

Inspection report for Cowley St Laurence Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Hillingdon
Inspection number	404137
Inspection dates	19—20 September 2012
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Date of previous inspection	12—13 October 2012
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Linked school if applicable	Cowley St Laurence CE 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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's staff and representatives from the local authority, members of the advisory board, parent forum and representatives from some of the centre's partners. They had informal discussions with parents and users of the services.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation including the action plan produced by the school and local authority in relation to findings from the previous inadequate inspection, key policies, and the centre's self-evaluation documents and data about users of the centre.

Information about the centre

The centre serves the Cowley area of Uxbridge, Middlesex. It is a phase two centre originally designated in January 2008, although it was not until December 2009 that it provided the range of services for its designation: drop-in sessions; family support; child and family health services; and Jobcentre Plus. Services have changed since then and Jobcentre Plus is no longer a partner. The centre now offers short sessions of childcare. Staff provide advice and guidance to families about other services locally, including those provided in two local children's centres.

This small centre occupies part of a new building that links the two main buildings of the primary school. It comprises two multi-purpose rooms with an outdoor area and office space. Until the building was completed in November 2010, the centre operated services from a number of venues in the local area. The centre has undergone many changes in staff, including a period when there was no administrator. The centre manager is the only full-time member of staff.

The area that the centre serves has some pockets of deprivation as well as more affluent areas. Over 25% of families in the area are in receipt of workless benefits, 39% receive incapacity benefits and 17% are lone parents. There is a local women's refuge and mother and baby unit in the centre's reach area. The majority of the community, 70%, are of White British heritage. The remaining 30% represent a wide range of cultural heritages. Children's levels of skills and experiences when they start school are lower than is typical for their age, especially in language development.

The governing body of the school managed the centre on behalf of the local authority until August of this year, when its management reverted to the local authority. A parents' forum has been re-established very recently and an advisory board advises the centre's leaders on the types of services to offer the community.

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

Cowley St Laurence Children's Centre has improved significantly since its last inspection and its overall effectiveness is now satisfactory. The action plans devised following the last inspection were thorough and enabled managers at all levels to rectify the issues identified. As a result, more families within the centre's reach area use the services provided, with clear line management and accountability at all levels.

The centre is bright and welcoming. Staff have a caring approach and have built a high level of trust with families. They are committed to helping families to improve their life chances. Relationships are positive and families feel well supported. One parent reported that the centre had helped her in the past and that she now volunteers to support the centre's work. Safeguarding is satisfactory. Parents feel safe and say that the centre is a secure place to bring their children. Case studies show that the services parents are engaged with are having a positive impact on their lives. Comments made by parents include: 'I don't know how we would have done it without you.'

The centre now uses data provided by the local authority more effectively, to connect with families in its reach area. Data show a continuing improvement in the

number of families being engaged by the centre as it takes a more proactive approach to engagement with its local community. The centre has also undertaken its own survey to obtain direct information from its local community, to identify services they wish to see developed and provided by the centre.

The centre has developed and implemented an effective system for recording which families attend activities, this information is used when designing new services, and to evaluate the impact of its services. Families are engaged with the centre and are very happy with the services they receive. However, the centre does not have an outreach worker at present to engage more of its target families. The centre is clearly able to demonstrate its impact on improving the achievement of children that are now in school. However, not all staff working with families are fully engaging to facilitate learning.

The centre is effective at working with most of its target groups and families who need specific support to help them overcome difficulties in their lives. This work is being effectively supported by good partnerships with a number of key services locally. Its partnership with the school has improved and sharing of information ensures that the transition to school from the centre is smooth and that children settle well. The resources within the centre are good; however, there is insufficient information and communication technology provision for children to develop skills in this area. The accommodation used for children and families is good; however, further thought should be given as to how best to meet the accommodation needs for the adult services.

The quality of governance has improved since the local authority took over from the school, and is now satisfactory. Lines of communication are much improved, ensuring clear and coherent management of the centre, with clearly identifiable lines of accountability and responsibility. The self-evaluation is satisfactory, being overly descriptive. The development plan is clear and centers on maintaining and improving the services and facilities provided to families within the local community. The centre is inclusive; however, the displays around the centre do not sufficiently reflect the many diverse ethnic groups that use it.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure the centre better meets the needs of families within its reach area, by employing an outreach worker.
- Ensure that staff working with families and children are better able to support and extend learning through staff development exercises.
- Ensure that there are appropriate resources to promote information and communication technology effectively.
- Ensure that the internal environment better reflects the local community with its rich culture and ethnic mix.
- Ensure that all accommodation available to the centre is used effectively to support community needs.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre staff are committed to improving the health outcomes for children and families. Outcomes overall are satisfactory and improving.

