

Inspection report for Bemerton Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Islington
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Reporting inspector	Alan Comerford-Dunbar

Centre leader	Gilles Shewell
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	1a Coatsbridge House Carnoustie Drive Islington London N1 0DX
Telephone number	02075274806
Email address	gilles.shewell@islington.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bemerton Children's Centre EY291873

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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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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior leaders, parents and members of the advisory board. They met with a range of partners, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Bemerton Children's Centre is a phase one centre which opened in 2004. Located near to King's Cross railway station, the centre serves an inner London community within Islington, which is socially, economically and culturally diverse. The centre provides the full core offer through a range of services, including health support, adult courses and workshops.

The centre works in partnership with the Kate Greenaway Children's Centre in a cluster model. Both centres share in timetabled services which are delivered across both reach areas. There are also joint commissioning arrangements for external services such as swimming sessions. The other centre is subject to a separate inspection. The linked childcare provision is also subject to separate inspection arrangements and was last inspected in June 2012.

Families living in the reach area are from many different ethnic backgrounds. Some 35% of families are of White British heritage, while 39% are from a wide range of Black and other minority ethnic heritages, including Bangladeshi, Somali, Turkish, Kurdish and Chinese. Almost 43% of primary school children in the reach area speak English as an additional language.

Currently 605 children under the age of five years live in the centre's reach area and of these, 89% are registered with the centre. The centre serves one of the most deprived areas nationally. The proportion of workless families is 23%. The area has a

mixture of types of housing, with some privately owned, a significant proportion privately rented and a high number of families living in social housing. Seventy-three per cent of lone parents registered at the centre are in receipt of benefits. Research by the centre shows that overcrowded living conditions and other social issues lead to a high turnover of families in the area. Children enter early years education with a range of skills and knowledge below those typically expected for their age.

The local authority is responsible for governance of the centre. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents. The advisory board is responsible for the governance of the two centres in the Islington cluster.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Bemerton Children’s Centre is an outstanding centre in all respects. The centre makes a very significant difference to improving the lives of local families who use it; thereby demonstrating its outstanding overall effectiveness. Parents from different target groups are unanimous in their praise for the work of staff at the centre; as one mother said, ‘This centre is my second home, in many ways this is where I feel most valued.’

This large centre, situated in the heart of a significantly deprived area, has a major influence on community life. The purpose-built centre is always full to capacity with users very keen to benefit from the centre’s high-quality provision. The outdoor play area, overlooked by high-rise tenement blocks, is well used by staff not only to enable children to play but also to educate them about the source of many different vegetables as part of raising their awareness about the importance of a healthy diet. As one astute mother put it, ‘My son now realises that vegetables come from the ground, not cans.’

Centre staff are extremely effective in raising the aspirations of parents. Excellent strategies result in parents becoming more confident mothers and fathers. Children’s

readiness for learning is boosted significantly through the work of dedicated, skilled staff at the centre and as a result their educational achievements and personal development are exceptional.

A very large majority of families from the reach area are registered with the centre. Proactive outreach workers diligently run a wide range of activities in the community, thereby ensuring that families, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are given precisely the support they need to overcome personal barriers. An excellent programme called 'Islington Working with Parents' is very effective in working with adults who wish to return to work. Currently, relatively small numbers are benefitting from the programme. The centre recognises this and has well-conceived plans to introduce new complementary services, working closely with Jobcentre Plus.

Excellent working arrangements with partner agencies such as health and social care lead to families being healthy and safe. The safety of users and staff is of paramount importance and, despite significant funding cuts, robust policies and outstanding practice lead to outstanding outcomes. For example, safety in the home is promoted at every opportunity, with innovative methods used to provide needy families with safety equipment, for example through productive links with local charities. All health indicators are improving strongly. Despite recent significant success in reducing the obesity rate of Reception-age children, the centre has recently introduced fitness related activities although more needs to be done to increase participation rates.

Leadership and management are outstanding because from the moment visitors enters this busy well-run children's centre, they are greeted by friendly, conscientious staff, who are highly effective in meeting the needs of existing and new families. The centre exemplifies high-quality practice in safeguarding and equality and diversity, as reflected in the outstanding outcomes. Self-evaluation processes are rigorous and are used extremely well to identify priorities and plan future provision.

