

Inspection report for Greenlands at Darenth Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent County Council
Inspection number	406942
Inspection dates	30–31 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Nasim Butt

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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Darenth Community Primary School, 118245
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 senior managers from the centre, frontline staff, parents, staff from partner organisations, members of the advisory board and a representative of the local authority responsible for the centre.

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

Information about the centre

This is a phase 2 centre located in the grounds of Darenth Community Primary School. The centre was designated in March 2008 and is one of seven children's centres in Dartford, overseen by a District Children's Centre Manager. The centre meets its core purpose. The centre's total reach area covers 7.3 square miles and the highest level of deprivation is in Darenth ward, which comprises 1.3 square miles and is within the top 30% most deprived areas in England.

The centre is managed directly by Kent County Council. Governance arrangements involve a multi-agency District Advisory Board, on which sits partners, parents, the local authority integrated Family Services Manager and the District Children's Centre Manager. Each centre has its own steering committee and a centre manager responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre.

The very large majority of families in the centre's reach area are of White British heritage, and the rest are made up of a diverse range of Black and Minority Ethnic and White European communities. The rural areas have a village community, and Darenth has four Traveller sites that are known to the centre. Data show that there are 673 children from birth to four-years-old (September 2012) in the reach area; of these, 12.1% live in workless households. Children in the centre's reach area

demonstrate skills, knowledge and abilities broadly in line with those expected for their age on entry to early years provision.

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 centre provides effective and increasingly well-integrated services for a community where families have a variety of needs. The centre’s leaders have established a clear vision and understand the needs of the community well. Effective strategies and a clear action plan underpin the vision resulting in good outcomes across most areas of the centre’s work. With a clear track record of bringing about improvements in the quality of provision and outcomes, the centre demonstrates a good capacity to improve further.

Staff work effectively with families to provide good activities and high standards of care and support. The large majority of families with young children who live in the area use the centre and value its services and the total number of those registered has increased sharply. The centre has built a strong and positive reputation within the community and this has established trust and confidence in the staff, partners and the services it delivers. One parent echoed the views of many when she remarked, ‘Staff at the centre go out of their way to listen to and address your concerns; my family have benefited so much from the support provided.’

Staff are forward thinking and proactive; as a result, the centre has increased participation and engagement of lone parents, teenage mothers, families with children in workless households, and the Gypsy Roma Traveller community. Families get lots of opportunities to feedback their experiences of activities and programmes, but parents are currently not included in making important decisions about how the centre is run. Although the parenting courses provided are of a good quality and used well by targeted parents, opportunities for those seeking to undertake training or find paid work are under developed and their progression is not closely tracked.

Leaders and managers have sustained strong and effective leadership and

management. The centre's leaders have been effective in setting up and implementing effective monitoring and self-evaluation systems. For example, they use data well to monitor the impact of the centre's work in bringing about improved outcomes for families, including target groups and those identified for additional support. Although children's learning and development are soundly tracked, for example in the crèche sessions run by trained workers, currently the tracking is not followed through when the children join another early years setting. Nevertheless, children's achievement is good and gaps in attainment have been closing fast.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve economic stability and independence outcomes by:
 - extending the range of opportunities available for adults to access training and learning opportunities that will lead to employment
 - closely monitoring adults' participation and progression in these activities.
- Develop a consistent method to track the achievement of children who have accessed the centre and moved on to other settings to measure the longer-term impact of its work.
- Provide more formalised opportunities at a strategic level for parents to shape the design and delivery of services.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre offers a broad range of activities to promote all aspects of family health, in collaboration with health visitors and midwives. Families learn the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity through short, motivational courses, such as Community Chef and Active Health, both of which have influenced parents' attitudes to choice of food and physical exercise. As a result, childhood obesity by the end of Reception in the reach area went down by 7.9% in 2010–11 and is now below both the Kent and national average. Engaging teenage parents through successful programmes such as Big Feet Little Feet has resulted in a significant reduction in teenage pregnancy rates across Dartford. In addition, none of the targeted vulnerable young people who have attended have become young parents. Programmes for new mothers on the benefits of breastfeeding have led to a respectable increase, from 31.9% in 2011 to 39.3% in 2012, in the numbers sustaining breastfeeding after six to eight weeks. The figure is still slightly below the national average, but the centre has trained two volunteers as breastfeeding peer supporters who are working closely with Dartford's breastfeeding coordinator to improve the trend.

