

Deanwood Children's Centre

Long Catlis Road, Rainham, Kent, ME8 9TX

Inspection date 25–26 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- The number of families from most target groups who are using this centre or being signposted to neighbouring centres is increasing at a rapid rate. A large majority now make use of children's centres' services, with the highest percentage coming from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the reach area.
- Staff are adept at recognising and reacting to specific needs, such as those of grandparents who act as carers and children and parents with disabilities. A wide programme of activities is provided, with a good balance of those open to all and those aimed at supporting families who need it most, such as the 'Grow Together' sessions. Parents are very appreciative of this, as shown by comments such as: 'It really is a remarkable place'.
- Very effective links with health services and other partners mean that most families in the reach area are well known. Improving childhood obesity levels, very high immunisation rates and an increasing number of mothers who continue breastfeeding reflect the centre's effective targeted work and support.
- Children, especially those who are identified as disadvantaged two-year-olds and those who need additional support following their two-and-a-half-year review, make good progress as a result of the staff's expertise, very effective planning and strong links with partners such as local schools and childcare providers.
- The local authority is very supportive. It has been proactive in ensuring that significant staff changes have led to positive outcomes for local families, especially for those who need it most. The data that the local authority produces are a highly effective tool to monitor who is using the centre and to set challenging targets that are very specific and measurable.

It is not yet outstanding because:

- The opportunities for parents to extend their workplace and other skills are not wide enough. Where support is given, the outcomes are not consistently followed up.
- The list of those who sit on the advisory board is long but attendance is sporadic. At present, although the core group who do attend are supportive, they are not yet familiar enough with the available data to challenge the centre effectively especially in relation to its work with families who need help most. Not enough parents attend meetings.

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 Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and other staff, officers from the local authority, representatives from the health services, the supervisor from an early years setting in the reach area and the headteacher of a local school. They met parents and representatives of the governing body and advisory board. The inspectors visited several activities, including one jointly with the centre coordinator who, along with the centre manager and local authority adviser, also attended all team meetings. They looked at the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding policies and procedures and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Graham Saltmarsh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The centre opened in March 2010 as a phase three stand alone centre. It delivers or supports access to a range of services to meet its core purpose. Midwifery and other health services are delivered directly from the centre. The building is open 50 weeks of the year, Monday to Friday from 8.15am. It closes at 4.15pm Monday to Thursday and 3.45pm on Fridays. Services are also delivered in the community from Hempstead Youth Centre and Parkwood Health Centre. The centre is located in Deanwood Primary School, whose governing body manages it on behalf of the local authority; the headteacher is the centre manager. The school is subject to a separate inspection. There have been significant staff changes in the children's centre; the coordinator is seconded from the Medway Early Years Team and maternity leave cover for the community liaison officer's post is being provided by two play workers.

There are 734 children under five years of age in the centre's reach area. Children enter early years provision generally at levels expected for their age. The centre serves nine super output areas of varying need, although none rank in the 30% most deprived. Most families are owner-occupiers but a number rent their houses from the local authority. The unemployment rate locally is low and declining; 18% of families are eligible for the childcare element of working tax credits. Most families are of White British heritage, 6% are from minority ethnic groups. The centre has identified its main target groups as fathers, children from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, grandparents who act as carers, and disadvantaged two-year-olds.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the opportunities for learning and training, especially for parents from the target groups, to improve their education and employment skills and track the impact of the centre's work by:
 - carrying out regular checks on individual education and training needs
 - establishing a clear, consistent system to check how well adults progress as a result of accessing centre services or those provided by partners.
- Strengthen the level of challenge made in decision-making by the advisory board by:
 - ensuring regular attendance and participation from a core group of representative members
 - increasing the number of parents who serve on it
 - increasing members' understanding of the relevant data required to challenge the centre and hold it to account.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Well-established links with health partners mean that the centre is informed by hospitals of new births in its area. This, plus several sessions each week run from the centre by health professionals such as midwives, baby weighing opportunities and a very well-attended breastfeeding support group, results in a large majority of families accessing early childhood services, which ensures they have a healthy start.
- The local authority has a very effective system to monitor attendance. This allows staff to check on how many are attending from outside the reach area and, where local families access services at neighbouring centres, to ensure their needs are met. Consequently staff know which target groups are relatively under-represented, such as fathers, and have plans well in hand to further to meet their needs.
- Outreach work in areas that have been identified as requiring more targeted support such as where childhood obesity is relatively high, enables families to access groups such as 'Trendy Totz' that they may not otherwise have done.
- The centre works very effectively to support five early years settings in the local area. Identifying

disadvantaged two-year-olds as a target group has led to the large majority of those children taking up free places and being supported further by a specific music and movement session held in the centre. The vast majority of children aged three and four take up their free entitlement to early education.

