

Inspection report for Brambles Children's Centre

Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	383927
Inspection dates	18–19th December 2012
Reporting inspector	Qaisra Shahraz

Centre leader	Georgie Norgate
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Epping Library St John's Road Essex CM16 5DN
Telephone number	01992 575175
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	gnorgate@spurgeons.org

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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 an additional inspector and one early-years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the local authority, centre staff, advisory board members, health professionals, voluntary and statutory partner organisations, a head teacher and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Brambles Children's Centre is a phase two centre, situated in Epping Town, located on a split-base site in the Library and Epping Social Care building next door. Following a recent restructure, the centre is one of 17 in the West Essex region and is now managed by Spurgeons. The centre has a large geographical reach covering the four wards; Epping Hemnall, Epping Lindsey and Thornwood, Theydon Bois, and North Weald. The centre serves a relatively affluent community with pockets of deprivation.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering integrated childcare, health, family support, outreach and a child-minder support network. Some of the centre's targeted services are delivered from satellite venues such as the clinic room at St Margaret's Community Hospital, Epping Hall and North Weald Methodist Hall. The large majority of families in the centre's reach area are predominantly White British with a small percentage of families from Eastern European or Asian backgrounds.

There are 1,210 children under the age of five years living in the centre's reach area of which 744 are registered with the centre. There is a small proportion (155) of children living in workless households. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision are typically below those expected for their age.

The governance of the centre is provided by Essex County Council and Spurgeons Quadrant Advisory Board. The centre leader is responsible for the day-to-day operational running of this and another centre, Little Star Children’s Centre, which is subject to a separate inspection. She is supported by two full-time family support workers and an early years worker. Full day-care provision is run by Kids Unlimited and Little Flyers and is subject to a separate inspection.

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

Good leadership and management, cohesive provision and good and improving outcomes for families demonstrate the centre’s good effectiveness in meeting local needs and its good capacity to sustain improvement. The centre serves its local community well, and is much appreciated by all users and partners. As one grandparent told the inspectors: ‘Brambles is a welcoming centre that lets you get out of your home and do something, meet people and take away ideas to do with your children.’

Outcomes for both adults and children are good and improving. Children make good progress in their learning and development. Adult users demonstrate much improved parenting skills, increasing knowledge about healthy eating and lifestyles and build positive relationships. The social and emotional well-being of many families and, in particular, those who experience isolation is greatly improved because of their engagement with the centre’s well-targeted services.

Families appreciate the enjoyable and purposefully tailored services and activities, including one-to-one sessions at home. The development of employability and enhanced functional skills for users is a key priority for the centre, and staff are working proactively to widen learning opportunities and the training available to adults, though more work remains.

Leadership, management and governance are good. Senior managers and the centre leader are highly experienced, skilled and very effectively lead a team of hardworking

and well motivated staff. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. The resources at the centre are managed efficiently to meet the needs of families who access its services, leading to good outcomes. The centre's self-evaluation process effectively identifies areas for improvement and includes precise targets and high standards for future achievement.

Inclusion and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups, for example disabled children and those with special educational needs, is recognised as a key priority for the centre to continue to improve. Users' views are taken on board by the centre to help shape its provision and services. However, parents are not sufficiently involved in the centre's self-evaluation process or in governance and the work of the quadrant advisory board.

Safeguarding the users' health, safety and well-being is given top priority. Multi-agency working is effective in safeguarding children, including those subject to a child protection plan. Partnerships are good and the centre works very effectively with a number of agencies to bring linked services to the local community. Registrations are increasing but are higher in the communities nearest to the centre than in the more remote villages.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop the current adult learning programmes provided by the centre to include more courses and learning opportunities covering literacy, numeracy, information technology and employability training to respond more fully to the needs of users.
- Continue to increase the registration and participation rates of families living in the remote rural communities and with children with additional needs so that they can benefit from the centre's good quality provision.
- Increase the involvement of users in the centre's self-review processes and their contribution governance and the work of the quadrant advisory board.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The health of users is improving due to the centre's well targeted interventions, for example by offering a good range of physical activities for both children and adults. At 7.5% the level of obesity of in young children in the Epping area is much below the national average of 9.4%. Similarly, the rate of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has steadily increased over the last year. Health visitors and midwives based at the St. Margaret Hospital baby clinic work in productive partnership with the centre staff and support families well in giving their children a healthy start in life, including those with premature babies.

Children make good progress from their starting points. At 21% the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is much narrower than seen nationally. Adults and children experience a high level of enjoyment in taking part in activities that enhance their personal and social development. 'Boogie babies' sessions were really good. It was more than a singing class. All the mums made an effort to get to it.' were the words of one happy parent who clearly enjoyed the shared time spent with her child and other parents.

The centre's good focus on building positive relationships and supporting families' emotional well-being is much appreciated, especially by those users experiencing personal difficulties and who feel isolated at home. They appreciate the opportunity to make new friends and learn together, as one user said, 'The sessions get new mums together, sorting out their problems. We cement friendships and gain lots of useful ideas and inspiration provided by staff.'

The centre provides a safe and secure environment. The centre's partnership with social services to ensure the safety of children is very strong. Family support staff make effective use of the Common Assessment Framework to ensure that families and children including those with disabilities, looked after children and those subject to child protection plans, are fully protected against harm.

The strong, positive relationships within the centre, consistently modelled by centre staff, help young children to learn and to behave well when they attend sessions. Currently two adult volunteers are engaged in making positive contributions to various centre activities, however not enough parents are involved in governance. Children build good skills for the future as reflected in the positive key performance indicators. Opportunities for adult users are satisfactory and enable them to develop personal skills, increase independence and improve their economic stability. The centre's leadership recognise that one of the key priorities is to further widen employability training opportunities and adult learning programmes for its users including literacy, numeracy and information technology.

