities for fathers to learn and play with their children. We are also asking managers to work more closely with health services to promote the benefits of breastfeeding.

We wish you every success for the future.

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