

# Inspection report for Cotmandene Children & Family Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	London Borough of Bromley
<b>Inspection number</b>	420287
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 March 2013
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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.

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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 the children and family centre support officer and the senior family support and parenting practitioner of the centre and other staff, as well as a wide range of representatives from the local authority and health service professionals. Inspectors talked to parents, carers and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including evaluations of services, safeguarding arrangements, case studies, other records, development plans, together with local authority data.

## Information about the centre

Cotmandene Children & Family Centre opened to the public in August 2008 under phase two of the Sure Start programme. The centre is housed in purpose-built accommodation, and is open for 48 weeks a year from Monday to Friday. It is part of a borough network of six children's centres and works in close partnership with Blenheim Children and Family Centre in the neighbouring town of Orpington.

Following a restructure within the local authority in 2011, the centre is now part of the Bromley Children Project (BCP). This brought together family support for parents with learning opportunities for children from birth to five years. This has enabled the centre to offer wraparound support for families with children aged from pre-birth to 10 years. The children and family centre support officer is responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre. The strategic management is led by the senior family support and parenting practitioner and governance is provided by the London Borough of Bromley via the BCP.

The children's centre reach area covers the district of St Paul's Cray, and serves mainly the Cray Valley West ward, which is one of the most deprived wards in the borough. A number of families are housed temporarily in bedsits and small flats

located close to the centre before being moved elsewhere. The transient population is increasingly ethnically and socially mixed, with families from East European backgrounds who are beginning to access the centre. Most families are of White British heritage. Furthermore, this centre is also used by families out of the reach area, including the largest settled Traveller community in the United Kingdom. A below average proportion of families speaks English as an additional language.

The centre is situated in an area identified as having one of the highest levels of deprivation. All seven Super Output Areas are among the 30% most deprived in England, with three being in the 10% most disadvantaged. There is an above average proportion of lone parents and young mothers in the area. Just under half of all children under five years old are from workless households. An above average proportion of families living in the reach area receive out of work benefits.

There are 831 children under five years old registered with the centre with just under two thirds regularly accessing services. The centre meets its core purpose through a range of services, which includes health services, family support and outreach activities to promote children's and parents' all-round development and well-being. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below the levels expected for their age.

## 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

Cotmandene Children & Family Centre is very effective in meeting the needs of its community and has some outstanding features. This highly inclusive centre is much appreciated by the large majority of families from different ethnic backgrounds who regularly access services. Parents who made their views known to inspectors were universally complimentary and supportive of the work of the centre. When asked why they continue to attend activities at the centre, one parent commented, 'It is because the centre staff are best, they are the 'A' team; 10 out-of-10.' Parents said that their needs are met well by skilled staff, who go to great lengths to ensure effective communication with families. For example, centre staff make good use of translation programmes and information leaflets, translated in the main community languages, to provide vital early help and support to families when they first visit the centre.

The enthusiastic and skilled leadership team and practitioners are very focused on improving the lives of children and families. Their outstanding commitment ensures that all families have equality to succeed in a culturally harmonious and respectful environment. This leads to good, and improving, personal and educational outcomes and is reflected in the rapidly reducing achievement gap for the most vulnerable Reception-age children. A good number of adults enhance their skills and many improve their life chances through accessing training and employment opportunities.

The quality of care, guidance and support the staff provide is outstanding, particularly for families in times of crisis. Staff clearly understand the complex issues facing the local community and work tirelessly to contact families known to be hard to reach. Staff have worked sensitively with families to develop their confidence and build their self-esteem, in order to make positive changes to their lives. The centre works actively to enable all target groups to access its services. Staff utilise every opportunity to identify each family's individual need and support them with carefully tailored help and advice. For example, those who have experienced domestic violence are supported very well so that they are empowered to reshape their lives.

Staff have ensured that purposeful working arrangements with a wide range of partner agencies continue, so that services are extremely well integrated and cohesive. Health outcomes are good and improving for the majority of users. Breastfeeding rates are improving and levels of obesity among young children are falling. Arrangements to ensure the safety of children are robust. Parents, staff, and other professionals are all clear that safeguarding is given a high priority.

Leadership, management and governance are good. Self-evaluation is accurate and, as a result, the areas for development identified during the inspection came as no surprise to senior leaders. Activities for children in the early years, although popular with users, are not always fully effective in promoting the value of play to parents. Also, the analysis of data to check the full impact of the centre's actions to improve the outcomes for all target groups to help shape future provision is at an early stage of development.

