

Inspection report for TEN2 St. James' Children Centre

Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	384150
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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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.

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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 out by additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, staff from Barnardo's, the local authority, partner agencies, parents and carers and the chair of the advisory board.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The children's centre opened in August 2009 and meets the full core offer. It has been managed by Barnardo's, a third sector organisation, since April 2012 after a successful bid awarded by the commissioning body, Essex County Council. The transfer of management processes to Barnardo's has called for changes in policies, procedures and training and this has an effect on some aspects of the work of the children's centre. For instance, the advisory board has been reformed and is still at an early stage of development. The centre is led by a centre manager supported by early years practitioners and family support workers.

The centre was relocated in September 2011 to provide a town centre presence and it shares a joint main site with Holland Valley Children's Centre. Outreach sites include the Clacton Coastal Community Centre, Salvation Army Centre, Baptist Church and Brotherhood Hall. The accommodation is a converted industrial factory unit on two floors with no outdoor play area and limited car parking.

The reach area is a narrow strip of Clacton covering three wards, Alton Park, St. James and Peter Bruff. Alton Park has some areas which are in the top 10% most deprived in England and the other two wards are in the top 30%. There is a high proportion of private rented housing and flats, social housing and private dwellings dominated by the lowest council tax bands.

There are 886 children under 5 in the reach area and most of the families are of White British heritage. There are a small number of families of Asian, African and Western and Eastern Europe origin, of whom a large proportion are Polish. Nearly a quarter of families have lone parents. There are high levels of unemployment and the proportion of households where families with children under five are in receipt of out-of-work benefits or tax credits is higher than that found nationally. The population in this seasonal seaside location is transient. On entry to early years provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are in line with those 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

This is a good children's centre with some outstanding features including the quality of care, guidance and support. It offers good provision, leading to good and improving outcomes for the high number of families registered in the local area. Leadership and management of the centre are good, with a strong staff team whose members are determined to improve the lives of families. Parents and carers were full of praise for the help and support they receive and many came forward to spontaneously testify how the centre helped to improve their lives. All agreed in a crowded room that: 'two hours spent at the centre was the best two hours of their week' and that staff were 'life savers' in times of crisis.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The inclusion of all families and children is central to the vision of the centre and is fully promoted in all aspects of the centre's work. The centre has an excellent understanding of its key target groups and, as a result, outcomes for those families who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances are at least good and for staying safe are outstanding. A key strength of the centre is the "Bridging the Engagement Gap" project. The centre carefully analyses all data about each target group and goes well beyond normal bounds to engage these hard to reach families, often with good results. The engagement of disabled children however, is still low as a result of a lack of information about their whereabouts. This causes some frustration to centre staff who are passionate in their determination to help and support these families. Overall, recent actions and

outreach provision have resulted in the centre successfully engaging with the majority of its target groups.

Safeguarding the health, safety and well-being of children and families is a high priority at the centre. There are clear policies and procedures, which staff consistently apply very well, and the routes for referral to other services are clear and understood. Effective communication with other agencies enables timely sharing of information. As a result, the safety and support of children identified as in need or those subject to child protection plans are excellent.

Partnerships with health professionals ensure that families improve their health and well-being, and health outcomes are good overall. Participation in sessions, such as 'Make and Bake', helps increase parents' and children's knowledge of how to live a healthy lifestyle.

Leadership and management are good. Members of the advisory board, with their wide range of professional expertise and community representation, provide good support and direction to the centre's work. Parents however are not fully represented on the advisory board yet. The centre provides good value for money. It uses its staff and learning resources effectively and provides good quality of provision leading to good outcomes for families. The centre accommodation is dominated downstairs by storage of toys and the office upstairs is disproportionately large. Parents requested that they would like more space for more activities and felt that the centre space could be used more effectively and inspectors agreed.

