

Inspection report for Ham Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Inspection number	420288
Inspection dates	13–14 February 2013
Reporting inspector	Christine Field

Centre leader	Viviana Patterson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Ashburnham Road, Ham, Richmond, TW10 7BG
Telephone number	020 8734 3400
Email address	viviana.patterson@richmond.gov.uk

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

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.

Report published: February 2013



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

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

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2013



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, frontline staff, a range of partners, Local Children's Centre Commissioning Board representatives, local authority officers, and parents. They also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the self-evaluation form and action plan 2012–13.

Information about the centre

The centre was designated as a phase two centre and has been open for the community since 2008. It is situated in the south of the London borough of Richmond upon Thames and serves Ham, Petersham and Richmond Riverside communities. In partnership with a range of providers, it delivers a range of services that meet its full core purpose.

There are 2000 children under five years living in the reach area, which comprises mixed tenures, including privately owned, rented and social housing. Ham is assessed as being one of the most deprived communities within the borough but includes pockets of both significant affluence and severe disadvantage. The proportion of children living in workless homes across the reach area is 9%, but in the most disadvantaged neighbourhood, some 40% of children are living in poverty. The large majority of families (75%) are from White British backgrounds. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision span a wide range of ability, but are typically below average in the area in which the centre is located.

Day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the manager who oversees the work of the staff team of outreach worker, young parents' outreach worker and two children's centre coordinators. Until November 2012, governance

was provided by an advisory board comprising centre staff, local authority officers and partners. A new Local Children's Centre Commissioning Board (LCCCB) has taken over this role, together with the prime function of commissioning services. The LCCCB has met once since it was formed.

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

This busy, welcoming and highly inclusive centre has firmly established itself at the heart of the community. It provides a good service for local families who achieve good, and in some instances outstanding, outcomes because of good quality provision and extremely well-targeted interventions. The highly motivated staff team are passionate about what they do and work very effectively to assess and respond to local needs. Leadership and management are the lynchpin of the centre's good effectiveness. Governance is currently satisfactory rather than good because the newly comprised LCCCB is not yet up to full strength, especially in relation to parent representatives, and has yet to establish performance monitoring arrangements. The centre manager is highly regarded and has been innovative and resourceful in establishing a strong track record of success, particularly in building the trust and good engagement of a significant number of hard-to-reach families. Everyone is clear about the priorities for further improvement and the centre has good capacity to achieve them.

The highest priority is given to safeguarding. The care, guidance and support provided for families are outstanding. Exceptionally effective multi-agency work and high quality outreach support result in families, particularly those at risk, being extremely well protected. Outstanding partnerships, particularly with health services, underpin the outstanding health outcomes. Parents praise the quality of support they receive, especially in times of crisis. One mother's comment is typical of many: 'I was so low and everything got me down. The staff are so supportive. I now recognise the warning signs and am coping so much better.'

Families using the centre have high levels of satisfaction with the services available, as reflected in the increasing number in regular contact. Their evaluations show

clearly what gains have been made, particularly in building confidence and self-esteem. The very active parents' forum, which is truly representative of the community, helps shape services, for example by canvassing centre users' views to commission new services, change the timings of sessions or spearhead new projects such as developing the centre garden.

Most children using the centre behave well and enjoy the range of experiences on offer. However, fewer than average attain a good level of development, despite the good quality learning opportunities provided. The centre is working in close partnership with local schools to narrow the achievement gap between the lowest achieving children and the rest, but has yet to devise a progress tracking system to support this work. Over a third of adults, including a large proportion of lone parents, are engaged in various training opportunities that enhance their personal development significantly. A few adults access accredited courses but the number who improve their learning and skills is relatively low; this is particularly the case for those from workless families.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen governance and accountability by ensuring that parents are fully represented on the LCCCB and that close attention is paid to reviewing how well the centre is meeting its specific targets for improvement.
- Extend the opportunities for adults, particularly those from workless homes, to enhance their learning and skills, and develop a way of checking how well children who have accessed centre services achieve by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The very large majority of families in the reach area access health services, with midwifery services held at the centre and ongoing child development checks ensuring that families most in need receive easily accessible support. The key indicators of sustained breastfeeding, which, at 71%, is very high, and obesity levels in young children, which, at 6%, are very low, reflect the significant impact of the centre's excellent partnership work. Services have been carefully commissioned to promote healthier lifestyles and participation rates are good. Activities such as 'Cookie Tots' (which involves parents making nutritious low-cost meals with their children), 'Diddi Dance' (where children enjoy musical movement), and 'Dads Go Wild' (involving a range of physical activities outdoors) all make an important contribution to family health. Breastfeeding is promoted in all activities and it was great to see so many mothers feeling comfortable to enjoy these moments with their babies during sessions.

