

Inspection report for Sydney Russell Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
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Reporting inspector	Rosy Belton HMI

Centre leader	Lisa Ward
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Parsloes Avenue Dagenham RM9 5QS
Telephone number	020 8724 1840
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	sydneyrussellchildrenscentre@lbbd.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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 manager, the manager of the co-located private day nursery, the youth worker, volunteers, and family support workers. They also met with parents and representatives from the local authority, partner agencies, health services, the Children's Centre Community Forum and parents' forum.

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

Information about the centre

Sydney Russell Children's Centre is a phase two centre within the central area of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. The local authority manages the centre, which opened in 2007. The centre is based at the entrance of a large secondary school, and co-located with a private day nursery, which is subject to separate inspection. The centre is part of a cluster with three other children's centres within the locality working in partnership. To meet its core purpose, the centre offers family support, child and family health services, including young people's sexual health advice and counselling, a 15-place crèche, adult learning and employment support. The Children's Centre Community Forum acts as an advisory board and supports the centre.

The centre is located in the Parsloes ward, which has the second highest proportion of lone parent households. At 42%, this is well above the borough figure of almost 31%. The locality is within the 20% to 30% most deprived in the country. The figure for young people not in education, employment or training is higher in Parsloes ward than any other ward in the borough. The number of children within the borough aged below five years old has rapidly risen over the past 10 years and 932 within this age group live in the children's centre reach area. Currently, nearly 36% of children

aged 0–4 live in households dependant on workless benefits, compared to 38% borough-wide and well above the national average of 19.7%. The percentage of children under 16 living in poverty within the ward was just above the all Barking and Dagenham rate of 39%. The average for England as a whole is 21.3%. At Parsloes Primary School, 23% of pupils speak English as an additional language and at Southwood Primary school, the rate is 34%, both lower than the borough average for primary schools at 46%. Children’s knowledge, skills and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those usually found, especially in communication and language skills. The centre is taking part in a national payment by results pilot.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of Sydney Russell Children’s Centre is outstanding because of the vital role it plays in improving outcomes for the vast majority of families in its reach area. The centre manager, supported by the local authority strategic lead for children’s centres, can clearly demonstrate the impact of services on families who use the centre. The collection, collation and analysis of data have been a powerful factor in achieving this. The strong focus on young people’s sexual health, in close partnership with the secondary school, is a unique feature of the centre and promotes the health and well-being of young people, particularly the vast majority of teenage parents, exceptionally well. However, despite great efforts by the local authority and the centre to change behaviours and support families to eat healthily and take physical exercise, too many children in the area remain overweight for their age.

The outstanding quality of services provided keeps parents coming back. The wide range of learning opportunities and excellent support enables both children and parents to succeed, with many parents achieving vocational qualifications, employability skills and work experience to improve the economic life chances of both them and their children. This is a particular strength of the centre.

Due to the excellent learning opportunities and specific support to improve their

communication and language skills, children have enhanced achievements on entry to school as a result of attending the centre and accessing the high-quality provision. One parent said: 'The speech and language support was fantastic. My child is now doing really well at school and I was given really good guidance on how to support her.' However, routine involvement of local primary schools in the centre's work would enable closer monitoring of the continued success of children on entering primary education.

The centre leaders have forged strong partnerships with the secondary school, the locality team, the day nursery and other agencies, enhancing the service offer and particularly meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families in the area. Safeguarding arrangements, including those for the safe recruitment of staff, are outstanding. The close working relationships between the multi-agency locality team and the children's centre staff have ensured the well-being and safety of children and families at risk within the area. The local families' culture and backgrounds are valued and excellent work to promote equality and diversity, and community cohesion, makes the centre welcoming and friendly.

The children's centre has demonstrated outstanding capacity to sustain improvement. This is shown through its excellent leadership and performance management which measure both the centre's impact on improving outcomes for children and families and the staff's role in providing high-quality services in the children's centre area. The active involvement of parents helps to shape services provided and enables their involvement in running activities and events for themselves. The local authority provides excellent support and challenge feeding in to the centre's self-evaluation; stretching staff and inspiring them to continuously improve the provision.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Consolidate activities to further reduce obesity rates in children in the area through continued promotion and provision of activities and events to develop physical activity and healthy eating.
- Build on the links with local primary schools to strengthen their involvement in the centre and enable monitoring of children's transition into primary school and their continued success as learners.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The children's centre has an excellent approach to improving health outcomes for families, including those most in need of support. The on-site antenatal and postnatal services are particularly well used with the majority of local mothers accessing antenatal clinic appointments. Further engagement with children's centre services are excellent with the very large majority of families in the local reach area

fully engaged with appropriate health services. The centre provides particularly good promotional work to encourage breastfeeding. The number of mothers initiating breastfeeding has increased and is higher than the borough average. The very effective work with the family nurse partnership to provide intensive home visiting for young parents involving mothers initiating breastfeeding and a reduction in smoking is particularly good. The centre provides a strong focus on outside play to help develop children's physical skills and good promotion of fitness for parents through, for example, 'Zumba' classes. The promotion of healthy eating is excellent with a range of healthy cooking activities, and families are aware of how to keep themselves and their children healthy; however, despite the centre's and local authority's best efforts, progress has been slow in reducing obesity rates in Reception-aged children. The promotion of mental health services through borough-wide initiatives is very effective. Excellent health and well-being support for teenage parents is provided with the vast majority within the area accessing services at the centre.