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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and	3

parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment

2

How good is the provision?

Participation rates are currently satisfactory but improving with a 20% increase seen in recent months. Staff are currently working to engage more with the wider community and in particular families living in remote villages. The centre accurately and effectively assesses local needs and in consequence services are matched well to the changing needs of the families, including specialist support for parents with multiple births. Work is in progress to extend the provision for children with additional needs who are currently not as well engaged with the centre’s services as other target groups.

Users from different target groups benefit from the wide range of purposeful learning opportunities aimed at improving their lives. The parenting programmes, for example, help parents to build their self-esteem, develop parenting skills, share ideas and resolve family problems. Through a wide range of play and development opportunities, parents are learning how to support their children’s learning. One enthusiastic mother said, ‘My son and I got time to spend together, singing and doing tactile activities. He enjoyed it and was very responsive.’ There is close monitoring and tracking of the impact of the centre’s provision on children’s achievements through the use of photographic learning journeys and the use of Soft Outcomes Universal Learning (SOUL) for adult users who access services.

Once under the care of the centre, families, including the most vulnerable, receive good support and guidance which is well-tailored to their needs and makes a big difference to their lives. Midwives, health visitors and family workers liaise effectively to support parents well, including mothers suffering from post-natal depression or those with premature babies or multiple births. Parents particularly value outreach services including home visits where staff model games and good parenting in activities as well as providing individually tailored support. This is summed up in the words of one mother ‘I was going through a difficult period and the centre offered a bit of normality once a week. It was fantastic.’

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	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 quadrant advisory board and the local authority are highly proactive and provide good support and guidance to ensure the centre adapts its provision to meet the changing needs of the community. Effective teamwork and good communication between senior managers and staff ensures that morale remains high despite recent organisational changes. Staff are well motivated, skilled and ambitious to improve the centre still further. Performance management and staff supervision systems are robust, with a strong focus on developing the skills of all staff. The cycle of evaluation and improvement planning is rigorous though has yet to fully involve users in the process. Users' views are valued and help to shape the range of services and activities offered. However, there is currently no parent representation on the quadrant advisory board.

Development planning is clearly aligned to local and national indicators for children and families. Challenges arising from the cuts in funding last year have resulted in an effective sharing of resources, staff skills and venues across a cluster of two centres. With its good and improving outcomes, well targeted provision and efficient use of resources the centre provides good value for money.

Good partnerships enable successful joined-up services which support and benefit many families. This includes the effective use of partners' venues to extend the centre's capacity to deliver services and reach target groups. The Epping library's staff speak very positively of this collaborative partnership, saying, 'We would like more centre activities in the library as this does make a difference to families in the area.'

The centre's policies and approach to safeguarding including criminal records bureau checks, child protection, safe recruitment and its comprehensive monitoring arrangements are all good. Safeguarding practices are well embedded in all aspects of service delivery. Robust risk assessments across the service's work ensure the children's personal safety. As a result, children assessed under the Common Assessment Framework are well protected. Ongoing training for all staff up to Level 3 ensures safeguarding is at the forefront of the centre's work. For example, effective work takes place with families who have experienced or are likely to become victims of domestic abuse.

Diversity is well celebrated through the use of multicultural teaching resources and bilingual books. Inclusion and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups, including those with special educational needs, is a priority for the centre. The centre's work with some families who are new to the country, is a good example of how well needs are assessed and met when families most need support. For example, one south Asian mother whose son received help from a speech therapist, described to the inspector the multi-faceted nature of the support she received, 'The centre helped us a lot in the home. I was isolated. There was someone to talk to. My son developed. He is now talking.'

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	3

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Brambles Children's Centre on 18–19 December 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We really appreciated the opportunity to talk with many of you during the inspection. We could see how much you enjoy coming to the centre and appreciate the good learning opportunities and services that the centre provides for you and your families. Your children are making good progress. Some of you have benefited by improving your parenting skills, making new friends, receiving personalised support and becoming volunteers at the centre. As one parent informed us, 'The centre is invaluable to me. I broke my ankle and was in a wheelchair for eight weeks. The support I had from the centre helped me to manage taking the babies out and coping on a day- to- day basis. Now I work as a volunteer for the centre in order to give something back.'

The centre also gives you good advice and guidance on courses you can take, or learn about healthy eating and new games to play with your young children. The centre's services including those provided in your home are very well matched to your needs. The centre has robust safeguarding procedures and provides you with good support, including helping new mothers who experience personal difficulties to feel less isolated or those with multiple births. The social and emotional well-being of many families and, in particular, those of you who experience isolation is greatly improved because of the centre's well-targeted services.

Your centre is well led by a good team of staff and managers. As one grandparent told the inspectors, 'Brambles is a welcoming centre that lets you get out of your home and do something, meet people and take away ideas to do with your children.' Staff have developed very good relationships with professionals including health workers at the baby clinic in St. Margaret Hospital. All staff and partners are keen to support you. The Children's Centre Strategic Board supervising the work of the centre is very proactive in effectively monitoring the services to ensure that they meet your needs. For this reason we believe the centre offers good value for money, in the way it uses its resources to support all of you in so many ways. We are really pleased that the centre provides a safe and a welcoming and inclusive place, where staff are committed to celebrating diversity, including other cultures.

The centre is planning new adult learning programmes and training for the New Year so that you can improve your skills and become more successful in finding work and we agree that this is an important priority. We have asked the centre to press ahead with its work to increase the number of families registered with and accessing services, so that those in remote rural communities and children with additional learning needs can benefit more from its good provision. We have also recommended that the centre leaders involve more of you in reviewing its work and in decision-making as members of the quadrant advisory board.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed their ideas either by speaking to us over the phone or by coming to meet us and sharing their views.

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