

# Little Starz Children's Centre

118 Bentons Lane, London, SE27 9UD

<b>Inspection date</b>		12–13 June 2013	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	Access to services by young children and families	Requires improvement	3
	The quality of practice and services	Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The number of families taking part regularly in centre activities is rising very slowly and, although the majority are from the most disadvantaged communities, they are not yet the majority of families from the area. The centre's staffing capacity to reach out to involve more families has been dented during periods of time in which there has been no strategic manager or qualified teacher in place following the local authority's reorganisation of children's centre groups in 2012.
- The centre evaluates its activities, taking into account the views of parents and partner organisations, which helps the outreach coordinator to assess what activities to plan for the future. However, managers do not use all the information available to them in an effective way to keep track of the how well groups of children and their families are doing to help make the future plans more precise.
- The local authority and children's centre are making some progress to support the development and improve the quality of linked early years provision in the area. Although work to generate more places is underway, the forecast remains that there will be too few high-quality places for two-year-old children in the area and the centre is searching in surrounding areas to meet families' needs.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Families coming into contact with the centre are safeguarded very well. Staff effectively focus their efforts on working with families who are in urgent need and give the highest priority to getting services in place for children and families who are suffering or at risk of harm.
- Services that are open to all in the area are well planned to meet families' needs and interests so that families' health, well-being and personal development improve when they attend regularly. *Stay and Play* and *Chattertime* sessions, are well attended and provide an effective route for families to contact children's centre staff to get information, advice and access to services.
- The centre and its partners work closely to help some of the most vulnerable families such as young parents and those at risk of domestic violence. Volunteers and adult learners are well supported to take their first steps towards gaining the skills and they want to go into or back to work.

### Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the outreach coordinator, senior managers and staff from the centre and partner-children's centres, a trustee, the Chair of the advisory board, a group of parents and children. They also met with officers from the local authority and representatives from partner organisations in health, education, children's social care services and adult education. They looked at the centre's self-evaluation, action planning, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation. Visits to activities were undertaken jointly with the centre's senior managers, who also attended all team meetings. The inspectors observed the routines of the day in the main centre premises, which included the day nursery areas and visited activities held at other venues in the area.

### Inspection team

Christine Davies	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Marian Pearson	Her Majesty's Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre/group

The centre opened in 2005 as a Phase 1 stand-alone centre. It is managed by Little Starz Children's Services Limited, a not-for-profit enterprise, for the London Borough of Lambeth. Following the local authority's review of children's centre services in 2012, the centre works in partnership with Kingswood Primary School Children's Centre to meet its core purpose. A joint advisory board serves both centres. The outreach worker coordinates services in the partnership area and in an adjoining children's centre group area. At the time of inspection, the joint strategic manager post was vacant. Senior managers from Little Starz Day Nursery Limited and senior staff from Kingswood Primary School liaised on strategic matters. A full-time joint strategic manager had been appointed and was due to start in July 2013. The centre runs the same site as Little Starz Day Nursery, which is subject to a separate inspection. Activities are held in other community venues across the partnership area and fortnightly arts and crafts session and other events for fathers and their children take place in an adjoining children's centre group area. A qualified teacher's time is shared between the two centres in the partnership.

There are 790 children under five years of age living in the centre's area, which comprises mixed social housing in low rise blocks of flats and mainly terraced housing in the Gypsy Hill ward. The area is among the 20% most deprived in the country with one quarter of the area being among the 10% most deprived. The percentage of children living in workless households rises to 40% in the most disadvantaged communities although a further proportion are workless although not counted in this as the families have no recourse to public funds. The largest ethnic heritage groups in the area are White British and White European families, followed by those of Black African heritage. Children enter early years provision with skills and abilities that are generally below the expectations for their age.

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

- Increase the centre's reach by refocusing the work of the outreach worker and other staff to be able to gather information and follow up and register new families when they contact the centre or come to the centre's attention.
- Put in place workable systems to collect accurate information by:
  - ensuring managers and staff track the progress of individuals and groups of children and adults from their starting points
  - ensuring that precise plans with clear and measurable aims and objectives for staff and partner centres to follow, in order that any gaps in achievement can be narrowed.
- Support the development and improve the quality of early years provision in the area to build up to having sufficient high-quality places available, including for two-year-olds, to meet families' needs and give children in childcare a good start in life by:
  - making plans with clear and measurable aims and objectives to use resources, including the time of the children's centre qualified teacher, within the collaborative working arrangements for the reach area
  - putting the plans into action and keeping them under review as the needs of the area change.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre knows the needs of families in the area well. It works with the local authority, health, education and voluntary sector partners to keep information up-to-date. Only a minority of families in the area attend the centre although these are often the families with the greatest needs.

