

Inspection report for Castle Hill Early Years Centre

Local authority	Croydon
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Reporting inspector	Denise Blackwell HMI

Centre leader	Mary Watts
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Castle Hill Primary School – 101786
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Buffer Bear/Mid Counties Co-operative EY302223

The inspection of this Sure Start children’s centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

The inspectors held meetings with centre users, leaders and managers, health and local authority representatives and front line workers.

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

Information about the centre

Castle Hill Early Years Centre, along with Fairchildes Children's Centre and the Fieldway Family Centre, make up the Croydon East Collaboration. Castle Hill Early Years Centre was designated in January 2006 as a phase one children's centre. It is located in one of the 30% most deprived wards in England where over 30% of children are eligible for free school meals. Over 65% of families live in flats with no access to outside play spaces, with over 13% of families living in overcrowded conditions. The unemployment rate for the reach area is almost double that for the rest of Croydon at 10.3%.

The centre is situated on the site of Castle Hill Primary School with the Buffer Bear/Mid Counties Co-operative day nursery providing the childcare provision, which is also on the school site. The majority of families living in the centre's reach area are from a White British background; however there is an increasing Black and minority ethnic population. Over 40% of families in the reach area represent minority ethnic backgrounds. The centre is governed by a newly formed strategic advisory board, which covers all three centres in the collaboration. Currently there are two interim managers who work across the collaboration for four days a week while a permanent strategic manager for the collaboration is being recruited.

Data indicate children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a narrower range of skills and abilities than those typically expected for their age. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children in the Croydon local authority area reach or exceed expected levels of development across the six areas of learning, including communication, language and literacy. However, while levels of development are improving the Profile scores for the reach area, they are significantly below those for the rest of Croydon with 78% reaching 78 points across the Profile compared to 84% for the rest of Croydon, and 83% nationally.

The centre is currently managed by the governors of Castle Hill Primary School on behalf of the local authority. However, from the end of November, the Croydon East Collaboration will be managed by a Strategic Advisory Board made up of representatives from both schools and the family centre along with parent representation. Details of how this will link with the school governance and decision-making guidelines have yet to be finalised.

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

Castle Hill Early Years Centre is a good children’s centre that has some outstanding features. The centre knows the community well and is welcoming to all users. The exceptionally strong and embedded partnerships ensure that services are integrated and reach those most in need of support. The Family Engagement Partnership is built on existing good practice, ensuring all partners work together to improve outcomes for families due to its clear referral route and practice guidelines.

Safeguarding is given the highest priority in the centre. A comprehensive awareness of safeguarding issues, alongside exemplary protocols and procedures for sharing information with other agencies, ensures children are protected. A clear and informative, but simple, leaflet is given to all who visit the centre to explain the shared responsibility between the centre and parents to keep children safe. Regular training is provided for all staff in the centre and recruitment procedures are robust.

The centre has been sensitive to the concerns of parents as it moves towards working as a collaboration of centres, making changes slowly to ensure parents and families remain on board. Although some services have reduced while details are being finalised, the majority continue to be offered at the centre. Activities are well attended, though some timetable changes have led to a reduction in attendance in some sessions. Activities such as 'Jumping Beans' are extremely well attended, as is the health clinic with parents often staying on at the centre following activities to make full use of the play areas and café.

Professionals understand the difficulties of gaining the trust of those who live in the reach area, and spoke of the time needed for families to feel comfortable with new provision and change. A partly transient population living in temporary housing, means that often the work of the centre to gain involvement of families is hampered by their regular movement into and out of the reach area. The centre has clear plans to improve participation. However they also miss capturing data about participation as there are a number of different ways of collecting this information. For example, parents sign a sheet to record attendance at health clinic but during the inspection a number of parents were observed leaving without having completed this.

Planning to improve the provision for children's learning clearly links to the areas of learning of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Teachers state they can tell which children have attended centre activities as they are much better prepared for starting school. However, the centre does not yet track children across different activities they attend to ensure all staff are aware of where children are in their learning, and identify the impact the centre has had on this.