The centre has good capacity to sustain improvement because of its good leadership and purposeful partnerships with key agencies who share the centre's ambitions for families living in the area. As a result, outcomes for families are good and improving.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve the collection and analysis of data so that the centre is able to demonstrate clearly the full impact of its actions on improving the outcomes for all target groups and use this information to help shape future provision.
- Ensure all group activities are well organised and planned to extend children's skills and consistently promote the benefits of learning through play to parents.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>2</b>
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Families access a wide range of services which promote their good awareness of healthy lifestyles. For instance, around 60 to 70 mothers attend antenatal appointments at the centre each week. The proportion of mothers who continue to breastfeed at six to eight weeks has increased over the past three years to 62%, which represents an 18 percentage point increase. Immunisation rates have improved steadily over the past three years and are close to the national average.

Very popular activities, such as Gymboree Music and GYM Fitness Fun, are improving the health of families. For instance, parents identify that they feel more energised and some have lost weight. Childhood obesity rates at the end of Reception Year, at 7.5%, are down by 1.6% on the previous year, and are below the national average of 9.5%. Centre-specific activities supporting the good health outcomes for children and families include Family Kitchen, oral health sessions and the successful Healthy, Exercise, Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY) project.

Parents, children and staff feel secure and safe in the centre. They demonstrate positive behaviour and are supported by highly professional and well-trained staff who are very positive role models. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to prevent issues escalating in families, and both Team Around the Child (TAC) and Social Care meetings are held at the centre. Early intervention results in the number of children on the child protection register being reduced. Children subject to a child protection plan, including those who are looked after, are closely monitored and their progress tracked so that appropriate support can be put in place. Parents demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep their children safe. In the last three years there has been a reduction in the number of emergency hospital visits for minor injuries of children under five years. First aid courses and home visits make a positive contribution in raising children's and families' awareness of risks and dangers in the home and their communities.

The centre has been very successful at narrowing the achievement gap of different groups. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has increased from 56% to 63%, which is just below the national average of 64%. In addition, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest has reduced by 7% over the last three years to 27%. These improvements help support children's future educational and personal success through the development of key skills.

Parents access a good range of opportunities that enables them to develop their self-esteem and confidence. Adult education activities at the centre equip participants with the basic skills, experiences and aptitudes needed for essential employment readiness. Unemployment in the area is very high, with just under a half of all children under five years of age living in homes dependent on workless benefits. Jobcentre Plus provides valuable advice to parents looking for employment. For example, in the last six months, 40% of those who have been referred have gained employment. This effectively supports families' economic well-being.

The results from the centre's consultation with parents in 2012 show that over 80% of respondents were very satisfied with the services provided. Parents play a valuable role in the evaluation of the centre's effectiveness and make their views known through routine feedback and post-activity evaluations and, as a result, this information gives the centre a good insight about what they want. Parents attend Parents' Forum and make a valuable contribution to the governance of the centre.

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>2</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>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

**2**

The large majority of families within the reach area regularly access activities. The centre is located in a highly accessible position within the community. Through effective working with health partners and housing groups, centre staff have gained an insightful knowledge of their community. This has enabled them to ensure services are effectively tailored to meet the needs of local families. For example, the Acorn group enables young parents to meet informally in order to promote good positive parenting and life skills. Centre staff understand well the barriers faced by families whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. Case studies and discussions with families demonstrate the successful impact of the personalised support they receive, including from the speech and language service, for parents with disabled children and those with special educational needs.

Achievements are celebrated regularly as part of the centre's commitment to raising parents' belief in themselves. For many the centre is the first place where they feel they have not been judged for their lack of qualifications or because of their background. As a group of parents commented, 'Staff are so welcoming at the centre. They take time to get to know the children and always listen to people's point of view.' Adult learning courses and referral for employment advice are helping to improve the economic well-being of families. Case studies indicate some good individual support and training, leading to employment. For example, 50 parents

have achieved a level 2 or level 3 qualification in childcare learning and development, of whom 60% have proceeded to employment as crèche workers.

Parents and grandparents greatly value the specially targeted drop-in services, such as baby massage which helps the bonding of baby, mother and father and promotes their emotional health and well-being. Such experiences help to reassure parents about their children’s development and staff offer guidance when additional help is needed. For example, parents explained to inspectors how they like being able to meet professionals in a friendly environment in which they feel comfortable to share any concerns. Stay and Play sessions are very popular with parents, who relish the opportunity to experience messy play without having a mess at home. Story telling and role-play activities make a strong contribution to improving children’s social and early language and communication skills. However, at times, the organisation and planning of activities do not involve staff enough in showing parents how different types of play can extend their child’s learning.

The centre provides excellent care, guidance and support for families. Staff work sensitively to meet the needs of families who often face a raft of complex issues, including housing problems, domestic violence and isolation. Superb multi-agency working with families in crisis, through the Freedom Programme, results in well-coordinated services with impressive levels of care and support. For example, centre staff sensitively gain parents’ confidence to speak out about domestic violence. As a result, families feel exceptionally well supported. As one parent said, ‘I love the fact the centre is here. It has helped me to learn new things and meet people in the same boat. It is good to make new friends.’ Often members of this group overcome their problems, return to work or go on to further training. Clear information on smoking, alcohol, substance misuse and sexual health are readily accessed by users.