- Children and families access a range of services when they are in regular contact with the centre. Attendance is high at good quality stay-and-play sessions run by the centre's own staff and English as a second language classes with a crèche places. Appointments at Citizen's Advice Bureau case support, and specialist health visitor 'sleep' clinics also have high take-up rates.
- The variety of services on offer at Little Starz alone has reduced in the last year with the reorganisation of children's centres in the local authority area. Sessional and specialist activities are offered across the partnership area with Kingswood Children's Centre and neighbouring children's-centre group areas. This makes regular attendance more difficult for a few families although the centre staff give every support to and encouragement so that young parents and fathers who are a focus for the centre take up specialised activities nearby.
- Absolute priority is given to referring families on for specialist services and giving individual support if the centre has concerns that any child or family is at risk of harm or have a Common Assessment Framework plan in place. The centre refers children for further assessment and support through the early intervention services for children with disabilities or speech therapy on as soon as developmental needs are identified.
- Well-planned stay-and-play sessions allow all families to find out more about adult training courses, health services and how to apply for school places. Sessions are held often enough for families who attend regularly to support their children's language and communication development and adults get guidance for their own parenting skills. Forecasts show that there may be a shortfall of high-quality funded early years places in the area and the centre works hard to find places and help local families to take up their free entitlement to early education.
- The centre keeps very basic records of attendance and few details of work with any other agencies. It does not keep records of children and families' progress in the activities they take up. Information is not routinely gathered about the achievements of children and families as they move on from children's centre services, to help the centre assess its longterm effectiveness .

### The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The health and well-being of families involved with the centre improves as families find out more about services to support family health. This is reflected in the slowly improving immunisation and breastfeeding rates and particular success in getting families to take up vitamin D drops. Staff provide good role models at the centre, and as a result, families build in more exercise to their weekly routines and are making positive changes to achieve a more healthy balanced diet.
- Staff form strong, positive relationships with children and families and work with local Multi-Agency Teams (MATs) families. Together they target their efforts to those who are living in the most challenging circumstances. Staff are thorough and persistent in ensuring that concerns they have about children and vulnerable parents are heard by agencies so that families receive the safeguarding and family support services that they need.
- Volunteers are very well supported and gain valuable skills in personal organisation to prepare for return to work through helping at family learning sessions. Good numbers of adult learners attend and complete courses in English as a second language, literacy and numeracy, although evaluation of parents achievements and progress is often very basic. Because of the lack of follow up discussions, not all adult learners are able to identify their next steps in learning.
- Staff act as positive role models and provide good quality care, guidance and support that help parents to overcome complex problems. Support with concerns such as financial management and finding nursery provision to take-up employment is helping to reduce mental health issues. Centre staff have been successful in building trusting relationships with parents, including fathers, so that they are confident in sharing any concerns and request help when needed.
- Strategic planning to promote confidential advice on sexual health to young parents has helped reduce the teenage conception rate to below the local authority average. The centre is working successfully with young parents, through partnership with St Michael's Fellowship voluntary agency, to build their confidence, parenting skills and ability to protect themselves and their children from domestic violence and abuse.
- Children's early language and literacy skills are supported well through storytelling, rhyme time

and opportunities for book borrowing in all family play sessions and through targeted provision, such as 'Chattertime' sessions. As parents' own understanding grows, they are becoming increasingly confident in supporting their children's educational development through 'top tips' and activity ideas, which they use to extend learning at home.

- In 2012, 63% of children living in the reach area achieved a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which although it is just below the national level, nevertheless it has improved more rapidly than in the rest of the local authority area from when the centre opened. The centre's work to promote equalities is successful, as reflected in narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest which, at 25.6%, is closing more rapidly than seen nationally.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

Requires improvement

- The advisory group has reformed under strong leadership to promote collaboration between Little Starz and Kingswood children's centres. The re-formed board draws on a range of expertise and includes parents with a much clearer role than previously. The terms of reference provide a framework for support and challenge for the centre to improve although the collaborative working is at an early stage of development to show the full impact of recent actions??
- Parents' views are gathered informally, through questionnaires and at coffee mornings to help the centre design the content of some group activities and decide on their times and locations. Although families' needs in the area are well known and these are integral to planning the services that are commissioned, parents views are not yet highly influential in commissioning, governance and service design. . Parents satisfaction levels are high as the vast majority are very pleased with services.
- The leadership team are highly motivated and work with children's and their families' needs and interests at heart. Since August 2012 there have been gaps in the strategic management of the centre. The impact of this has been that staff in other roles have covered essential management responsibilities and the range of activities offered directly by centre workers has had to be reduced in order to concentrate on essential priority services.
- Leaders and managers know the needs of the area well because they make good use of the information supplied by the local authority. They keep records of activities and evaluate them. They know the centre's strengths and where improvement is required. However, the centre does not collect and analyse a wide range of information to show the full effect that services have on improving the lives of families or which services have been of most use to different groups that they most want to help in the community.
- The local authority supports and challenges the centre through regular visits and analysis of the centre's performance data. The expectations for the centre are high and are set out clearly as aims and objectives. However, the local authority provides few phased and measurable objectives on which the centre can build a more precise business plan.
- Safeguarding is uppermost in the minds of all staff, managers and volunteers, throughout their work. The centre works closely with health and social care professionals to focus on reducing the risk of harm to children. The centre makes a good contribution to work with children locally, including those subject to a child protection plan, in foster care or identified as in need. Work including the centre's one-to-one outreach work is closely planned in the MATs to improve families' safety and well-being, including those whose problems have been assessed using the Common Assessment Framework.
- Resources, including management, staff and volunteer time, have been used flexibly since the centre entered into collaboration. Staff have been acutely aware of priorities and an appropriate balance between tailored and universal services has been achieved. Managers and staff have worked effectively to maintain the momentum of the centre to meet the area's needs.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

<b>Unique reference number</b>	21703
<b>Local authority</b>	London Borough of Lambeth
<b>Inspection number</b>	423438
<b>Managed by</b>	Little Starz Children's Services Ltd on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	790
<b>Centre contacts</b>	Joanne Lynott/ Herbie Taylor
<b>Centre manager – vacant</b>	
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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