

# Inspection report for Burnt Oak Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	367770
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 March 2013
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Hilary Macdonald HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Heidi Barton
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Burnt Oak Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Burnt Oak Primary School Nursery

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 the centre manager, the headteacher and other centre staff. Meetings were also held with representatives from the local authority, partner agencies and a group of parents. Informal discussions were held with families using the centre's services throughout the inspection. A telephone meeting was conducted with the Chair of the Advisory Board.

Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a comprehensive range of relevant documentation. This included policies, the centre's self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, session planning and evaluations, performance management information, minutes of meetings, case studies and data relating to families' use of the centre.

## Information about the centre

Burnt Oak Children's Centre was designated as a phase one centre in March 2008. It is open from 8.00am to 5.00pm for 50 weeks of the year and provides a range of services for families and children under five years. These include courses and activities to promote physical and mental health such as 'Baby Massage' and wide-ranging opportunities for child and adult learning and family support. The centre is situated in a large purpose-built room at the front of the primary school. In addition the primary school provides regular and frequent use of other high quality spaces, such as the 'Learning Centre' facility. The centre runs a crèche or funds childminding to enable parents to access counselling and adult learning. The site is fully accessible for users and their families who may have a disability. Outreach services are provided directly in families' homes, in other schools and in community venues including the Sunlight Centre and St Barnabas Church Hall. The school has an on-site nursery, providing part-time educational provision for children aged three and four years. Evidence indicates that children's skills, knowledge and abilities are well below

those expected for their age when they enter early years provision. The nursery was inspected previously as part of the school inspection in February 2013.

The centre is managed on a day-to-day basis by the head of centre, overseen by the local authority in partnership with the headteacher. Governance is currently provided by the local authority, with liaison with the advisory board which evaluates the centre's work and plans future activities for approval. Parent forums take place in the children's centre and at outreach venues. Information from these meetings is shared with the advisory board.

Burnt Oak is one of 19 centres in the local authority and serves an area of high and increasing deprivation in North Gillingham. The centre serves communities in eight super output areas. Of these, six fall within the 30% most deprived areas in the country. There are two other primary schools, one setting providing early years childcare and 11 childminders within the reach area. There is a high proportion of social housing, including temporary housing, resulting in a high level of mobility in the population. Most families in the area are of White British heritage, with around 20% of families from a range of minority ethnic groups and an increasing number of White European families.

Around 1094 children under five live in the centre's reach area and approaching half of these are considered to be living in poverty. The percentage of workless families and lone parent families are well above average. Attendance rates from families in areas of greatest deprivation are strong at 76.2%. Almost all families in the centre's reach area are engaged with appropriate health services.

## 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

'Understanding and non-judgemental', 'caring' and 'supportive' are words that many parents spoken to during the inspection used to describe the staff at Burnt Oak Children's Centre. An ethos of positivity and optimism alongside care and support is well established. As a result, a majority of families, particularly those from target

groups, are attracted to the centre and participate in a wide range of activities. Participation rates at 66% are strong and increasing well, particularly when compared to other centres in the local authority. Families receive good support from the centre and feel confident to turn to it in times of crisis.

Centre staff have a deep understanding of their local families and community. They make extensive use of the hub school and local venues, including a leisure centre and scout hut to ensure good quality services are accessible to families regardless of where they live within the centre's reach area. Staff work productively with a range of partners enabling the centre to offer a diverse range of activities and programmes that promote positive outcomes for families. These include the popular 'Trendy Tots' 'Cooking on a Budget' and 'New Year New U' delivered in partnership with the public health team. The recent implementation of the 'Realising your Potential' course, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, is beginning to enable parents to develop the skills and confidence to prepare them for work. 'The staff know us so well. They make the effort to talk to and get to know every individual and make sure we get the help and courses that we need' said one parent. While parents who are new to speaking English say they feel welcome, there are not enough opportunities for them to improve their English skills.