Children, including those subject to a child protection plan, and vulnerable adults are exceptionally well safeguarded. Robust use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) ensures that from initial contact onwards, family support is timely and very

well integrated. Families using the centre have a very good understanding of how to keep their families safe. For example, the longstanding accredited paediatric first aid course has involved 151 parents attending in the past year, with a third of them being from minority ethnic backgrounds. As one parent said: 'I am using the skills I have learned every day and I now know how to save my child's life.' Home safety checks carried out during 'Safety Awareness Week' help families overcome potential dangers in the home and also enable the staff to follow up any ongoing concerns. Inspectors spoke to a high number of parents and child minders during the inspection and all said they have full trust in the staff and are confident to share any concerns.

Children are helped to get ready for school through well-planned activities such as 'Stay and Play', which help them build good attitudes to learning and grow in confidence as they use the outdoor climbing frames, play in the sand or enjoy creating lovely artwork. At 68%, the proportion of children across the reach area who attain a good level of development is just above the national average of 64%. However, the proportion from the immediate neighbourhood, some of whom have previously accessed centre services, is lower. The centre is working with local schools to narrow the achievement gap between the most vulnerable young children and the rest as, at 33%, it is slightly wider than seen nationally. The importance of tracking children's progress from their different starting points has been prioritised but a system for achieving this has yet to be established.

The proactive parents' forum is a very well-attended group that supports the centre in numerous ways. Their latest project is developing a garden so that children have first-hand experiences of growing their own food. There are good opportunities for users to feed back about the quality of services they receive, which helps shape the centre's future programmes, or to suggest adaptations to add value to those currently running. The prominently displayed notice-board entitled 'You said - We did' ensures that everyone is kept abreast of developments. Many adults build personal skills and grow in confidence as parents because of the centre's support. Specific programmes help parents to manage their children's behaviour positively and strengthen family relationships.

Families from target groups improve their economic well-being as a result of accessing specific support. For example, case studies show how one-to-one help has supported some families in managing finances, sorting rent arrears, accessing university courses and returning to paid employment. A large proportion of single parents are included in the numbers, and are engaged in various vocational training opportunities, including jewellery design, hair styling, health and social care. Some adults access basic literacy and numeracy skills courses but the number, especially of those without work, extending their educational achievements is relatively low.

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	3
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

Strong local knowledge and the thorough assessment of needs result in a good range of services being provided. The centre is working effectively to achieve a sensible balance between targeted and universal services that respond to the diverse needs of the community. Over 80% of families most in need of support are in regular contact with the centre, although the number from workless homes is not as high as from the other target groups. Many families regularly drop in for a coffee and a chat when passing, and staff take full advantage of this to keep in touch and make sure that any issues are responded to promptly. Excellent partnerships, together with regular information-sharing between agencies, result in families feeling exceptionally well looked after. One young mother commented: 'The centre is the centre of my universe, I wouldn't know where I would be if it wasn't here.'

Provision to help children learn and develop is good, but this is not yet reflected in the achievement data for the local area. Planning draws well on early learning best practice models, with specific sessions, for example to promote communication, speech and language, in place to help children overcome any specific difficulties. Children's 'learning journey' records are highly valued by parents but offer further scope for tracking children's progress more precisely. Personal achievements are celebrated well. Last year the artwork of some parents formed part of the 'Past, Present and Future' Arts Council funded exhibition which gave public recognition to their creative talents.

The quality of outreach support is first rate and results in the most vulnerable families receiving high quality care, guidance and support. A high number of young parents access services and receive impartial advice, for example as part of the 'Speakeasy' course, which covers sexual health and relationships matters. Parents of children with special needs, including physical disabilities, share their experiences at 'Sparkle Time' and identify that the support network is 'simply brilliant'. The centre's very positive relationship with health partners, and the co-location of some of their services such as baby clinics and developmental checks, has enabled it to reach a very large majority of families and achieve outstanding health and well-being outcomes.