The local authority clearly supports the centre to achieve its goals. Advisory board members are knowledgeable and passionate about the work of the centre. The centre's high-level effectiveness, track record of success and commitment to improving the lives of local families demonstrate its outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with health colleagues to reduce obesity rates still further by increasing the number of health- and fitness-related activities, such as 'Football Stay and Play' and 'Swimming' sessions, whilst maintaining parents' high awareness of the need for children to eat healthily.
- Press ahead with implementing the plans in place to increase opportunities and extend the involvement of adults ready to gain employment by establishing

advice and guidance surgeries with colleagues from Jobcentre Plus and extending the work of the 'Islington Working with Parents' programme.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The centre's excellent partnership working with health professionals results in an outstanding impact on community health. Breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is very high at 74%, and is significantly higher than the England average of 47%. A range of activities, including growing vegetables, improves families' understanding of the importance of a healthy diet. Many parents are gaining confidence when cooking and are using new ideas to ensure their families are benefitting from a healthy diet. Due to effective interventions, obesity levels in Reception-age children are reducing strongly and are down by 3% on last year. This reduction is significant but the centre recognises that still more needs to be done to tackle obesity and appropriately has this as its number one target for improvement. Centre staff are highly effective in engaging with families to promote healthy lifestyles. A recent survey revealed that parents have increased their awareness about health-related issues because of the well-targeted services they access.

Staff's knowledge of protocols and procedures when working with social care is excellent. The centre outreach manager, a former social worker in the area, has effectively forged positive relationships with colleagues from social care and health which include fortnightly multi-agency case reviews. These ensure that centre support for the most vulnerable families is timely and effective. This multi-agency approach ensures the very best possible support for children, including those subject to a child protection plan, or who are looked after. Parents and children are kept extremely safe by the centre through the rigorous reinforcement of health and safety. As one mother put it, 'The reception staff here are superb, you know they are watchful, they know us all by name, even our children.'

Children achieve exceptionally well from their starting points. The proportion of children achieving 78+ scale points by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, including personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy, is significantly improving. Outcomes are at the national average at 63.9%, having risen strongly from 41.1% since 2008. More significantly, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest has narrowed considerably from 45.6% in 2009 to 27.6% in 2012. The gap is closing more rapidly than is seen nationally.

The uptake of positive parenting courses is exceptionally high. Staff are highly skilled at influencing parents, constantly reinforcing effective parenting strategies throughout activities and, as a consequence, children's behaviour is excellent. Parents make an outstanding contribution to the running of the centre, for example as members of the advisory board. Parents, including fathers, are actively involved in centre activities. The centre runs a well-structured volunteer training programme so that parents become 'Buddies' for new users of the centre. This process ensures that all new users receive a friendly, informed welcome to the centre.

The economic and social well-being of users is outstanding. The centre is strategically located adjacent to the most deprived areas within its reach area. Adults benefit from an excellently designed and well-thought-out series of programmes to improve their employability skills. In 2012, out of the 19 adults who were considered to be 'job ready', 18 obtained employment through the highly effective 'Islington Working with Parents' programme. However, due to budget constraints, this service has limited availability at the centre and few adults are currently benefiting as positively, a fact recognised by the centre. As a result, a mother registered at the centre has been instrumental in setting up additional employment advice and guidance surgeries to be run in conjunction with the local Jobcentre Plus.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1
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	1

How good is the provision?

1

The area is undergoing a significant programme of change due to the regeneration of the neighbouring sites near King's Cross and St Pancras. A very large majority of families within the reach area access centre activities on a regular basis. This is testimony to the hard work and dedication of the centre outreach workers, the friendliness of centre staff and the suitability of services offered. The centre regards each family as unique and staff offer careful and sensitive assessment at the point of contact to ensure families' needs are fully met. Particularly good work is being done with a group of teenage boys from a local secondary school to educate them about risks and consequences associated with teenage pregnancies. Teenage conception rates in the reach area have recently dropped dramatically. Initiatives have been so successful in building the confidence and abilities of parents that many have gone on to become volunteers or advisory board members. One father summed up the feelings of many parents when he said, 'I have received so much love from this centre that I wanted to give a little love back.'

Learning and development opportunities for children are outstanding and include purposeful individualised learning which enables high achievement. Personal

achievement is celebrated well; the many centre walls are adorned with the work of children and adults proudly displaying high quality work produced during sessions and of which they are rightly proud. Staff have very high expectations of all users, who flourish as a result. All parents, including fathers, are actively involved in healthy activities with their children, including a 'Fathers and Children' Saturday swimming group and a 'Stay and Play Football' group.