Children's safety and well-being are enhanced by the effective implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures. Staff initiate and respond to Common Assessment Framework (CAF) referrals to ensure families receive the most appropriate level of support and intervention for children subject to child protection plans or identified as children in need. Parents are entirely confident that they and their children are kept safe while engaging in children's centre activities. Parents reported that their knowledge of safety in the home was significantly increased, for example by attending a fire safety talk which was followed up by a home visit where new smoke alarms were fitted free of charge.

While the gap in achievement for the lowest attaining 20% of children and all others remains too wide at 34.2%, it is reducing. The work of the centre in identifying and supporting these children and their families is a particular strength. The progress of children in the hub school who have been engaged in children's centre activities prior to starting school is carefully tracked. Data show a remarkable improvement in outcomes for these children, particularly relating to physical development and communication and language skills which are consistently above local authority averages. The number achieving at least six points in physical, social and emotional development rose to 82% in 2012, while communication and language scores rose to 66%. Data for children in the reach schools are not currently available to the children's centre.

Parents make a positive contribution to the work of the centre by providing regular feedback at the end of events or courses. Some parents take part in regular parent forums and these views are shared with the advisory board. However, not all parents are aware of the systems to share their views or of the existence and work of the advisory board. Although parents are welcome and some do attend from time to

time, there is currently no parent representation on the advisory board.

Governance of this centre is fully effective. Due to significant organisational changes in school governance, the local authority rightly intervened to provide an alternative model of responsibility and accountability, which is understood by all centre staff. Centre staff and the local authority are acutely aware of the centre's strengths and areas for further improvement. They make good use of high quality data, local intelligence and partnership work to assess needs and plan provision. Action planning reflects national and local priorities and combines these effectively alongside the needs of individual families. Despite a transient population, small numbers of staff and high levels of need the centre is successfully increasing the number of families it reaches, including lone parents, fathers and families from minority ethnic groups. The quality of leadership and management and the centre's capacity to keep improving are therefore good.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Promote more widely the role and function of the parents' forums and advisory board to ensure all parents have improved opportunities to contribute to decision making and to participate at a strategic level.
- Further increase opportunities for parents to participate in courses and activities that will provide them with skills and experiences to prepare them for work, including courses in English for parents who are speakers of other languages.
- Further develop the centre's systems to monitor and measure the longer-term impact of the centre's services by working with the local authority, local nurseries and reach schools to track the achievement of children as they move on to the next stage in their learning.
- Further reduce the gaps between the lowest attaining children and all others by continuing to identify and prioritise these children and their families for additional targeted support.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>2</b>
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High regard is given to promoting safety to support families to feel safe both at the centre and in their daily lives. For example, free starter packs of child safety equipment are given out, paediatric first aid courses are run regularly and the centre has been proactive in building links and engaging families who experience domestic violence. One member of staff is a trained facilitator for the 'Freedom Programme' which provides help for such families. As a result, parents express the highest levels of confidence in centre staff. Parents also express how parenting programmes such as 'Triple P', as well as the general daily guidance from staff are helping them to make positive changes to how they manage their children's behaviour.

Sessions such as 'Messy Play' and 'Stay and Play' have a strong focus on children's learning and development. Any potential concerns are identified and referrals made

for specialist support, such as counselling, home visiting, or medical referrals for child development assessments. Carefully planned activities, including regular swimming and one-off activities such as a 'Let's Get Physical' event, as well as targeted interventions such as 'Grow Together' ensure physical development and health are promoted well. Data confirm that rates of breastfeeding at initiation (58.7%) and sustained at six to eight weeks (50.4%) are above local authority averages, while rates of obesity have declined and are below local averages. Communication and language development are consistently given high priority through songs and stories at universal groups as well as through 'Bookstart Corner' and 'Breakfast and Books' which provide more targeted support for parents and children. Much improved scores in the Early Years Foundation Stage data at the hub school demonstrate the success of these approaches. The centre also provides support to the reach schools and is now looking to track the impact of the support for and achievement of these children.