The centre demonstrates a good capacity for sustained improvement. Good outcomes are achieved because the centre constantly monitors the quality and impact of services and identifies how they can be improved. Self-evaluation and development planning are good and used well to improve the provision. The current self evaluation form however does not capture the good self evaluation practice as it is overly descriptive and in places repetitive.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve self-evaluation processes to analyse outcomes more effectively and record this accurately in documentation linked more precisely to improvement planning
- Extend the role of the Parent Voice Group to ensure parents are more systematically involved in higher level governance and decision making.
- Review the use of accommodation to ensure that space is used more effectively to deliver all relevant programmes.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre promotes health and well-being through a good range of services and partnerships with health services. Families using the centre are developing healthy lifestyles because of the good advice and support they receive. The level of attendance at health clinics is good and immunisation rates are high. The number of babies that are breastfed at six to eight weeks is low but several local initiatives are beginning to have a positive impact to improve numbers and data for the last three months indicates some significant improvement. The 'Bumps and Bubbas' programme has helped to persuade at least five teenage mothers to breastfeed for the first three months. The smoking cessation programme is excellent and two thirds of pregnant mothers have quit. This is quite exceptional and ranks seventh best nationally. The centre offers some good opportunities to develop fitness through the popular swimming voucher scheme, active play sessions and the targeted one-to-one health trainer sessions encouraging parents to reduce their own and children's weight through a healthier lifestyle.

The children's centre is a very safe and secure environment. Children who are subject to a child protection plan or in need of additional support from social care receive intensive individual support and, as a result, their progress is often outstanding. There are no families involved with common assessment framework processes currently. Highly specialist support ensures that those families where domestic violence is prevalent make some exceptional improvements. Families develop an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and reduce risk. The centre's successful courses, including first aid, and parents' good use of the array of safety items in home safety packs result in them improving their confidence and parenting skills.

Outcomes for enjoying and achieving are good. The centre has good arrangements for transition for two-year olds to both private and school nurseries. The centre makes a particularly good contribution to children's personal, social and emotional development. Parents were keen to confirm how independent and confident their children had become as a result of the activities they attend. Local schools say that parents' engagement in their children's learning is strong as a result of the encouragement they receive from centre staff. The proportion of children who achieve 78 points or more by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is higher than that seen nationally. These scores are well above the local authority average and the centre is helping to narrow the achievement gap between the different groups of children, and especially for those of lower ability.

Children behave well at the centre and staff are excellent role models for parents' attitudes and behaviour. Those parents who find their children's behaviour difficult benefit from individual advice and the 'Incredible Years' programme which helps to foster better relationships with their children. The centre routinely listens to and uses the feedback of families to shape and develop its services. Parents and children make a positive contribution to the development and social life of the centre through volunteering and taking an active role in the Parent's Voice Group. However, parents' ability to participate in the strategic decisions of the centre through their membership of the advisory group is underdeveloped.

Through a wide range of play and development opportunities, parents and carers are learning how to support their children's learning and children develop good skills for the future. Parents and children treat each other with respect.

The majority of parents benefit from well-planned learning, including parenting programmes, first aid, literacy, numeracy and computer courses. As a result, their personal development is good. Case studies demonstrate families are improving their economic well-being by gaining qualifications or progressing to further training, education or employment. For example, one parent stated: 'I have passed my Childcare level 1 and I am working towards my level 2,'. Another parent wrote to the inspectors confirming that she had got the job of her dreams at a local nursery and how pleased she was about this.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	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	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The provision of services and activities is good overall. The centre's clear knowledge and understanding of the community it serves enables training, courses and progression routes to be carefully planned based on the assessment of individual needs. The quality and range of services offered are good and targeted families who are in greatest need have good access to services both in the centre and in the outreach centres. Outreach services are effectively conducted through home visits and targeted programmes are held at convenient locations in the town centre. For instance the 'Mini-Stars' and 'Mini-Sparkles' programmes that are held at the Clacton Coastal Community Centre. The building is adequately equipped to provide activities for families including adult learning courses and a crèche for children but the ground floor is dominated by the large toy library. The sensory room is well used as a calming environment for family counselling. Registration rates for the two key focus groups of lone parents and workless households are high and well over half of these families use the centre regularly. Participation levels of priority vulnerable groups

such as families with domestic abuse issues are also good.

The centre promotes learning effectively for children and adults. Staff use information about children's starting points to plan their learning and measure their progress. Parents and carers are encouraged to support their children through enjoyable activities such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Baby Massage'. Adults' and children's successes are celebrated well through publications, presentation events and displays of work. There is clear and demonstrable impact from the effective, targeted provision for two-year-old children.