The arrangements to keep families and children safe, including vulnerable adults, are excellent. Site security is robust and effective. Vigilant reception staff pay close attention to safe working practices. Parents, children and staff feel safe attending and working in the centre. Very effective targeted family support engages families at risk who report confidence in sharing their concerns and accessing support. Staff are well trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and are confident in its use with families, with excellent outcomes. Records show a significant reduction in children in need cases and in the number of children subject to child protection plans. Particularly good use is made of evidence-based parenting programmes, significantly improving parent confidence levels and in helping them form strategies to manage children's challenging behaviour.

Children make significant progress in their learning from their starting points and the centre is outstanding in helping them develop the skills they will need for the future. The centre clearly demonstrates its contribution to the significant increase in the percentage of children achieving above the expectations for their age on entry to school. One very pleased mother said '...no attachment issues, no separation anxieties...taking turns and used to being with other children...he got off to nursery very ready'. Excellent story sessions with children having fun and learning clearly demonstrates good listening skills and particularly high levels of concentration. Good strategies used by staff engage parents who are eager to participate in activities. Parents enjoy sessions, for example the story session with books available to take home, providing good support for home learning. Information to help children's transition to school provided by the independent nursery on site is valued by parents, who are more able to understand the process and can support their children through it. Effective stay and play sessions help parents interact with their children and access any support required, with an excellent take-up of the service and high attendance rates. As one parent said, 'I would have been sat at home stagnating if I hadn't got involved.' Parents report feeling more confident in being able to support their child's literacy learning due to the excellent family learning literacy courses held at the centre.

Parents and children demonstrate very good and positive behaviour when engaging in activities. Children have excellent opportunities to make choices and engage in activities that excite their interests. They behave very well; they learn to cooperate and to develop polite and respectful behaviour. They are effectively involved in evaluating sessions through pictorial boards depicting their approval or disapproval of activities. Parents are respectful to each other and very helpful in sessions. A good borough-wide volunteering scheme supports the children’s centre’s five volunteers, who report significant improvement in their confidence and skill levels and a better understanding of the work of the centre and its value. As one volunteer parent said, ‘Gaining the confidence to do the basic things in life was a struggle and volunteering has really helped improve my confidence.’ Effective systems gain the views of parents and children through, for example, activity or event evaluations.

The children’s centre works very effectively with partners to provide information and services to promote families’ economic well-being. There is excellent engagement in work clubs supporting parents back into training and work. Good partnership work with Jobcentre Plus signposts parents to training and work experience. Highly effective adult education provision, including excellent resources and accommodation for classes, has outstanding success rates. Teenage parents are supported financially with childcare costs and bursaries. The centre has provided very effective responses to supporting the very high percentage of children living in poverty within the area, for example through the establishment of a credit union, access to food parcels and charitable organisations providing second-hand furniture. Support to families to access benefits is highly effective, particularly for those with low levels of literacy or poor English language skills.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1
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	1

How good is the provision?

1

The children's centre knows its families very well and careful planning ensures a broad range of services which parents highly value. The outstanding partnership within the multi-agency locality team leads to excellent assessment and understanding of need. Very effective outreach services provided through targeted family support workers enables particularly good engagement with teenage parents. The role of the universal family support worker enables particularly good engagement with the wider community. Overall, the children's centre groups are extremely well attended and parents are clear that these meet their needs very well. Very effective referrals support families to engage in services enabling children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, to receive early intervention when they need it. The participation rates of families with 0–4-year-olds within the reach area, at 94%, are outstanding.

Provision to help children to learn and develop is outstanding. Excellent provision helps teenage mothers to continue their learning at secondary school and access nursery provision on-site. Families enjoy the outstanding opportunities to learn together through stay and play and family learning initiatives. The centre promotes individualised, purposeful learning very well and activities are of a high quality. The very effectively planned and presented story group and communication support provided for the pre-schools locally develop children's communication, language and literacy skills particularly well. Baby massage is an excellent opportunity for mother and baby to form secure attachments and to relax and enjoy this experience together. The centre very effectively builds on parents' prior knowledge and learning, enabling effective progression to more complex and externally accredited qualifications. One parent who went on to complete a business administration qualification with the adult college said: 'Gaining the courage to answer a phone call or a query was a lot for me prior to completing the course.' Achievements are celebrated and reflect the high aspirations of all staff engaged with the families.

