

Inspection report for Marvels Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Lewisham
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Marvels Lane Primary School URN 100696
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 the centre leader and staff, representatives from the local authority, and the governing body. They also spoke to partner agencies, for example health services and the family support team, parents and other users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

This phase 2 centre was designated in March 2008 and officially opened in March 2009. Its services fulfil the full core purpose and following a local authority review it now provides targeted services for 0- to 19-year-olds and their families.

The borough has divided its children's centre services into four areas, each covering between four to six wards. Marvels Lane Children's Centre is located in the Grove Park ward of Area 3. Following a major reorganisation and commissioning out of services by the local authority, the governing body of Marvels Lane Primary School took over the management of the children's centre in August 2012. The school's assistant headteacher is now also the centre leader and all of the other staff who deliver services are school employees. None of the previous staff of the centre are still in post. A re-constituted joint advisory board covering Areas 3 and 4 has been set up but has not yet had its first meeting.

Services are available from 9.00am until 5.00pm Monday to Friday for 48 weeks of the year from the centre's purpose-built premises adjacent to Marvels Lane Primary School.

The reach area covers nine super output areas, four of which are in the 20% most deprived in the country. White British heritage families account for 81% of the population. The remainder includes a wide range of other ethnic groups; the most significant, at 10%, being Black or Black British. Some 34% of children aged from birth to four years live in households dependent on workless benefits which is well above the national figure. The proportion of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, at 7.6%, is far lower than the national average.

There are 1,087 under five-years-old living in the reach area. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are typically below the level expected 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Marvels Lane Children’s Centre provides a satisfactory service to families. The centre provides a warm welcome to those who use it. A large majority of families are helped to have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives through a strong focus on healthy eating and exercise and good links with the health services. Safeguarding is good because Marvels Lane Primary School’s very effective policies and procedures have been adapted for, and adopted by, the centre and because of the safeguarding team’s in-depth expertise and knowledge.

The centre provides a wide range of courses to help adults develop their parenting and wider skills, and many report increased confidence levels. A commonly-voiced view was, ‘I used to be so shy; I wouldn’t be able to do what I’m doing now without the courses.’ However, the centre is not tracking adults’ progress to ensure the needs of all target groups are met or to know the long term benefits. This is also the case with children who access centre services as their early development and progress is not recorded, either during their time at the centre or when they move on to early learning. This is partly due to a lack of information exchange, for example from partners when adults are signposted for support elsewhere. Furthermore, there are no strong ties with early years settings and schools other than the link school

because of the short time the centre leader has been in post.

Most families in the local area are registered with the centre and all target groups are represented. Teenage parents and families of disabled children and those with special educational needs engage particularly well. However, the numbers from some target groups who go on to use the services are relatively low. This is especially so for lone parents and fathers. A lack of consistent, readily available data prevents the centre knowing accurately which groups are accessing services. In addition, the leadership team has not had enough time to adapt services to meet the needs of specific groups such as fathers. Outreach work, currently undertaken by the school's learning mentor, is also limited due to the constraints of staff working jointly across the school and the centre. As a result, many of the families who access the centre live within close proximity of the school as services are not yet taken out to the further regions of the reach area.

Families feel they have a voice in shaping centre activities and they have trusting and amicable relationships with the staff. Everyone mixes well at all activities and participants reflect the increasingly diverse nature of the community. All leaders and staff have a strong enthusiasm and sense of excitement about their new roles and the part the centre can play in supporting families, especially those whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. Although they have only led the centre for a matter of weeks, much has been done to plan for the future and there is a concerted drive to increase the numbers from some target groups and from other parts of the reach area. They have already had an impact in improving the lives of individual families and there are early indications of improving outcomes. Self-evaluation is effective. Consequently, there is a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop a consistent method for tracking the progress of children and adults who access the centre and use this to measure the impact of provision and identify where precisely to target services by:
 - monitoring children's progress more consistently and in line with the new Early Years Foundation Stage framework
 - working with schools, early years settings and the local authority to devise a system to track children when they move on to the next stage in their education
 - liaising with partners to develop a consistent method to track the progress of adults when they have accessed training, further education or employment advice.
- Increase the number of families who access the centre's services by:
 - working with the local authority to ensure that accurate data is provided about the target groups in the community and those who access services
 - extending outreach work to target services to families who need it most,

such as lone parents, fathers and those at the further regions of the reach area.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Local data show good, and improving, health outcomes for children. A very high proportion (75%) of mothers breastfeed after six weeks. Childhood obesity, at 11%, has dropped substantially over two years. Regular visits to parents' coffee mornings from the dietician, nutritionist and school nurse have done much to help families understand how to lead healthy lives. Although the centre does not have an outdoor area, physical activities are woven into centre sessions such as the music group, and parents are encouraged to use local green spaces. Families' emotional and mental health is addressed effectively through access to the school counsellor and through good links with the health services.