Almost all families engage well with appropriate health services. Although universal health services are not typically delivered within the centre excellent links between health visitors and centre workers ensure that health needs are identified and responded to. Sensitive early intervention for parents with post-natal depression at 'Baby Massage' has helped parents bond with their babies. Signposting to physical activity is successfully tackling rates of obesity, which are reducing and are below average for the local authority. In conversation with inspectors families identified many ways in which the children's centre has helped them and their families to lead physically and emotionally better lives.

Family learning activities such as 'Books and Cooks' build adults' confidence and inspire them to attend further courses such as 'Realising Your Hidden Potential'. Consideration has recently been given to the need to further increase and promote employability skills. Opportunities to learn through volunteering are extending and parents are eager to establish a 'job club'. However, it is too soon to see the impact of this work on increasing numbers of parents gaining employment. There are currently no courses for speakers of other languages delivered at, or very close to, the children's centre.

Families are highly enthusiastic about attending the centre. They make good progress in achieving personal, social and educational goals. Children behave well and families show respect and valuable support for each other. Parents regularly provide feedback regarding their views on particular courses and activities and a 'You said, we did...' board provides information to parents about how their views have been used. Some parents take part in parents meetings that are held at the centre and at outreach venues, but not all parents are aware of these groups. Currently, there are is no regular parent representation on the advisory board, although minutes of meetings indicate that parents are welcome and do attend from time to time. Centre leaders are aware of the need to increase the role of parents in strategic decision making.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>2</b>
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The centre is successful at reaching out to, and engaging with, families identified as in greatest need. A good range of services are all carefully shaped to precisely meet local families' needs. The strong emphasis on community-based provision has led to a greater sense of belonging in the community and friendships between families in the area. Family support workers, and other key partners, are persistent in their efforts to successfully engage with families made vulnerable by their circumstances. The use of photographic 'Learning Journeys' records parents' increasing confidence and engagement. In this centre all families are certain to receive a warm welcome.

Specialist programmes such as 'Understanding Your Child' have helped parents develop clear and appropriate behaviour management skills securing good outcomes for children's safety as well as improved family relationships. Highly effective and skilled partnership working, including with health, social services and early years professionals, plays a vital part in the centre's success and in providing support that builds parents' abilities to promote their child's learning and development needs. In targeted and universal activities such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Books and Cooks' parents and children enjoy learning together. The strong emphasis on health promotion, physical and language development within the activity programme is contributing significantly to improved outcomes.

The take-up rate for all activities led by the centre is good and has increased well over the last year to 66% overall. An enticing range of one-off events, such as a visiting farm and trips to the beach, provide opportunities for families to share new and exciting experiences. A 'DIY for Dads' group in partnership with Mid Kent College has encouraged more fathers to engage with centre services. Volunteering pathways for individuals are provided with a view to encouraging greater aspirations regarding their learning and achievement. This positive work is at an early stage.



Care, guidance and support are good. Individualised, targeted support is a strength of the centre and highly valued by parents. Case studies and conversations with parents provide compelling evidence of how staff help to meet the complex and challenging needs of individual families, including those facing eviction, struggling with debt, domestic violence and child protection. Skilful working, including home visits, one-to-one support as well as support packages agreed between partners help to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. As one parent said; 'The 'Thursday Group' for families with children with special educational needs and disabilities is a real lifesaver. It is the only time when I don't have to worry about how he will behave. The staff understand and I can relax. I can't go anywhere else and feel like that.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability are clearly understood by staff. Centre leaders convey optimism, ambition and high expectations. Effective systems and practices are in place to ensure that staff receive appropriate opportunities for professional development, guidance and support and understand the targets they are working towards. Families' views and evaluations as well as vital information from partner agencies are shared with, and considered by, the advisory board in order to inform service provision and programme planning. Although overall satisfaction rates are high parents are not strongly represented in decision making or strategic planning and evaluation processes. Self-evaluation is thorough and demonstrates a detailed understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Plans for further improvement are well considered and clearly laid out, indicating objectives to be achieved as well as who needs to do what and by when. These plans are therefore an effective tool to steer further improvement. Case studies are now being compiled and tracked over time to identify the long-term impact of work on strengthening families' resilience and ability to manage their own lives.