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>1</b>

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

**2**

Leadership at all levels is effective. The governance and lines of accountability are very clear. The Parents’ Forum meets regularly, and provides good opportunities to agree key priorities and to evaluate the effectiveness of the centre. All staff are motivated and enthusiastic, and this enthusiasm is shared by partners. Key partners, parents and leaders meet regularly to review and agree action plans which include clear targets to ensure the continuing success of the centre. Evaluation of the centre’s work is a routine feature, and partners’, parents’ and children’s views are



always taken into account. Effective links have been made with the local authority data team at the local authority. However, the collection and analysis of data to check the full impact of the centre’s actions on improving the lives of families across target groups, particularly for health outcomes, are not fully developed.

Staff say they are well led and managed. There are very effective performance management systems in place to support their professional development. Engagement with children living in the area has increased significantly over the last two years. The centre engages with the large majority of children and their families and significantly with those families identified as in greatest need. The inclusion of families from the wider community and those identified as most vulnerable due to their circumstances is at the heart of the success of the centre. Effective partnerships with a wide variety of agencies play a key role in the accomplishments of the centre and the development of good quality provision across the locality.

The centre’s safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Successful multi-agency working between key agencies ensures that child protection concerns are swiftly acted upon. Effective recording systems enhance the centre’s safeguarding practice. Recruitment procedures are comprehensive, and include Criminal Records Bureau checks. All staff attend regular training to update their knowledge of child protection.

The number of disabled children and parents who access the centre has almost doubled in the past three years. High-quality provision ensures that their individual needs are well met in partnership with other agencies. As one parent commented, ‘This centre is fantastic for children with special and even complex needs.’ The promotion of equal opportunities is extremely well embedded in all aspects of the centre’s work. Discrimination of any sort is not tolerated. Children and parents are never left out so that they have excellent opportunities to develop the skills they need to succeed in their lives.

Those families identified with circumstances that make them particularly vulnerable receive timely, sensitive and very effective support. The interventions made by the centre have a significant impact on the outcomes for these families, especially in relation to their confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being. The centre is also successfully breaking down cultural barriers to access, for example with Eastern European communities. As a result of strong leadership and good provision, outcomes for families are good overall and improving. The centre makes effective use of all available resources and clearly provides good value for money.

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>1</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>2</b>

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

None.

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### **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Cotmandene Children & Family Centre on 25 and 26 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you very much for speaking with us and letting us come into your sessions. The information you gave us helped us to make our judgements. Many of you commented on how you had been helped in times of crisis; as one of you commented, 'I want a bed here...I wouldn't survive without it.' Like you, we were very impressed by the warmth of support and welcome provided by the children and family centre support officer and the senior family support and parenting practitioner and staff. Everyone works together to make sure that your individual needs are well met because partnerships with different organisations, such as health and social care services, are effective. You often spoke about the fantastic help that you receive and how the centre is a lifeline to you. The excellent care, guidance and support provided by the centre help to reduce depression and loneliness and enable you to overcome problems. Young parents benefit considerably from the high quality support of the centre, particularly through the Acorn sessions. We were especially impressed in the way that the centre supports families facing domestic violence.

The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities they offer. They change how and when they do some things because of what you say. You told us, 'The centre staff are so friendly and welcoming and always go the extra mile.' The centre's good practice ensures that you and your children are kept safe and develop important life skills and enhanced emotional well-being.

We enjoyed seeing many of the activities and looking at your comments about them. These clearly show how you gain much from the parenting courses, including first aid and home safety activities. There are good opportunities to help you get back to work. You spoke about having interesting activities to do and plenty of help with the challenges of running a home and your child's development.

You enjoy the sessions with your children, such as baby massage, which contribute much to your children's development. The centre helps you to understand how your children learn. We found out that you have learnt new things and developed new skills. Members of the Parents' Forum make an increasingly positive contribution to the life of the centre and go on to gain qualifications, further training or find work. The centre is successful at improving the health of the large majority of families.

Leadership, management and governance are good. The centre's attention to promoting equalities is outstanding, as demonstrated in the rapidly closing achievement gap. Much information is collected from you, the local authority and partners. We have asked staff to make closer checks on how much difference its actions have on improving your lives so that they can meet your needs even more successfully. We have also asked them to plan activities for your children that promote the value of play in extending your child's learning so you can support this.

Your contributions to the inspection were greatly appreciated. Thank you for your willingness to talk with us about some of your personal experiences.

Best wishes to you and your families.

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