The very well-focused guidance and exceptionally well-tailored support that every individual receives are key features of this outstanding centre. Clear planning between agencies and early intervention effectively ensure that all families receive exactly the right support to improve their well-being. During the inspection, unfortunately, there were two serious separate incidents when women from families in the reach area were subject to domestic violence and sought the centre's help. Experienced sensitive staff skillfully managed both incidents with the utmost discretion and professionalism, thereby ensuring that the significant needs of the women were met whilst not causing distress to other users of this extremely busy centre.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

This outstanding centre is expertly run by a centre leadership team that ensures that all outcomes are improving strongly and that as many families as possible benefit from using the centre. The centre manager provides inspirational leadership through a number of strategies, for example through the excellent use of research projects to help shape services. All staff are well qualified and actively encouraged to develop their expertise in areas that interest them and which benefit the centre. The leadership team provides high-quality professional supervision for all staff.

All associated with the centre are crystal clear about the aims and priorities for the centre. The local authority senior management team, along with the advisory board, is very effective in supporting and challenging the centre in their efforts to improve life chances for families within the local community. The centre's self-evaluation document is extremely well written and accurate, and judgments are well supported as a result of the very good use made of sophisticated reach area data. The resulting centre improvement plan is clearly linked to identified needs and demonstrates why the centre has outstanding capacity to improve.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding and result in particularly vulnerable families receiving exceptional support during times of crisis. Very effective use of the Common Assessment Framework and the close partnership working of agencies involved ensure a secure safety net is in place. All legal requirements in relation to safeguarding are adhered to. Leaders ensure the safe recruitment of staff, and robust checks are made on all adults working in, or with, the centre. Staff are vigilant about safety and take prompt action to minimise any potential risks in activities.

Visitors to the centre cannot help but notice the wonderfully warm and friendly environment. A beautiful wall display describing 'Our Family' depicts the very heart of multi-racial Britain as families from a wide range of backgrounds tell their story to all visitors of the centre. A wander along the corridors of the centre is a delight to the senses as families from all walks of life show respect to each other and chatter amongst themselves in their many different home languages. Highly effective services meet the needs of all users very well, including those of disabled children and children with special educational needs.

The centre is proactive in seeking the views of its service users. Excellent partnership working ensures all parts of the reach area are provided for, resulting in the very high engagement of target groups. This large, full-to-capacity centre, with excellent resources such as a sensory room for children with autism, extensive outside play area situated under tenement blocks and outstanding outcomes, clearly demonstrates excellent 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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
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	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	1

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

The recent inspection findings at Bemerton Children's Centre: EY29873 were used to inform this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bemerton Children's Centre on 6 and 7 February 2013. We judged the centre as outstanding.

As part of the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of staff and partnership workers. We were pleased to speak to some of you about the centre's work and to listen to your views. We really enjoyed talking to you around the centre and in the various activity sessions you were engaged in. You expressed your views very clearly and we appreciated your 'straight talking' in telling us how things really are.

We are pleased to tell you that the centre enables you and your families to achieve outstanding outcomes through the range of excellent quality activities and services it has on offer. Excellent attention is given to ensure you and your children stay safe. The way the centre offers you care, guidance and support during times of crisis is particularly impressive and we know many of you describe the centre as 'a safe haven' for you. We were delighted to hear how well so many of you have benefited from coming to the centre, increasing your confidence and becoming involved in the many worthwhile activities available to you.

The centre is superb at helping you increase your knowledge about play and how children learn through the many play activities and parenting sessions. The centre offers a fantastic range of high quality support to new mothers and fathers. Many of you are gaining confidence when cooking and are using new ideas to ensure your families are benefiting from a healthy diet. There have been impressive results in the work the centre is doing to tackle obesity in young children. However, more needs to be done in this important area and we have asked the centre to continue to work with health colleagues to reduce obesity rates still further.

We judged that the centre has an excellent leadership team and that staff are well qualified and work very hard to make the centre as good as it can be. The centre is extremely well supported by senior managers from the local authority and also members of the advisory board. The self-evaluation report is very well written and accurate. Challenging targets are set in order to improve services for you, and the

centre makes excellent use of resources and has great capacity for making future improvements.

The centre exemplifies high-quality practice in safeguarding and equality and diversity. With a very large majority of families accessing services, the centre provides excellent value for money. It was also good to hear about those of you who have undertaken training to increase your confidence and develop your skills, which may help you secure employment in the future. In 2012, 19 adults worked closely with the centre to gain employment, with a highly commendable 18 getting jobs. Despite this, we have asked the centre to work more closely with colleagues from the local authority and also Jobcentre Plus in order to increase the opportunities for even more of you who currently wish to gain employment.

We know that you love your centre and the work that it does, and we agree that it is first-rate. Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to share your views with us. We can see why the staff enjoy working with you so much and wish you every success in the future.

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