Families are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to improve themselves and their children's health. Children are encouraged by centre staff to wash their hands before eating and after using the toilet, promoting good personal hygiene. Healthy eating is promoted in playgroup. Children attending the centre have routine opportunities to benefit from outdoor play. Healthy eating cookery courses are run at the centre. The centre provides information on staying healthy, diet and exercise. However, the percentage of Reception Year children living in the reach area who are obese is high. Parents are given information regarding dental health. The centre has taken proactive actions to improve the breastfeeding rate within its reach area. All staff are trained and are more confident when dealing with breastfeeding mothers. The local breastfeeding ambassador attends the centre to help mothers who may need support, and operates an open door policy, encouraging mothers to ask for help. The centre has seen an increase in the proportion of mothers breastfeeding at six weeks from 55% to 67%. The number of two-year-olds attending for their two-year assessment was low; this has steadily improved month on month as health visitors now deliver the two-year assessments within the centre. The centre has worked to improve the take-up of its services by teenage parents and young parents. The National Childbirth Trust works effectively with the centre, providing well-being courses during pregnancy. Topics covered include de-stressing, coping strategies and good nutrition. One father stopped smoking when he heard about the effects of smoking on the baby's health.

The arrangements for families to stay safe are satisfactory. Care is taken to ensure that all activities are well organised and supervised, with thorough risk assessments. Families report feeling safe and protected. Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. The staff ensure that the environment is safe by checking the premises daily, and between sessions. Parents and carers have attended sessions covering National Safety Week. Parents complete safety quizzes identifying areas of concern. One hundred and one safety plug sockets were handed out during Safety Week 2012. The centre has planned to raise parents' awareness about safety gates. Paediatric first aid courses are offered to parents. Families are able to discuss very personal issues with centre staff and obtain advice. Many are signposted to other services.

Parents and carers make a valuable contribution to the work and development of the centre. There are a number of parent volunteers working within the centre, providing and developing services and activities that meet identified needs within the local community, for example, the need for resources to support children's learning and development such as the 'Family fun bags' loaned to families to use at home. Parents volunteer to provide support and advice for other parents who are breastfeeding.

There are currently 10 parents who are waiting to be cleared to become parent volunteers. Parents' and carers' views are collected following each session and suggestions are discussed and acted upon, for example, for a course on paediatric first aid. The centre undertook a community fun day, which encouraged families to suggest services that they would like the centre to provide, ensuring that the centre becomes more fully integrated into its community.

Parenting courses encourage parents and carers to become more actively involved in their child's learning. The adult education services provides a number of programmes such as first steps into information and communication technology (ICT), mathematics, and keeping up with the children in literacy. A new programme of English as a second language (ESOL) will start at the end of September 2012. Following completion, many parents feel more confident to help their children with homework. Others are using the courses as a stepping-stone on to further qualifications, such as GCSE mathematics. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores show a slight decline in the number achieving 78+ points from 60% in 2010 to 59% in 2012. However, this is in line with national averages. The primary school has reported that the children settle well.

The centre has developed an effective partnership with a voluntary organisation providing advice to families including access to childcare, housing and training. Families are signposted to Jobcentre Plus, which is no longer situated within the centre, and to the Citizens' Advice Bureau for advice on benefit and financial matters. Individuals are signposted to education and training in local colleges. A number of parents and carers have moved into paid jobs, developing in self-esteem and confidence. Others become parent helpers or volunteers within the centre, or become ambassadors for the centre, for example for breastfeeding and parenting advice.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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 centre provides a satisfactory range of services. The number of families in the area using the services has increased from 328 in 2010 to 479 in 2012. Since the last inspection, and following the community fun day consultation event, the centre staff understand better the needs of the area, particularly for families in the target groups. The centre staff, along with the local authority, are working to implement a number of suggestions from this event, such as fathers' groups, child development training courses, and support for job applications. Assessment methods are effective, and outcomes satisfactorily recorded. There is a lack of outreach work due to staff shortages; this sometimes means that hard to reach families are not contacted. However, the continued uptake of services offered by the centre is evidence of its impact in meeting the immediate and personal development needs of the reach families and target groups. Children's achievements are recorded satisfactorily in their profiles. Prior learning is acknowledged and recorded, and used satisfactorily to signpost families to further learning.