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

High aspirations, resourcefulness, very strong teamwork and a shared vision that everyone's needs will be met through quality services are the main reasons why outcomes are good and the centre achieves good value for money. The centre manager has a clear plan for improvement and a realistic view of what the centre does well and where further work is required. The parents' forum and centre users identify strongly that their contributions inform decision-making and that their views clearly help shape future services. Staff are highly motivated and keen to play a full part in moving the centre forward.

Day-to-day management of the centre runs smoothly and professional supervision is a positive feature in managing staff performance and in supporting their professional development. Governance arrangements are in transition as the new LCCCB gets to grips with its evolving role, and more work remains to ensure it meets its full remit. Partners form part of the group, but as yet there has been no parent involvement. There is a shared sense of purpose between members to ensure that commissioned services meet local needs, with clear monitoring arrangements agreed. However, not enough attention has been given to how the board will hold the centre to account for meeting its key targets.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding and include robust risk assessments, consistently implemented policies and rigorous staff vetting checks. Children's well-being and safety are significantly enhanced by the exemplary practice of staff who are well trained in, and keenly alert to, all child protection matters. Regular and well-attended multi-agency meetings focus on supporting children in need and families at risk. The comprehensive sharing of information and the very effective referral system underpin the tight safety-net of support in place.

The inclusion of families from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds is central to the centre's vision. Much good work takes place, especially through the bespoke packages of outreach support that eliminate any barriers to families' well-being and ensure full equality in accessing services. The developing analysis and growing use of data about specific target groups is helping the centre to close the gaps between different groups and plan ahead with greater precision. The good work with local schools and clear strategies to improve the achievement of the most vulnerable children has not yet had time to make a demonstrable impact.

Partnerships are exceptionally strong, particularly with parents, childminders, voluntary services such as Home Start and Relate, plus health and child development-related services and schools. Service delivery in supporting the health, safety and general well-being of families at risk is closely integrated. Information-sharing protocols, especially to support the CAF process, are a very positive feature in assessing needs and supporting the very positive health and safety outcomes.

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	3
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

Not applicable

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected Ham Children's Centre on 13 and 14 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

We talked to partners, staff, officers from the local authority and members of the Local Children's Centre Commissioning Board (LCCCB) that governs the centre and looked at a huge amount of data and documentation. It was great to meet so many of you and to hear about some of the ways in which the centre extends your life choices and chances. It is very clear that the centre has firmly established itself at the heart of your community and built trusting relationships. You enjoy the welcoming, relaxed atmosphere and told us that is why it is good to pop in for a chat and drink when you are passing.

The centre provides a good service for you and your children. The highly motivated staff team are passionate about what they do and they work hard to provide you with exactly the right kind of support you need. The highest priority is given to safeguarding, and the care, guidance and support you receive are outstanding. Exceptionally effective multi-agency work and high quality outreach support result in your families being extremely well protected. Outstanding partnerships, particularly with health services, result in most of you accessing health services and improving your well-being as a result. Parents value highly the quality of support they receive, especially in times of crisis. One mother's comment is typical of many: 'I was so low and everything got me down. The staff are so supportive. I now recognise the warning signs and am coping so much better.'

Your children behave well and enjoy the range of experiences on offer. However, despite the good quality learning opportunities provided, achievement outcomes are satisfactory rather than good. The centre is working with partner schools to narrow the gap between the lowest achieving children and the rest, but has yet to devise a progress tracking system to support this work. We have asked the staff to look at this as a priority. Over a third of adults who use the centre, including a large proportion of lone parents, are engaged in various training opportunities that enhance their personal development significantly. A few adults access accredited courses but the number who improve their learning and skills is relatively low, particularly from workless families. We have asked the centre to extend these opportunities.

Good leadership and management is the main driving force behind the centre's good effectiveness. Governance is currently satisfactory rather than good because the newly formed LCCCB is not yet up to full strength and has yet to establish performance monitoring arrangements. We have asked the centre to ensure parents are involved in the board's work and to make sure it keeps a close eye on how well the centre meets its targets.

We thoroughly enjoyed our time at the centre; thank you once again for sharing your views with us so readily and we send you our very best wishes for the future.

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