The centre is a very safe place and security arrangements are robust. Children learn how to keep themselves safe and to recognise dangers through play. Many parents have undertaken paediatric first-aid training and are knowledgeable about how to

enhance children’s safety in the home environment. Through parenting programmes, they develop the confidence to manage their children’s behaviour well. Children are very well protected by the increasing use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and staff identify potential risks and intervene early. Many children have benefited from child protection plans and the increasing number of looked after children have had a full package of appropriate interventions, swiftly triggered once a referral is made from health services. As a result of the centre’s good work with the Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) families in getting them registered with local health services, the rate of accident and emergency admissions in the reach area went down last year from 134.13 to 89.42 per 10,000.

Outcomes for children and parents involved in learning and play are good. They have lots of fun and bond well together and parents discover how children learn through play. The numbers of children in the reach area achieving a good level of attainment by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage increased from 48.7% in 2010 to 77.2% in 2012, which is well above the national average. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the average in the Early Years Foundation Stage reduced from 28.7% to 22.0% in the same period. The centre effectively promotes the development of children’s speech and language skills through, for example, the well attended weekly Mini Melodies programme. As a result of purposeful play and singing activities, parents spend more time talking to, and playing with, their children at home. Children are well prepared for transition to nursery or primary school. Most parents who take up adult learning programmes achieve well and some have successfully completed accredited programmes.

Parents believe that the centre promotes a strong culture of mutual respect and inspectors agree. They are regularly encouraged to evaluate their learning experiences both formally through feedback forms and informally by placing comments on the ‘Wow’ wall. Further paediatric first-aid training is planned for next spring as a result of suggestions made to the centre by members of the parents’ forum. However, parents have insufficient opportunities to contribute to decision making at a strategic level through membership of the Dartford District Advisory Board or the Greenlands and Darenth Steering Committee.

The centre contributes well to motivating and building the confidence of hard-to-reach families who lack the skills needed to seek work. There are some opportunities available for parents to engage in further training and seek financial benefits or advice. Volunteering has been promoted by the centre and several volunteers have been supported in finding appropriate employment. However, the range of training opportunities available for adults is limited, particularly in an area where the number of children in workless households is above average. An employment adviser working across Dartford has been recently appointed with a brief to address this issue.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
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The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	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	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?

2

The centre, along with its partners, meets the needs of targeted groups well. It effectively assesses the individual needs of children, including looked after children and those with additional needs, and provides for them well-coordinated support. Services in the centre are adapted well to ensure they meet the needs of children and parents. Parenting needs are assessed thoroughly. A high proportion of families is registered with the centre, including 93% from Darenth, the most deprived ward in the centre's reach area. A large majority of these families attends activities. The centre is particularly successful in engaging lone parents, teenage parents, and the Gypsy Roma Traveller families.

The range of varied provision in different locations, including in the home, which meets the needs of the community and helps children learn and progress, is good. Activities are of a good quality and give parents valuable opportunities to further develop their confidence and parenting skills. Sessions are clearly targeted to attract children or mothers at particular stages of their child's development, for example the Baby Group, Baby Clinic and Toddler Drop-in. There is a strong focus on supporting families who need particular help in developing children's speech, language and communication skills, in the context of song, rhyme and movement.

Families receive good guidance on choices to be made and are signposted well to other services. For example, women suffering from domestic violence have benefited from confidential referrals to the Freedom programme that is offered in another centre. Teenage mothers are given well tailored support through the Young Active Parents Service (YAPS) which has resulted in sharp reductions in the number of teenage pregnancies. In addition, families in crisis are strongly supported by multi-agency teams, in part the result of the effective Team Around the Family (TAF) approach.

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	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

The District Advisory Board and steering committee provide a good structure for governance, including clear lines of accountability at all levels. The advisory board has a good awareness of the area and the challenges families face. The board receives regular updates from the centre about its work, including data about the number of families in each target group it has engaged with. Action points are agreed at meetings and progress against these is monitored during the year. Detailed and accurate self-evaluation results in the setting of measurable targets in relation to the key performance indicators for children's centres. The advisory board is now routinely involved in setting targets for the centre and tracking the centre's progress against them.