The care, guidance and support provided to families are satisfactory. All parents who spoke to inspectors identified how positively the centre is helping them and their families to improve their lives. The quality of support for families in crisis is effective, minimising or preventing crisis events. This is evident in the cooperation between the local authority and other services to assess the needs of the most vulnerable children and families. The centre offers crèche facilities for parents and carers attending development sessions such as behaviour management.

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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Since the previous inspection found governance and accountability of the centre to be inadequate, the governing body has developed and implemented a satisfactory quality improvement plan. Governance and accountability transferred from the school to the local authority in August 2012, and is now satisfactory. The lines of accountability are clear, and better understood by all involved. The local authority has become closely involved in monitoring the effectiveness of the centre, bringing both the quality improvement plan and the centre service plan under the authority's strategic direction.

Clear focus is placed on upon the continual professional development of staff. This

includes formal safeguarding training and working with families in crisis. All staff are appropriately qualified. Partners have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in improving the outcomes for families; this is resulting in a more coherent service to families. The findings from the community consultation are used effectively to inform key priorities for the centre. Its effectiveness in meeting these is monitored and challenged by the advisory board. The centre has developed effective systems for evaluating the services it offers, to ensure that they meet the needs of the families within its reach area. For example, parents have gained confidence in completing homework with their children, and developed aspirations to improve their career prospects. The centre offers satisfactory value for money, as demonstrated by the increase in the rate of families attending the centre and the increase in the number of vulnerable groups attending the centre, for example lone parents. The centre's ethos is fully inclusive. However, its internal environment does not reflect the very diverse and culturally rich community it serves sufficiently.

Safeguarding is given a high priority, and all policies and procedures are implemented consistently. Vetting and recruitment processes in place for all staff and volunteers are satisfactory. Training in safeguarding and child protection is given high importance. The centre plays an important role in ensuring that children are safe, and in promoting their emotional health and well-being. Where necessary, child protection plans are implemented effectively. The existence of few active cases demonstrates that staff take swift and appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are identified. The centre works effectively with external agencies, such as health visitors and social workers, to reduce the number of children who are at risk of harm.

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	3
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	3

reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cowley St Laurence Children’s Centre on 19 and 20 September 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Your children’s centre was inspected 11 months ago and was found to be inadequate overall. Following the inspection, the governing body produced an action plan that has been effective in bringing about improvements. As a result, the centre now provides satisfactory support to children and families accessing its services, leading to satisfactory and improving outcomes for families. Governance and accountability transferred from the school to the local authority in August 2012, and are now satisfactory.

We enjoyed talking to you during centre activities. You were clear when making your views known about the centre. We agree that the staff at the centre are caring and welcoming and provide you with an appropriate range of guidance and support. You told us how you enjoy the different activity sessions that are helping your children to learn and develop. It was good to see many of you taking part in the Stay and Play and Little Roos Playgroup sessions.

We could see that relationships are positive and that you feel well supported, particularly when you are experiencing difficulty. One parent said she was happy to help because she likes the centre and it had helped her in the past. Staff are trained in safeguarding children and ensure children are well protected. You told us that you feel safe and that you feel the centre is a secure place to bring your children. Case studies show that family support work, such as Small Steps, Little Roos and Dads’ groups are effective in helping you to develop effective strategies to manage your children’s behaviour positively.

The centre actively promotes the inclusion of children and families from all backgrounds, providing a welcoming environment within which families from different cultures get on well together.

The centre has an accurate self-evaluation and correctly identifies what it does well and where it needs to improve. The centre is at an early stage of demonstrating the impact of its work. The current action plan is clear and linked to a number of priorities raised from the Fun Day consultation event in which many of you took part.

In the last 11 months, the centre has increased the number of families registered at the centre from 328 to 479. Staff are able to show that an increasing number of families from the target groups are accessing services, for example lone parents, teenage mothers and young parents. The centre is improving its use of data to plan services and to target particular groups.

We have asked the centre to make a number of improvements. We have asked it to ensure staffing resources meet the needs of families within its reach area by, for example, employing an outreach worker. We have asked it to ensure that staff working with families and children are better able to support and extend learning and that there are appropriate resources to promote information and communication technology. We have asked the centre to make its internal environment better reflect the local community with its rich culture and ethnic mix. We have also asked it to ensure that all accommodation available to the centre is used effectively to support community needs.

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