- Joint developmental reviews with health services of children aged two and a half have a very high take-up rate. The centre then provides a 12-week 'Grow Together' session for families where specific needs are addressed by specialists and children's progress is monitored carefully and reassessed.
- The centre is aware that, while increasing, the number of lone parents and fathers who access their services is relatively low compared to other target groups such as disabled adults and children, grandparents and BME families. A recent successful Saturday session, held in conjunction with the co-located school to help families with transition, introduced a further 14 fathers to the centre's services.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- High quality sessions such as 'Sensory Sensations' led by experienced staff and a good balance between universal and targeted services that have a positive impact on children's progress and their readiness for school. This is especially so for those identified as having some developmental delay and for two-year-olds who receive free early education. The school's tracking shows that in most areas, children who accessed the centre make better progress than the rest.
- Children are helped to get off to a good start in life. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile results for the reach area show an improving picture to levels above those seen nationally and a very significant narrowing of the achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest.
- Where courses are provided for adults, such as 'Understanding Your Child', the large majority complete them and parents say that they have been helped significantly in managing their children's behaviour, supporting their early learning and keeping them safe. Parents speak of the 'invaluable parenting course' and say that staff's good role-modelling and advice has led to their children 'coming on in leaps and bounds'.
- Families speak very positively about how the 'Feeding Friends' peer supporters have enabled them to continue breastfeeding. Children are said to be eating much more healthily as a result of the centre's work such as making fruit kebabs. Physical exercise is promoted regularly through groups such as 'Toddler Rollabout' and Zumba for adults.
- The centre provides high levels of care, guidance and support, with new staff quickly establishing families' trust and being instrumental in encouraging many more families to attend, especially those who need help the most. This includes vulnerable families where children are subject to child protection plans or are assessed under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Families know they can get support in times of crisis such as if there is an incident of domestic abuse.
- The parents' forum is well attended and its views are taken on board and used to develop services that meet families' needs. Parents are encouraged to support each other through volunteering and by being breastfeeding peer supporters. The social networks that have been established have enabled new mothers and grandparents at risk of feeling isolated to be very much a part of the community.
- The development of adult learning, education and skills is rightly seen as a priority. However, the centre has not established what parents' precise needs are. A minority of adults, including those from target groups, have accessed a range of courses such as first aid to help them keep their children safe, but the centre is aware that more now need to do so.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The majority of staff are either on long-term secondment or working on a temporary basis. Nevertheless, there is a great sense of camaraderie and a shared commitment to improve the lives of local families. Staff training and supervision, and drawing on relevant expertise especially for

early childhood development, are having a positive impact on families who use the centre.

- The local authority has provided hands-on highly effective support during a prolonged period of staff change. This, plus setting challenging targets and providing an excellent set of data to enable the centre to measure its impact, highlight where significant improvements have been made and lead to a clear understanding of areas for development.
- The chairs of the governing body and the advisory board are clear about their separate areas of responsibility. However, the advisory board members' attendance is too sporadic to enable them to have an in-depth understanding of the data and how to best use the information provided to challenge the centre.
- Parents and children are consulted very frequently and effectively so that most families contribute to decision-making at an informal level. There is a 100% user satisfaction with centre services and how well they meet families' needs, whatever age they are. This is reflected by the comment: 'This is a fantastic place. There are three generations of my family here right now.' Putting families' views more formally, for example through representation on the advisory board, is not embedded well enough.
- Information sharing and partnerships with other agencies are good and lead to the centre being fully involved in the CAF process and able to provide tailored support for families. Early identification of any needs mean that families, including the most vulnerable, are well protected. Safeguarding families permeates the work of the centre and is backed up by well-trained staff and comprehensive policies and procedures.
- Staff and other resources are used to good effect to ensure that families receive high quality services. The sensory room is a much-valued and well-used resource that ensures a high number of children with additional needs attend the centre and good links are established with other schools and Portage.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
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.

Unique reference number	20930
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	421455
Managed by	The governing body of Deanwood Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	734
Centre manager	David Bignell
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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