

Inspection report for Regents Park Children's Centre

Local authority	Camden
Inspection number	384089
Inspection dates	31 October – 1 November 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Regents Park Children's Centre URN: 100571

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 manager, the locality manager, frontline staff, the outgoing chair of the locality advisory board, representatives of the local authority and partner organisations including health, and families using the centre's services.

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

Information about the centre

Regents Park Children's Centre is a phase one centre. It was designated in June 2007. Children's centre services in Camden are delivered using a locality model, this centre being part of the Euston locality. The other centres that make up the Euston locality are Edith Neville, Hampden and St Mary and St Pancras. Through each centre, families can access services that fulfil the core purpose including childcare, child, family and adult learning, health, family support and employability services. These services are delivered in a wide range of venues across the locality. The centre itself is open from 8.00am to 6.00pm for 48 weeks of the year, but also offers some services outside of these hours, including at weekends.

The centre's governance structure aligns with the locality model. The centre is managed by the local authority and there is a locality advisory board. The locality manager oversees the children's centre services. The centre manager is principally responsible for the early years provision and management of centre-based activities.

There are approximately 2,230 children under the age of five that live in the locality. Although the area includes pockets where families have high incomes, for many, levels of deprivation are high. Nearly three out of every 10 children live within families that are dependent on out-of-work benefits. The local population is very ethnically diverse, with nearly 80% of families from a range of ethnic minority

backgrounds. On entry to early years education, children’s skills, knowledge and abilities are much lower than the levels 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Excellent partnerships ensure that families accessing children’s centre services through Regents Park receive a good service. A very wide range of different partner agencies and organisations are strongly committed to working together. Combined with the outstanding leadership of the locality manager, this means that families that walk through the door of Regents Park Children’s Centre have their needs met well. ‘It has made such a difference in family life,’ is one parent’s experience, typical of many.

The centre’s work with families identified as most in need is particularly impressive. Partners work together to carefully select the most appropriate person to coordinate families’ individual packages of support. Every family that registers receives a welcome call from the centre to check how it can help them and to guide families to the right services across the locality. This is typical of the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support.

Most families with children up to the age of five in the locality have accessed centre services. The range of different people that use the centre reflects the wider community exceptionally well, showing the centre’s outstanding promotion of equal opportunities. Take-up rates by different groups, including disabled children and parents, and those with special educational needs, are mostly high. Centre leaders have rightly identified the need to continue to develop and refine systems for checking who is regularly attending services across all target groups.

Families regularly access services in a wide range of venues across the locality, including frequent support in the home. Services and frontline workers are very flexible, so support is suitably adapted to meet individuals’ personal needs and circumstances. A number of parents told inspectors how much they appreciate that staff can speak so many different languages. Well-established systems help the

centre assess the difference services make to families' lives, for example by tracking the high breastfeeding rates, or the good progression of parents benefiting from very effective support from the employability team. Children and families achieve well through centre activities. The proportion of children across the locality that do well by the end of Reception Year is improving yearly, but at present the centre does not have the data to evaluate precisely the influence it has on these outcomes.

Leaders have a detailed and accurate understanding of how well the centre is performing. They plan effectively to address areas that could be improved. Robust structures and systems, together with rigorous monitoring and quality assurance, mean changes are implemented well. Measures the centre uses to assess the impact of its services show improving trends and demonstrate the centre's good capacity to improve further. Leaders recognise that parents are not yet well enough involved in planning, shaping and evaluating these improvements. The centre manager has plans well in hand to establish a parents' forum.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop the centre's analysis of participation rates to sharpen evaluation systems to check what difference services make to families' lives.
- Involve more parents in evaluating and shaping services, for example implementing plans to form a parents' forum.
- Use the excellent links with primary schools in the locality to track the longer-term impact of centre services on children's achievement.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Children achieve well. The recent inspection of the centre's early years provision recognised the good progress children make. The proportion of children in the borough that reach the expected levels across different areas of learning, and specifically in their personal, communication and language skills, has shown sustained improvement in recent years, rising by over 13%. It is now only marginally below the national average. Furthermore, at the same time, as standards have been rising, the gap between the lowest attaining children and the rest has been reducing. It is now narrower than the gap seen nationally.