Families receive valuable advice, care, guidance and support in times of crisis. Outreach workers are proactive in accessing the community to engage those families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable; this includes completing home visits with health practitioners. Excellent partnership working ensures that families receive the support they need quickly in relation to financial help, support with housing problems and childcare. Early preventative help has a positive impact on younger community members through the excellent partnership with the secondary school to provide guidance for young teenagers to prevent pregnancy and drug misuse. Support for families through multi-agency locality teamwork, the use of the Common Assessment Framework and interventions by targeted family support workers are highly effective.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The excellent whole-borough approach to developing and managing children’s centres is supported by very effective multi-agency locality teamworking. The outstanding use of data informs management decisions and measures the impact of services on children and families locally and borough-wide, enhanced by the payment by result pilot initiative. The operational management of the children’s centre is outstanding. Staff routinely receive professional supervision, regular professional development and annual appraisal, closely linked to the maintenance of high performance and excellent outcomes for the families they serve.

The centre manager and staff have a particularly good understanding of the needs of families within the reach area. Good use is made of evaluations to inform service delivery. Target setting is realistic and continually challenged and amended in the light of further evidence supplied on a monthly basis. Self-evaluation is ongoing and contributes to continuous improvement particularly well, resulting in effective action planning.

The excellent resources, including adult education resources, enhance and support learning experiences for children and families using the centre. A strong emphasis on community cohesion supports the borough’s equality and diversity agenda. The collection, collation and analysis of equality and diversity data to identify children and families most in need within the reach area, and to ensure targeted groups are engaged and their needs met, are very good. Very effective measures help to tackle discrimination and ensure social inclusion across the borough supported by children’s centre activities and events.

Staff understand and follow the clear and comprehensive safeguarding policy and procedures, including the recruitment and vetting of staff. The close relationship with the multi-agency locality coordinator enables effective managerial support within the locality and continued training for staff. As a key safeguarding service, the centre prevents concerns escalating and links universal services with targeted work for vulnerable children and families across the borough as part of a wider offer of early help. Parents’ views are sought within the safeguarding process.

Very effective partnership arrangements enhance the children’s centre offer and

prevent duplication of services. Good co-location of services, such as the family support workers, adult education and private children’s daycare provision, provides a joined up approach to working with families. The excellent partnership between the children’s centre and secondary school enhances both services. However, there is limited engagement with the two main local primary schools and a missed opportunity to monitor children’s continued success as learners. The good children’s centre cluster arrangements enable sharing of good practice, professional support, development and continuity of provision within the locality.

Initiatives to enable parents to be actively involved in the centre, for example the parents’ forum and its central role on the Children’s Centre Community Forum, which acts as an advisory board, are excellent. Confident parents take initiatives to develop services for themselves, such as the ‘stay and make’ group. A volunteer proudly stated that: ‘I gained a level 2 in children’s workforce development through a volunteering role at the centre and used the crèche as a placement. I got so much from the parenting courses that I am now a guest facilitator and eventually I want to become a family support worker.’

Outcomes for children and their families are outstanding. Their behaviour is positive and the centre’s excellent provision also enables them to develop economic stability and independence. The centre provides outstanding 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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
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	1

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sydney Russell Children's Centre on 24 and 25 October 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

The centre manager and staff, with your help, have created a safe, secure and friendly place for you and your children to learn and develop together. You told us you receive outstanding support to help you make the most of the opportunities that the centre provides for you.

You showed us that you want to give your children a good start in life by stopping smoking and breastfeeding your babies. With the support of the centre, you make great efforts to ensure that your children live healthy lifestyles by taking exercise and eating healthy foods for example. However, despite the centre's excellent work to promote healthy living, too many children remain overweight for their age. We have asked the centre staff to build on the good work they have done and to continue to help you encourage your children to eat more healthy foods and take more exercise.

You clearly showed us how you have increased your confidence in managing your children's behaviour through participation in parenting courses. Your children behave very well at the centre and show respect for each other. They are keen to get involved in activities and have lots of fun. Many of them do particularly well at the centre, for example, in developing their communication skills and are well prepared for primary school; however, the centre staff do not have a routine involvement in the local primary schools to which your children go on. We have asked them to increase their involvement to monitor your children's continued success as learners.

Your growing confidence was clearly demonstrated by your willingness to give your views about how the centre works and the kinds of activities you would like to see provided. Some of you showed considerable ability by running services for yourselves, such as the 'stay and make' sessions.

The centre is excellent in helping you develop skills for life and work. For example, many of you have been very successful in developing job-related skills and completing vocational qualifications. The range of activities and events available for you and your children to do at the centre is excellent. You showed us you are able to enjoy a wide range of experiences together.

The way the centre is managed is outstanding and staff are very well supported to help you and your children make the most of the centre's facilities. They work very well together to help those of you who need extra support and help in bringing up your children. The arrangements to safeguard your children are outstanding, and the staff at the centre work particularly well with you to keep your children safe when they are attending the centre and help you protect your children when outside of the centre.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to come and talk to us. We wish you and your children all the best for the future.

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