Leadership and management of the centre are good. The interim managers are clearly focused on what needs to happen next to move the centre and the collaboration forward while the centre is in the process of recruiting a permanent strategic manager. The detailed and accurate needs analysis informs the action plan and improvement cycle, clearly identifying priorities for the centre and how it will measure success showing good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that systems for capturing information and data on participation:
 - link to other key agencies, especially health, to capture information about participation
 - consistently collect information from all who attend activities and services so that there is clear evidence that the most vulnerable families are being reached.
- Track and monitor the progress of children who attend centre activities to:
 - enable staff to develop planning and assessment that takes account of all the activities children attend
 - clearly show the progress children make over their time at the centre and

the impact of the centre services on children's school readiness.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes are slowly but steadily improving. Breastfeeding initiation rates are improving for the reach area with 67% of mothers initiating breastfeeding in 2011 compared to 34% the previous year. The health clinic is very well attended. The Family Engagement Partnership ensures families in most need of support receive the help they need. The centre promotes healthy cooking courses and provides activities that promote the use of their outdoor spaces and encourage children to be active with 'Jumping Beans' being particularly well attended. The speech and language therapy service provides training to centre staff enabling them to provide additional support for children with speech and communication difficulties.

Excellent parenting support is available from staff, and through family learning courses. Good use is made of home visits to advise parents on home safety issues. The sensory room supports children with special educational needs who have priority use. Parents of disabled children say they feel well supported by both staff and other users as their child's needs are understood and catered for. Despite changes in staff there is consistency and continuity for families, and parents and children speak very highly of school and centre staff. Thorough risk assessments of activities and services, ensures children are safe when they are at the centre.

Profile scores for the reach area are improving year-on-year with 78% achieving 78 points or more in 2011 compared with 68.8% in 2009. Adults also improve their skills and confidence through training courses, which help them to support their children's learning at home. Almost all of the participants on the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course said they wanted to improve their English to support their children's learning. Many adults have gained qualifications in functional skills and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in childcare. Transitions into Castle Hill School are well managed. This supportive approach is being rolled out across the local area to ensure both children and their parents are well prepared for changes.

Parents' forums are based at each of the children's centres with a view to combining these in the future. These work well at enabling parents to be fully involved in what is happening and ensuring services are meeting needs. The newly formed Strategic Advisory Board will include parent representation but is yet to hold its first full meeting of all nominated representatives. The centre responds to ideas and suggestions from parents and has made changes based on their feedback. For example, parents suggested moving the health clinic to a different room encouraging more parents to join other activities after their children had been weighed.

Many adults leave school without qualifications which impacts on the type of work they are able to do. The centre has had difficulties in engaging Jobcentre Plus but has made good use of support and guidance from family centre workers to ensure families receive the benefits they are entitled to. However, there are still concerns in

the centre that the changes in benefits are not well understood by families, many of whom already have debts they cannot afford. Literacy, numeracy and family learning courses are regularly held in the centre with almost all who attend completing courses and gaining qualifications. The NVQ in childcare offered through the centre has resulted in over 30 adults gaining Levels 2 and 3 with several going on to gain employment.

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 has an excellent understanding of the reach area. Data is comprehensive, but not always up-to-date enough to enable the centre to be sure of its impact. Data is used as a starting point for enquiry and analysis of what is working well and what needs to improve, for example increasing participation rates. However the reach area has some specific issues to overcome in order to improve participation and to ensure actual involvement is captured in their records. The majority of activities are very well attended though the centre has seen some decline as it moves towards the collaboration. The Common Assessment Framework is used particularly well for initial identification and assessment of need, followed up by robust individual assessment by the Family Engagement Partnership and individualised support packages.

Provision to help children learn is good and improving. Children are involved in interesting and exciting activities that promote their all-round development and skills. Learning and development opportunities for adults are exceptional. Records show examples of families who start attending literacy classes and go on to gain NVQs. 'The courses are great' said one parent, 'Once you have done one you just want to do more.' Almost all adults who attend training courses complete them and gain qualifications. The centre proudly displays photographs of centre users meeting with Princess Anne to discuss the importance of family learning.

Families who attend the centre receive extremely effective tailored support. There are clear procedures for assessing need and as a collaboration even greater capacity to improve the well-being of families. The Croydon Information and Support Service (CRISS) is used exceptionally well to ensure work is coordinated and professionals can access information on a range of support services available to families. Case studies show that the centre supports families in times of crisis and provides effective practical and emotional support. The centre works with the linked childcare provision and settings in the local area, including childminders, through the learning communities to share good practice and improve what providers do. Childminders say they value the learning community for the guidance and practical advice shared.