At sessions such as Baby Bounce and Rhyme Time, families and children engage and learn well together. Mothers and fathers from different ethnic backgrounds attend drop-in sessions, interacting well with their children and staff. One parent reported how this had 'really given her child confidence', whilst in an evaluation another recognised the benefits for the adult. 'I always feel very welcome, and feel I can always come here for support.'

Adults also achieve well. Good numbers of workless families receive excellent guidance and support through the extensive work of the employability team. In the previous year, 58% of 103 adults referred from across the locality went on to register and complete individual action plans. Evaluations reflect positive outcomes, such as improvements in self-esteem and motivation, alongside tangible outcomes for the large majority. For many this might be completion of curriculum vitae, for others it includes training or work placements and, ultimately, securing paid jobs for some. Recent figures show that in just over a year, 343 parents took up training or volunteering opportunities, well over a third of the likely workless total.

Indicators that show how the health of families in the locality is improving are mixed. Some are very high. For example, the proportion of mothers that are sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks, averaging at close to 75%, is significantly above the national average. The percentage of parents that smoke during pregnancy is very low. However, although securely and steadily reducing, at 11%, obesity rates in the Reception Year remain above the national average. Where indicators remain below average, the centre is able to demonstrate that its strategies are effectively engaging those families that are most in need of support, thus securing improvements.

When using the centre, families mainly behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. They demonstrate a sound awareness of their own and their children's safety. Family support workers effectively evaluate risks with those identified as most in need. They link extremely well with other agencies and professionals to reduce or eliminate these, including for victims of domestic violence. Deeply embedded use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) underpins this highly integrated support. Consequently, as well as improving a possible initial concern of safety in the home for example, other aspects such as ensuring families are accessing the right benefits or that babies are achieving a healthy weight are also addressed. Extremely careful tracking of families' engagement with the family support team shows significant improvements for most. This includes the children that the centre engages with that are subject to child protection plans.

Some parents are confident to express their views and voice what they feel would make the centre even better. Staff take great care to use the views of individuals to personalise services to families' particular needs, including through an innovative Parent-friendly CAF. Response rates to questionnaires used by the centre to seek families' views are improving, although the number of parents who use this method to share their views is still low in comparison to the number taking up services.

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	2

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

How good is the provision?

2

The centre engages with 80% of children under five years of age living in the locality. The proportions from Black and ethnic minority groups in the community and male carers reached by centre services are similarly high. The numbers of teenage parents accessing services is increasing and 43 disabled parents or children engaged in services in the last year. The proportion of known workless families who use the centre regularly is lower, although figures here are less reliable as they are reliant on parents' own declarations of worklessness.

Headline participation rates are impressive. Of families registered with the centre, 91% accessed at least one service in the last year. However, leaders are rightly developing systems that will enable them to analyse more readily who is attending which services, how often and over what period. They recognise the importance of this information in evaluating the detail of why overall high participation figures are yet to secure outstanding improvements in families' outcomes overall.

The range of services and activities meets families' needs well. This is because it takes account of the deep knowledge and understanding about the community that staff have, combined with effective use of data to identify what is required. For example, the strategy to reduce obesity figures further is being intensified, including through consultation with parents and an increase in healthy eating sessions. Across activities, families are provided with positive role models and good habits are promoted, one parent noting that the centre is 'very good at healthy food'. Strong links with health partners also result in excellent information and guidance for parents about dental health and oral hygiene. Responding to below-average childhood immunisation rates, more rigorous checking of records and training for frontline staff so they can offer better guidance for parents, is securing improvements.

Planning for drop-in sessions takes good account of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and are well resourced. Staff evaluate these sessions carefully to make sure all children and parents are involved in play and learning, adapting plans where necessary and linking activities to children's interests. Activities take account of the diversity of culture and ethnicity within the local community well. When speaking to inspectors, parents and professionals recognised the value of these sessions in helping to ease children's transition into nursery or other early

years provision.

The outstanding quality and coordination of guidance and support result in often significant improvements to the lives of families identified as most in need. The rising number of victims of domestic violence supported by the family support team is strongly indicative of the confidence families have in turning to the centre for help in times of crisis. Individual pathways for families ensure they benefit from the most appropriate services for their personal circumstances. This results in the excellent promotion of equal opportunities and the rapid narrowing of gaps. As one parent summed it up, 'I am very happy and grateful with all the help. It has changed my life.'

