

Inspection report for Victoria Park Children's Centre

Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	410983
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2013
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

Centre leader	Fiona Bridger-Wilkinson
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Victoria Park Nursery School 109757/EY311182

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 parents, partners and staff. They met with leaders and representatives of the local authority, the governing body and the advisory board. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Victoria Park Children's Centre was designated in 2007 as a phase two centre. It provides the full range of services, including early years provision and health services. The centre is located in a purpose-built premises attached to Victoria Park Nursery School. The school's headteacher is also the centre's manager. The governing body of Victoria Park Nursery School manages the children's centre on behalf of the local authority. The Castle School Nursery is co-located in the same building and provides education for children with special educational needs and disabled children. The Castle School does not share governance with the children's centre.

The centre is situated in Newbury's town centre. There are 911 children under the age of five years living in the centre's catchment area, according to the centre's most current data. A few (5%) have minority ethnic heritage, including some Indian and Polish. Some parents and children have English as an additional language. The level of prosperity within the reach area is mixed, with some areas of affluence and some that are economically deprived: there are three wards rated in the 40% most deprived of areas in England. The proportion of families living on workless benefits in the area (23%) is similar to that found nationally. Children's skills and abilities on entry to Early Years provision are generally below age-related expectations.

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

Victoria Park Children's Centre delivers good services for the local community. It is a busy centre. Universal services, such as 'Stay and Play', are well attended, and a wide range of targeted groups deliver tailored services to families in need of additional support. Parents, carers and partners contribute to governance through their participation on the advisory board. All who work at the centre are highly knowledgeable about a broad range of relevant aspects, including child development. Quality provision meets the needs of families well, and, as a result, all outcomes are good. Families appreciate the welcoming and safe environment the centre provides, and parent comments such as 'It's such a friendly place, you can speak to anyone' are typical.

Leaders have a good overview of the centre's work. Priorities for development are ambitious and grounded in the needs of families, especially those most in need of support. Parents and carers have many opportunities to give their feedback and influence development planning so services are adapted to meet families' needs. Progress towards improvements is rapid. For example, the number of families using the centre improved by 28% between 2011 and 2012. The governing body and local authority have an accurate view of the centre's strengths and next steps. Both provide consistent and supportive challenge to promote and monitor development. As a result, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

Leaders understand the needs of the reach area well as a result of good local knowledge and effective partnership working with key agencies. Procedures to refer vulnerable families to the centre by social care and health services are well embedded to support those most in need. Very good liaison with the health visitor team provides the centre with accurate information about eligible households within its catchment, which is used effectively to reach families. Leaders make good use of data provided by the local authority, although some aspects of this are too outdated to give accurate assessment of the need and take-up of services. Data on the number of families with ethnic minority backgrounds, for example, are based on the census of 2001 and so do not accurately describe the current ethnic profile of the

area. However, the centre compensates well for these gaps, and uses its own assessment of the area to match services to need, such as by providing a Polish 'Rhyme-Time' group.

The centre collects and records a great deal of relevant information, and so can demonstrate good health outcomes for families, especially those engaged in family support. However, some data shared strategically by health services with the centre are not sufficiently specific to the centre's catchment area to give accurate starting points for measuring the impact of services reliably. For example, the proportion of children who are obese at the end of Reception Year is given as a local authority percentage (9%), which makes it difficult for the centre to measure the effect of their provision to encourage healthy lifestyles. The centre's close collaboration with health visitors and professionals reduces the impact of this shortfall and the health of individual families is enhanced by engagement with the centre, especially for those most in need.

The local authority is aware of both these issues concerning data. Local authority staff are currently developing more detailed data provision to give better support to the children's centre. There is discussion at a strategic level between the local authority and health services to provide better data about the reach area and health outcomes on a regular basis, although no agreement is in place yet.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the quality of data about the composition of the centre's reach area so that it provides accurate and up-to-date information and highlights those families who will most benefit from use of centre services. (The local authority)
- Work in partnership with the local authority and health services to provide a comprehensive range of data that give an overview of all key performance indicators so outcomes can be clearly demonstrated. (The local authority and health services)

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes are good. Families engage well with health services because many services are delivered directly from the centre, such as the baby clinic and midwife booking-in service. Adults who have suffered from post-natal depression and other emotional health issues make significant improvement as a result of tailored individual support and signposting to specialist agencies. The proportion of mothers who sustain breastfeeding to 6–8 weeks is above average (53%), and this is aided by the weekly breastfeeding support drop-in and the work of peer supporters.

The centre provides a safe environment which parents appreciate. In a recent survey, the overwhelming majority of parents stated they felt they and their families were safe at the centre. Parents with challenging domestic circumstances or other difficulties enhance their parenting skills by attending tailored courses at the centre or in their own home. Children subject to child protection plans make good progress as a result of honest dialogue and sustained work which improves the situation for the majority of children. The centre makes good use of the early intervention strategies to prevent many concerns escalating further, and use of the Common Assessment Framework supports vulnerable children when needed. Contact visits take place at the centre, and the safe and suitable premises ensure children's needs are met well on these occasions.

Adults and children enjoy their engagement with centre services. Children make good progress in their learning and development. Those with two-year-old funded places make secure progress that helps them catch up with their peers in their learning and development. Children's crèche learning journals clearly show children achieve well and enjoy their learning. In the reach area, the gap between the lowest performing 20% and the rest is better (at 21%) than local and national levels. The centre and nursery school work collaboratively with other early years providers in the reach area to improve outcomes for children. Children are well prepared for school and transition arrangements are good: individual planning for children with disabilities and special educational needs leads to a successful move to school. Parents, especially those in receipt of support, do well and benefit significantly from their attendance at groups such as 'Share'. In 2012, the vast majority of parents increased the time spent interacting with their children as a result of completing the course, 28% went on to complete another course, and 12.5% moved to a college course.