Creative solutions for engaging and meeting the needs of families are a strength of this centre. Work to reduce inequalities is particularly effective with regard to children's learning. One example of this is that children in the Nursery and Reception classes who have fewer opportunities for support at home are provided with additional small group intervention. This is successfully ensuring that they do not fall further behind their peers. The centre has an inclusive and welcoming approach, but opportunities for speakers of other languages to improve their English are limited

and opportunities to celebrate and promote cultural diversity are not fully exploited.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Policies and procedures ensure that staff, volunteers and visitors to the centre are subject to checks and receive training relevant to their roles. Risk assessments are routinely used to help minimise risk throughout the premises, during activities and for outings and events. All users of the centre understand they have a part to play in keeping the centre a safe place to be. Important family information is well shared and conveyed efficiently between key practitioners: one parent reported, 'Whenever you go to a meeting it's really good because even if you don't know them, they already know all about your child and the problems you are facing.'

As a result of the mostly good outcomes for families and the high and increasing participation rates, the centre offers good value for money. Resources at the centre are well used. The school shares its resources and expertise without question and this significantly increases the ability of the centre to extend its reach. The centre constantly seeks ways to increase families' participation and the use of local venues ensures this is the case. The centre works effectively with a range of partners, particularly including health and social services. As a result, the needs of families are routinely met. A wide range of partners, including from the reach schools, are actively involved in the breadth of the work of the centre through their participation on the advisory board and through increasing numbers of jointly delivered activities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

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

The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings of the Burnt Oak Primary School inspection of January 2013, particularly with regard to the findings concerning the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Burnt Oak Children's Centre on 20 and 21 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

Many thanks to all of you who spent time talking to us during the inspection. We enjoyed meeting you and your comments helped us to make our judgements about your centre.

Like you, we felt very welcome in the centre. We know from your comments how much you appreciate the wide range of courses and activities that are offered, including those that are held at other places, such as the church hall and the community centre. More than anything we understand how well supported you feel as a result of the hard work and commitment of the staff. Many of you spoke about the quality of support and the fact that the staff are not judgemental. As a result you feel you can be relaxed and honest about any difficulties you are facing. You also told us that the centre is a 'happy and fun place to be' and we could see that this was true!

Your centre is doing good work to improve the lives of families. Activities such as 'Cooking on a Budget' and swimming and 'Trendy Tots' promote healthy living and the new 'Realise Your Hidden Potential' course and proposed job club are beginning to help parents to become better prepared for job searching or for employment. We have asked the centre to ensure they continue with the good work started to support you in gaining work-related skills. Although the centre is very welcoming there are not enough opportunities for people to learn to speak or improve their English in or near the centre. Everyone we spoke to said that the courses and activities were enjoyable as well as promoting good health or learning.

We know that your children enjoy attending the centre and we can see very clearly that it supports their learning well. Children who have regularly attended centre activities make a particularly good start to school and make strong progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. We have asked the centre to track the progress of all

children who attend the centre when they move on to nurseries and schools locally, even if this is not at Burnt Oak Primary School in order to identify the difference made by the centre over time. As well as this, we have asked that the centre keeps up its good work in providing extra help to children and their families who are doing less well as they start school so that they can catch up with others.

During the inspection we held meetings with the centre staff, the local authority and other organisations that work in partnership with the centre such as health visitors. Your centre works well with other organisations and this is particularly effective when a family needs a range of support. The support you get is well planned and matched to your needs and because of this many of you reported that your lives were better. You also told us that you feel very safe when you and your children are at the centre. This is because staff prioritise the safeguarding of families and do their best to protect you and your children from harm.

Your centre is managed by a strong team and we know you value their work. We know that some of you are involved in the parents' groups and many of you provide feedback after attending sessions and courses. However, we were a little disappointed that not everyone knew about the parents' groups and even fewer knew about the advisory board and what it is for. We have asked staff to do more to ensure that all parents are aware of the roles of these groups and that, in time, more of you take on important roles in running them.

Once again, many thanks for your time and your contributions to the inspection. We wish all of you and your families the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).