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

Professional supervision and management arrangements are extremely effective and very well understood. The social work model of supervision ensures all who work directly with families are very well supported. Parents are kept informed of changes and consulted on the way forward as changes and alterations happen. However, not all parents understand the new governance and accountability arrangements, though there are plans in place to address this. One interim manager attends groups and activities to make herself known to families and to ensure parents are kept informed as the collaboration progresses.

Objectives in the action plan are limited and focused on what will have most impact. Families are central to evaluation and action planning contributing through the parents' forum and the 'You Said – We Did' board. 'Parents' needs and wishes are central to all we do,' said one staff member. The centre is well used with daily services and activities. Parents can access the soft play and sensory rooms at any time and have use of a family room for breastfeeding or meeting with support staff.

All target groups are engaged with the centre or one of its partners. For example, a successful dads group is run by Fieldway Family Centre. The range and quality of services are accessible to all who live in the reach area. Crèche provision ensures parents can access services and activities and attend advisory board meetings. Case studies show where the centre has been instrumental in supporting parents with children on child protection plans. Staff work across the three centres in the collaboration to help parents to become acquainted with them, also ensuring

resources are more sustainable. Outcomes for vulnerable families in the reach area are consistently improving and services have an outstanding impact on safeguarding children. Therefore, the centre provides good value for money.

The learning community supports effective partnerships with early years providers and ensures the quality of provision is improving and good practice is shared. The Strategic Advisory Board has effective representation from a range of partners and ensure all partners are fully engaged with the centre and contribute to meeting the widest range of needs.

Centre users contribute to the evaluation of services by providing feedback on the quality of services and activities. A recent snapshot survey found that all parents who responded are happy with centre services. Some parents are still unsure of what the collaboration will mean and are unsure about attending activities at the other centres. However parents are aware that the previous offer was not sustainable. The centre listens to their concerns and reassures most parents, though it is aware attendance at some sessions may decline until parents are comfortable with the changes. One parent pragmatically stated, 'We will just have to suck it and see, but I love it here so it won't stop me coming.'

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	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	2

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Castle Hill Early Years Centre on 7 and 8 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. During our visit we spoke to a number of you, observed activities and met with staff and professionals who work with the centre.

Your centre provides a friendly, welcoming environment for families. Many of you told us how much you had benefited from attending activities at the centre and valued the individual support you had received. We were impressed by the relationships between yourselves and with staff and saw that you treat each other with kindness and respect.

The number of parents registering with the centre is gradually increasing. However, the centre still has more to do to ensure that attendance is accurately recorded at activities and services. As a result, we have asked the centre to look at its collection of information so that it can more effectively capture all the information about participation in centre services.

The centre has developed excellent partnerships with the other centres that will form the East Croydon Collaboration and with pre-schools, schools, voluntary organisations, health and other services for children, which means more services and activities will be available to you than could be provided by the centre alone. Many of you told us about how much you enjoy attending courses at the centre and we can see that many of you have now gained literacy and numeracy qualifications as well as NVQs in childcare. We were very impressed by how many of you have gained qualifications and in some cases gone on to gain employment. You are rightly proud of your meeting with Princess Anne to discuss family learning, which shows that you are keen for others to benefit from the learning you have received.

Children have enjoyable activities to do which help them learn. They do very well because centre staff are skilled in providing interesting activities to help them develop. Staff work very well with other partners and early years settings and keep improving the quality of care and education that is on offer. As a result, children in the local area are now doing much better. However we have asked the centre to improve the tracking and monitoring of children's learning across all activities they attend so that all staff are aware of what children can do and so that the centre can show the impact it is having on helping your children to learn.

We were very impressed with the centre's dedication to keeping children and families safe. Staff have excellent relationships with other agencies, and the Family Engagement Partnership ensures you get the help and support you need when you need it. Staff demonstrate a very clear commitment to keeping children safe and protected from harm.

Thank you to everybody who took the time to come and speak with us and to let us know what you thought about the centre. We are very grateful to you all and wish you and your families every success for the future.

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