Strong partnership working results in excellent care, support and guidance for families. Family support workers are successful in working with families, and parents particularly value home visits and individually tailored support. Staff assess needs appropriately, provide ongoing support and refer families to other services. This highly effective approach is demonstrated by the rapidly improving outcomes for vulnerable families. Centre staff are sensitive to the needs of families and help them especially in times of crisis. The 'Coffee Pots' drop-in, 'Liberty' programme and an excellent 'Carousel' range of support programmes is particularly impressive for families where domestic abuse is an issue. The caring and welcoming environment usually means that once families get over their initial unease of using the centre, they go on to engage in many of its different services and reap the benefits.

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

The centre manager demonstrates a clear vision and relentless passion of inclusion and commitment to the success of the centre. Governance, leadership and management are good and lead to good outcomes for children and parents. Accountability arrangements are clear and understood. High expectations and ambitions are communicated to staff, and drive forward and improve services for families. The centre seeks and welcomes the views of all families and uses them to develop the provision but these could go further.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The inclusion of all families and children is promoted in all aspects of the centre's provision, to ensure that their diverse needs are supported and barriers to access are removed. Good individual support is provided for disabled children, which helps their progress. Engagement of disabled groups is low as the centre does not know who they are or where the majority live. However, strategic level discussions are ongoing to draw up local

protocols for sharing this information. The centre is effective in engaging with the majority of its key target groups, particularly workless families and young parents. The centre has put in place a support group for Polish families and some families have started using the centre more often especially the toy library.

Professionals from a range of agencies make an effective commitment to partnership working and to improving the life chances of children and families. Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. The centre is very effective in ensuring children and families stay safe through close attention to child protection and robust vetting and recruitment procedures. The safeguarding of children is a top priority in the centre and the centre consults well with parents and partners to make sure safeguarding is a model of best practice. For example the working partnership with the local women's refuge has helped the centre to specialise in helping and supporting families where there is domestic abuse.

Good outcomes are achieved because the centre constantly monitors the quality and impact of services and identifies how they can be improved. The 'Bridging the Engagement Gap' is a particular strength used for targeting services to the hardest to reach families. Most aspects of self-evaluation are good but the self-evaluation form is overly descriptive and does not contain sufficient evaluative judgements and link these to improvement adequately.

The good resources at the busy centre are managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, leading to good outcomes. Families using the centre state that provision and support are good and make a strong contribution to their well-being. As a result, services of the centre are well used and engage the majority of families in target groups. The centre, therefore, provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

<p>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</p>	<p>2</p>
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The inspection took account of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores of three local schools when judging aspects of children's achievement.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the TEN2 St. James' Children Centre on 20–21 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you very much for talking to us and letting us come into your sessions. The information you gave and the stories you shared with us helped us to make our judgements. Many of you talked about how the centre has helped you and your children. You told us how the children's centre has supported you to improve your lives and how you now have more confidence. It was clear that you are proud of your achievements. You told us how it has become easier to ask for help and support because of the friendly welcome and the relationships that you develop with centre staff. You also told us about the friends you have met and the things you have learnt because of your involvement in the centre's activities.

It is clear that you feel welcome at the children's centre. We found out that many of you have learnt new things and developed new skills, and many of you gain qualifications, go on to further training or find work. Some of you told us how the involvement with the centre is improving your ability to keep your children safe. We found that staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and that they are well trained.

You enjoy the sessions with your children such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Bumps and Bubbas'. We found that children benefit from accessing services at the centre and make good progress from their starting points. The centre works well with the adult education service to give you access to courses to help improve your own education and future employment opportunities. The centre is successful at engaging with the majority of local families and has begun to find ways to increase the number using the centre, especially Polish families. Your children behave well and you learn more about how to stay healthy. We found that health outcomes are good overall. The level of attendance at health clinics is good and immunisation rates are high and smoking cessation for pregnant mothers is particularly successful. The centre is actively encouraging breastfeeding and has been more successful recently in improving sustained breastfeeding for the first eight weeks of babies' lives.

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. Some of you are involved in making decisions about your centre through being a member of the Parent Voice Group but we think this could go further by more representation on the advisory board. You told us that you were concerned about the accommodation which is an industrial unit and is far from ideal. You asked for a review of how space is used in the building and inspectors agree and think this will be useful to make sure that all the rooms are used well.

We found that all the staff are keen to promote equality and diversity. Many of the families with the greatest needs are enjoying sessions to help them and their children. Families treat each other with respect. The centre works well for everyone in the community, irrespective of their background or disability. Information about disabled children is an issue when there has been no formal agreement on how partner agencies can to share information more effectively. The centre has been continually improving and knows what it needs to do to improve further.

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