The majority of adults improve their economic stability as a result of engaging with the centre services, especially those deemed most in need. Vulnerable families receive practical help to purchase essential equipment for the home and urgent benefit advice to improve their standard of living. The centre places high emphasis on a wide range of adult learning opportunities that successfully lead many to volunteer, attend college or university and enter employment.

Families from all walks of life enjoy one another's company when at the centre and they value the social aspects of the provision. One young parent summed this up by saying, 'I met most of my friends here.' Many increase their personal development well as a result of attending groups, such as the 'Young Parents Baby and Me' group or the Saturday 'Dads' Group'. Parents sit on the advisory board, and their role in governance is developing well. They have frequent opportunities to give their views and staff act upon these to influence provision so it meets families' needs well. For example, some parents from targeted services found the universal 'Stay and Play' sessions too busy for them to benefit fully, and in response a dedicated 'Stay and Play' session was introduced for them.

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 works in partnership with a number of other agencies to provide a broad range of universal and specific services. Opportunities are varied so parents have a great deal of choice, and attendance levels are good. Most of the provision is aimed at targeted groups and individuals. It is tailored to meet needs, such as those groups specifically for teenage and young parents. Fathers attend general sessions, as well as their own 'Dads' Group'. Family evaluation is an important tool for leaders planning provision, and changes made reflect their needs. For example, the frequency of the 'Dads' Group' has been increased following requests for more sessions. Provision for families in need of support is significantly enhanced by quality outreach delivered at home. Persistent contact with the most hard-to-engage parents successfully engages most. Staff deal calmly with situations of personal distress, offering caring and enabling support that reassures parents and their children. As a result, vulnerable parents willingly seek out assistance in times of crisis, leading to improved outcomes for those families most in need.

Learning opportunities for adults and children have clear objectives and are based on individual requirements. Adult learning builds on individual learning plans with agreed targets which promote purposeful engagement as a result. Strong partnership with adult and community learning services enhances this provision considerably. Children's provision in early years and centre sessions is of good quality and well grounded in the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Summary sheets evaluate sessions to give an overview of outcomes achieved and advice given; these provide the opportunity for consistency between sessions so that issues can be followed up at the next session, even for universal service users. Success is celebrated well. Presentation ceremonies enable parents and children to collect certificates and celebrate with tea and cake, which they greatly value.

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 centre promotes a harmonious community well and its promotion of equality and diversity is good. There are a number of families with minority ethnic backgrounds who regularly attend the centre, and they readily share their culture to enrich the knowledge of all. For example, Indian families shared their own local celebrations of Divali. Staff use translation services to enable communication with vulnerable parents who have English as an additional language. Parents with disabilities access all services with confidence because staff discuss individual needs and accessibility issues openly with them, and plan services accordingly.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Suitable checks are made on all adults who have contact with children and vulnerable adults to ensure they are safe to work with families. All staff are skilled to support those subject to domestic abuse, which ensures rapid and appropriate response. Staff and volunteers are trained and demonstrate good understanding of their responsibilities and steps to follow regarding child protection. Procedures for referring concerns are well established and thorough to ensure children are kept safe. Detailed records are made to show the frequency and content of contact. These prevent families going for an unwanted length of time without successful communication in order to keep children safe.

Governance arrangements are well established and effective. The governing body is well informed as a result of examining detailed reports and relevant data on a regular basis. The advisory board supports the work of the governors well, giving partners and parents on the board opportunity to contribute to all aspects of centre development and governance. Rigorous performance management at all levels is focused on development needs and the requirements of target families to ensure provision is effective. The local authority gives good support through a thorough annual conversation and quarterly monitoring. The local authority and governors are aware of the need to improve the availability and relevance of data concerning the composition of the reach area and health outcomes, and have begun to work strategically to achieve these. The head of centre and centre coordinator provide strong collaborative leadership which effectively drives improvement and delivers quality provision. Accurate evaluation of user needs and the impact of services are central to all planning of partnerships and services. As a result, the centre provides

good 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	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

The onsite maintained nursery school was inspected in September and was judged to be an outstanding school.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Victoria Park Children's Centre on 16–17 January 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for welcoming us to your centre when we visited recently. We are especially grateful to those of you who made time to speak with us and tell us about the difference the children's centre makes to the lives of you and your families. We think Victoria Park is a welcoming centre, with friendly and well-qualified staff. It is busy and many services are popular. Staff take great care to match the services

to the needs of those families who live within its catchment. They ask you to give your opinions about the type and quality of services. They act on your suggestions when possible, and explain their actions on the 'you said, we did' board, or in the newsletter, for example. Some of you contribute more, and act as volunteers for the centre.

There are lots of good opportunities for you and your children to learn about a wide variety of things. Some of you develop your understanding of how children develop and general parenting skills well, through attending courses and speaking to staff. Many enjoy the 'Stay and Play' sessions, and lots of fathers come along to the Saturday 'Dads' Group' with their children. The centre makes good links with some partner agencies, such as the adult and community learning service, to provide an even broader range of courses. The 'Share' course is a good example of this, and many families have enjoyed this group. They say it has resulted in them spending more time playing with their children, as well as being an enjoyable course to do.

The centre is a safe and happy environment. Staff make sure the premises are safe for you and your children. Families with different backgrounds and experiences get along well with one another, and many of you told us you have made good friends through coming to the centre. Children and adults with disabilities or additional needs are looked after well, and staff make sure they can access groups and activities easily.

Leaders have a good understanding of what the centre needs to do next to improve services further. We have asked the local authority and health services to develop some of the information they give centre leaders about the local area and health. This will allow them to plan their services more accurately, and they will be able to show the effects of what they do more easily and clearly.

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