Structured parenting and first-aid courses and sessions on anger and behaviour management have been effective in helping parents keep their families safe. The rate of emergency hospital admissions is low. Parents have a trusting relationship with staff, many of whom are known to them through their contact with the school. Consequently, they will turn to them when difficulties arise, such as coping with a child's specific behaviour needs. Staff are trained in multi-agency working and have a wealth of experience in making use of Common Assessment Framework (CAF) plans for school families. They are now bringing these into effect for the most vulnerable children's centre families, such as looked after children and those children subject to child protection plans. Recent improvements in information sharing at a strategic level mean that staff are now being informed about any such children in the reach area, where previously this was in relation to families attending the school.

Parents and children really enjoy interacting in groups such as the Big Me Little U music session, where they were excitedly singing and jumping with a huge inflatable ball. Children behave well and develop good relationships with adults and each other. Strong links with teaching staff in the school ensure there is an effective focus on developing early communication and language skills. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results have improved over three years, with the percentage of children gaining a score of 78 points or more increasing by 12% to 58% in 2012, although this remains below the national average. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest has also narrowed by 5.7% to 26%, which is now better than the national average. Anecdotal evidence from parents is that children who access the centre's services make good progress and settle well when they move on to the next stage in their learning. However, the centre has no means to record this or the longer term benefits of their contact.

The centre provides a wide range of courses for adults to improve their skills, including Laptop Learning and literacy groups, and to help support their children to learn through play. Several parents, including those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, stated that their confidence levels had grown substantially. Some have gone on to volunteer or work in the school and subsequently improved their

social and economic well-being. However, the centre is not yet tracking which families are accessing courses in the centre or elsewhere, or the outcomes, to ensure that the content is appropriately challenging and that families continue to progress.

Although there is no formal parents' forum, well-attended weekly coffee mornings ensure there is a platform for parents to air their views. They feel they are listened to, for example when they asked for, and got, the re-instatement of the parent and toddler group. Parent governors ensure there is a direct link with the governing body, although the means for parents to put forward their views at the new advisory board have not yet been finalised.

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	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

Staff have a very clear understanding of the local community because of their many years of experience in working with families whose children attend Marvels Lane Primary School. This has been used effectively to improve outcomes such as parental confidence. Careful thought is being given to developing a timetable of activities that meet families' needs, especially those in targeted groups. However, as initiatives are only just being put in place and some of the necessary data has not been readily available to show which groups are currently participating, the range of services is satisfactory rather than good. For example, although fathers attend some groups, there are none that actively encourage them and, at present, no services in the evening or at weekends. In addition, the needs of families who live some distance from the centre are not being fully met.

The number of activities is increasing however, and these activities are often of good quality. They are beginning to engage some target groups that most need support. For example, teenage parents feel welcome and attend sessions, as do disabled children and those with special educational needs such as autism. Personal

development and achievement are celebrated through awarding certificates and parents are rightly proud of their work portfolios. However, the centre does not effectively track the progress of all families who use the centre.

Some individual families have received good quality care, guidance and support, for example when there has been a family crisis such as a domestic violence incident. This has made a discernible difference to their lives, especially where there has been input from partners such as the Family Support Team and commissioned providers such as Targeted Family Support. One parent voiced the views of many by stating, 'This is the one place where I can come where people understand me.' The centre is aware now of the need to extend this support to more families in the community and to ensure that better information exchange is established and used effectively to support the most vulnerable children, such as those subject to child protection plans.

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

There is a clear structure of governance and accountability following the major reorganisation, although systems have yet to be fully embedded. The centre leader, headteacher and link governor are quickly getting to grips with the challenges facing the centre and have already implemented positive changes. This has laid foundations to help improve outcomes for families, especially those in target groups. The action plan has clear appropriate priorities that are based on the local authority's overarching aims of improved parenting and attachment, improving school readiness, and preventing escalation of need. However, targets are not always time specific and they do not always make effective use of data to measure the impact as some data have only recently become available.

Staff are managed effectively in their work, although at present the capacity to undertake further outreach work is limited. Families benefit from some resources in the school, such as staff expertise and access to the counselling service, and they are also signposted to other local children's centres. Consequently, a satisfactory range of families make use of the services and feel that their needs are met. However, some target groups, such as lone parents and fathers, are under represented and for this reason the centre's value for money is judged as satisfactory.

Everyone receives a warm welcome and the building is fully accessible to all, including those with a disability. Equality and diversity are promoted soundly and those who use the centre reflect the changing ethnicity in the area. The centre can point to successes in narrowing the achievement gap for some families, for example by giving them confidence to retrain and obtain work in the school. However, at present the number of activities and weekday-only opening restrict access for some. Furthermore, outreach work is not sufficiently extended to target some of the most vulnerable groups and the benefits to these families of accessing the centre's services are therefore limited.