Effective monitoring and evaluation ensure services are of good quality and help staff to identify where they need to develop further. One omission, however, is insufficient tracking of the learning and development journeys of children when they leave the centre and move to other early years settings. Day-to-day management ensures that the premises are used effectively. The use of resources, including the recent carefully-considered deployment of staff and the good outcomes for families, demonstrates the centre is providing good value for money.

The inclusion of all families is integral to the centre's work. Barriers to access have been broken through the building up of trusting relationships, for example with the hard-to-reach Traveller families on four sites in the reach area. The targeted Meet and Eat sessions ensure that this engagement continues. Inclusive practice is also seen in the centre's effective work with the very small minority of children and families with disabilities, resulting in successfully narrowing the gaps.

Safeguarding procedures are very thorough, supported by effective partnership working between agencies. The risk of harm to children is significantly reduced as a result of the centre's commitment to early intervention. All staff, volunteers and partners are vetted to ensure their suitability for working with children. The safeguarding board in the corridor reminds staff about what to do if they suspect abuse of any kind. Training for all staff is thorough and constantly updated.

Families overwhelmingly express high levels of satisfaction with the centre and its

staff. Their views are sought regularly and there are examples of how this feedback has been used to make changes in activities and programmes. However, there are too few opportunities for parents to be involved in the governance of the centre and shape developments at a strategic level.

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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
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 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	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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Greenlands at Darenth Centre on 30 and 31 October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for your help and contribution to the inspection. Those of you we spoke to told us how grateful you were for the support you had received from the centre

and the difference it had made to your lives. We read your comments in the many evaluations about the courses you have attended and services that you use. We agree that Greenlands at Darenth provides you with good quality care, guidance and support because the needs of each individual child and family are given high priority. For example, the very competent and caring centre staff assess needs swiftly and put together a tailored package of support for any referral made. This early intervention approach has resulted in significantly improved outcomes for many families registered with the centre.

Outreach work and the centre's links with other agencies are giving you the skills and confidence to overcome difficulties you are experiencing. The centre provides healthy eating courses, such as Community Chef, and safety courses, such as paediatric first aid, both of which you enjoy and gain much benefit from. Although the centre has supported some parents in acquiring qualifications and finding employment, there is still much work for the centre to do in this area. We have therefore asked the centre's leaders to create more opportunities for you to gain the skills and training you need for future employment if that is your aim. The centre recognises this and an employment adviser has already been appointed to work across the whole Dartford area.

The centre provides a good range of activities that effectively promote the learning and development of children. Baby Group, Mini Melodies and activities provided in the Young Active Parents Service are all effective in developing children's social and communication skills. Home visits reinforce the learning and sometimes extend it to the wider family. The centre also takes great care to ensure that you and your children are safeguarded and that the centre is a safe place to be. You also confirmed that this is indeed the case through your regular and very positive evaluations of your experiences. The inspection found that the centre is good at encouraging you to give this sort of evaluative feedback on a regular basis. However, parents are not well represented on the District Advisory Board or the centre's steering committee. Therefore, we have asked the centre to ensure that parents are fully involved in its governance.

The centre manager and the district centre manager lead the centre well. They use data effectively to make important decisions about where and how to target the centre's resources. As a result, outcomes for the large majority of families have improved in recent years. For example, there has been a reduction in obesity rates of children in the reach area, teenage pregnancies have gone down and children are achieving well by the end of Reception. Targeted work that the centre has undertaken has also brought dividends, for example engaging the Gypsy Roma families on the four Traveller sites in the area. Although children achieve well, their progress is not currently tracked when they leave the centre and move to another setting. Hence, we have asked the centre's leaders to track the learning and development of children who use the centre over a longer period of time by liaising more effectively with the early years settings they move on to.

The centre values its partnership with you fully and respects your ideas. For example, centre leaders regularly review the outcomes of your evaluations of all the

programmes and activities and adjust provision in the light of what the information is telling them. Significant improvements have been made in recent years showing that the centre has good capacity to improve further.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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