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The locality model for delivering children's centre services is very well established and understood at all levels. This means that families that walk through the door at Regents Park can access a wide range of locality services, representing good value for money. Through the effective blend of challenge and support brought by the excellent leadership of the locality manager, there is a strong sense of unity. Taking account of their own targets, staff and partners share a core vision and aims.

A broad range of representatives makes up the effective advisory board. Robust discussion and challenge support the continual drive for improvement. The board includes parent members and, until recently, was chaired by a parent. However, while staff take good account of parents' views through individual discussions and questionnaires, not enough parents are sufficiently engaged with the governance of the centre to the extent that they are fully involved with driving improvements.

Outstanding partnerships secure often excellent improvements to the lives of those identified as most in need, and good and improving outcomes overall. Partnerships are particularly effective because they are built on a combination of robust challenge and support. Very strong relationships at all levels, between frontline staff, the centre manager, and through to senior managers, are underpinned by rigorous performance and quality assurance checks. This takes effective account of both data indicators and first-hand checks, as seen through the thorough evaluations of the quality of drop-in sessions. Consequently, expectations remain high.

The reflective approach of leaders and staff contributes well to their accurate understanding of the centre’s performance. Leaders recognise the increased sophistication of evaluation that deeper analysis of participation rates will bring. That said, leaders are rightly cautious and reflective to ensure that data they collect are pertinent and ultimately useful. Analysis routinely considers different groups, reflective of the centre’s outstanding promotion of equal opportunities, determination to tackle discrimination and break down barriers for families. Parents greatly appreciate the wide range of languages spoken by frontline staff. Improvements in early identification and persistence with those hardest to reach have contributed to rapidly increasing engagement of those with disabilities and/or special educational needs. One parent referred to the impact of the on-site speech and language therapy unit as ‘quite astounding’.

Within the good quality and effectiveness of safeguarding procedures overall at the centre, rigorous systems and checks, and excellent multi-agency cooperation, ensure the safeguarding of children and families. The support for the most vulnerable accessing centre services is particularly strong. Thorough background checks are made when recruiting staff and up-to-date records of these are kept centrally. Child protection related training exceeds requirements, giving staff a thorough understanding of procedures. Written risk assessments for the safety of those using the centre are of good quality, although procedures for monitoring and checking these are less well developed.

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	1
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	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	2

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

The inspectors took account of the findings from Regents Park Children's Centre URN 100571, inspected 23 July, 2012.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Regents Park Children's Centre on 31 October and 1 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time and trouble to speak with us during the inspection. We greatly valued your contributions. Your views were an important part of our inspection. You were overwhelmingly positive about the support you receive from the centre and the difference this makes to your lives. Many of you praised the family support workers in particular. We have judged the care, guidance and support that you receive to be outstanding.

The centre works exceptionally well with a wide range of volunteers, professionals, organisations and agencies to meet your needs. These very close partnerships mean that walking through the doors at Regents Park Children's Centre you can access a wide range of services across the local area. In turn, this means the centre can have a good impact, helping you to improve aspects of your life. For example, the proportion of mums still breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is much higher than the national average. The centre works very well to protect those families where children or adults may be vulnerable or at risk.

A number of you told us how much you appreciate that staff can speak so many different languages. We were very pleased to see how those using the centre reflect the rich diversity of your community. This includes the growing numbers of disabled children and parents, or those with special educational needs. Good numbers of parents that are not in work currently are supported well by the centre. It is helpful for the centre to know if no one in your household is working, even if you are not actively seeking work at this time. It means they can plan for the help and support you might need in the future.

We were particularly impressed that somebody from the centre telephones every family that registers to find out what you might want from the services. Staff try very hard to make it easy for you to use services, perhaps in different places in the local area, or in your own homes. Children and adults achieve well, for example through

the nursery, drop-ins, courses, or through working with the employability team. We have asked the centre to check how much difference attending activities has made for children that attend sessions by the time they reach the end of their Reception Year.

It is very encouraging to see how many of you use the centre's services. We have asked leaders to check even more carefully how often you visit or use each service to help with their plans for the future. They are very keen to make services even better for you and are well placed to do this, under the very effective guidance of the locality manager. It was inspiring to meet the outgoing chair of the advisory board, who is a parent that centre services have helped, but we think that more parents could be involved in the drive to make the centre outstanding. The centre has plans to set up a parents' forum to help with this, which we hope will be of interest to you.

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