Safeguarding is given a high priority in all the centre's work as staff have gained considerable knowledge and experience from their work at the school, which they are now bringing to children's centre families. The safeguarding policies and procedures have evolved from the school's well-established ones. Those responsible for ensuring families are kept safe are well trained, including in specific matters such as domestic violence. Staff attend multi-agency review meetings and now use Common Assessment Framework processes well to safeguard children's centre families. Well-developed and regular risk assessments ensure families are safe and secure on centre premises. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau and recruitment checks are carried out on anyone working in the centre.

The major reorganisation and subsequent change of leadership and governance of the centre have meant that some partnerships, including those at a more strategic level, are not yet embedded. Nevertheless, the centre leader has already been proactive in establishing effective links with the health services and with agencies such as the Family Support Team and Targeted Family Support. This is beginning to impact on outcomes, especially in improving healthy lifestyles. Strong links with the co-located school ensure support for families can be continuous and information about younger siblings who may benefit from children's centre services can be shared. However, links with other schools and early years settings in the reach area are not as well established to ensure that families benefit equally from the services offered.

Families using the centre are supportive and appreciative of its work and the good relationships they have with staff. However, there have been no regular annual surveys. Also, a more useful means to evaluate the impact of services has only just been put in place. Nevertheless, families who commit to courses, such as the 10-week SHARE programme, engage well and there is a high completion rate. Children's views are taken into account through observing what the children enjoy, or asking parents to note them on 'speech bubbles'.

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	3

which secure improvement in outcomes	
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

The Marvels Lane Primary School was last inspected in January 2011 and judged as good overall. The safeguarding judgment of good was taken into account to inform the judgement made of the children's centre's safeguarding procedures. The inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

Thank you for your participation in the inspection and for taking the time to tell us about the centre's work. It was very helpful to visit all of the activities and thank you for welcoming us into your classes and groups. Here is a summary of what we found.

We inspected the Marvels Lane Children's Centre on 17 and 18 October 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. The understanding that you have of how to lead healthy lives and the centre's safeguarding procedures are both good features.

The governing body has only very recently taken over running the centre on behalf of the local authority and the assistant headteacher is now also the centre leader. This has obviously meant big changes for some staff who now work across the school and the children's centre. Although it is early days, there are already plans to develop more services, especially aimed at families who would need most support

and help. At present outcomes for those who use the centre are satisfactory overall. A large majority of you has a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives because there are strong links with the health services and you have been given useful information through visits from the nutritionist, dietician and school nurse at your coffee mornings. As a result, the numbers of you who breastfeed your babies and have them immunised are rising and the number of Reception age children who are considered to be obese is falling.

You feel safe and secure in the centre and have high levels of trust in the staff, even when there are very sensitive problems in your lives. Help to develop your parenting skills, such as dealing with behaviour issues and first-aid training, have improved your confidence levels in relation to keeping your children safe. Centre staff are experienced in supporting families through enlisting the help of other agencies, but they are not always automatically told when children in the area need more intensive levels of support.

You tell us that your children benefit from their time at the centre, growing in confidence and independence. However, the centre is not tracking the progress children make in enough detail or following up the impact of its work when children move on to school. We have asked the centre to work with others, such as schools and nurseries, to develop a system to measure how well children progress so that it can ensure the activities are developing children's early learning well. Several of you mentioned how much your own confidence has grown as a result of attending courses such as the SHARE programme, so that you have gone on to train as teaching assistants or to volunteer in the school. Many of you agreed with the statement of one of you who said, 'I used to be so shy; I wouldn't have been able to do what I am doing now without the courses.' This has obviously had positive benefits for you and your families. However, not enough of you are benefiting from this help, especially for some groups who need most support. Again, we have asked the centre to follow up the longer term outcomes for you and your families to make sure courses are tailored so that everyone achieves as well as they can.

The number of families registered at the centre is high and some groups, such as teenage parents and families of disabled children and those with special educational needs, make good use of the services. However, some, including lone parents and fathers, do not use centre services as well as others. This is partly because the centre has not had easily accessible and reliable information about who attends and which families are most in need of support. In addition, because staff are still adjusting to their new roles, there has not been enough work done to ensure families in the wider community are made aware of the centre and what it can offer. Many of you who use the centre at present do so because you have children who attend the Marvels Lane Primary School. We have asked the centre to ensure that families without school age children and those who live further afield are made aware of what is on offer. Also, at the moment, the timetable is still being developed to enable activities to be targeted at where there is the most need.

All the governance structures are in place, but as they are fairly new their impact is still to be seen. Nevertheless, there is a strong sense of commitment from everyone involved in the centre and an excitement about what the centre can offer to families in the local area, especially those who need help most. Work has already started to develop links with more partners and to strengthen those already in place. The centre leader is very clear about her vision for the future and is quickly coming to grips with the challenges of her new post. As a result, the centre has a sound capacity to continue to improve.

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