

Miers Court Children's Centre

Silverspot Close, Rainham, Kent, ME8 8JR

Inspection date 9–10 July 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 centre has been very successful in ensuring that most of the families identified in the local area as needing most support have increased their usage of the services provided directly by this centre, other local children's centres or partners. For example, 91% of children from the relatively most disadvantaged area access centre services.
- Services that are open to all and those that are tailored for more vulnerable families are well balanced and effective. The foster carers' support group, the Learning about Learning sessions for children at risk of slipping behind at school, and the targeted support for two-year-olds entitled to free early education have had a significant impact on those families.
- Well-established partnerships with health services, all the local pre-schools, the two primary schools and many other community and voluntary groups in the local area mean that there is effective 'joined-up' support for local families who need it most.
- There are excellent levels of care, guidance and support, especially for the most vulnerable families or where one-to-one tailored help is needed. Families say the 'incredibly helpful and supportive' staff have gained their trust to a great degree. The staff know families well and successfully inspire them to build their confidence as parents, understand how to lead healthy lives and aspire to extend and make the most of their skills.
- The local authority provides high levels of support at a practical level, such as training for advisory board and governing body members and in-depth guidance to the headteacher who is new to children's centre management. Consequently, leaders and managers at all levels are adept at using the excellent information provided to monitor the centre's performance against the challenging targets set and to hold the centre to account. As a result, the centre is improving strongly.

It is not outstanding because:

- The number of lone parents and fathers who use the centre, whilst increasing, is relatively low compared to other groups that the centre is working with.
- The centre is not yet measuring the progress of enough individual children when they attend activities and subsequently move on to school. There is no well-established method to see what the longer-term impact is of the training and employability skills they help adults to obtain to enable fine tuning of services.

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 coordinator and other staff, officers from the local authority, representatives from the health services, pre-schools and several other key partners. They met parents and representatives of the governing body and advisory board. The inspectors visited several activities, including one jointly with the qualified teacher. The centre manager, coordinator and local authority adviser attended all team meetings. Inspectors 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

Linda Kaye

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The centre opened in July 2010 as a phase three standalone 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 Thursday from 8.30am until 4.30pm, and from 8.30am. until 4.00pm on Friday, with a monthly dads', male carers' and working parents' Saturday session. The centre is located in Miers Court Primary School (URN 118545) 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 are 617 children under five years of age in the centre's reach area. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision generally at levels expected for their age. The centre serves eight Super Output Areas (SOAs) of varying need, although none rank in the 30% most deprived. The centre is located within a large residential estate where most families are owner occupiers. Only 7.3% of children live in households dependent on workless benefits and 17% of families are eligible for the childcare element of working tax credits. Most families are of White British heritage, with 3.2% of children from other ethnic groups. The centre has identified its main target groups as fathers, children from Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, grandparents and disadvantaged two-year olds.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of lone parents and fathers, so that the large majority are registered and engage with the centre by exploring what services would best meet their needs.
- Measure the progress of children who regularly access the centre and the longer term impact on adults who have used the centre or been signposted elsewhere so that services can be even more finely tuned by:
 - developing a method to track the progress of children who come frequently to the centre
 - working with the two local schools to create a consistent method to measure the longer term impact of the centre's work on a wider number of children
 - establishing a clear, consistent system to monitor how well adults progress as a result of contact with the centre or other agencies.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Effective information-sharing agreements and strong relationships with local schools and early years settings mean that the centre has been able to identify its key target groups effectively and ensure that most young children and expectant mothers are known. All eligible disadvantaged two-year olds have been supported by the centre and 98% of three- and four-year-olds take up free entitlement to early education.
- The centre has been proactive in ensuring that the large majority of most of its identified key groups are accessing services; this is especially so for BME groups, disadvantaged two-year-olds and grandparents. The number of fathers who are accessing services has grown substantially as a result of the monthly Saturday session. However, the numbers from this group are still relatively low, as they are for lone parents.
- The system to monitor attendance by target group or SOA is highly effective. The close proximity of two other children's centres, with which Miers Court works very closely, means that families are signposted to and from those centres for specialist services such as breastfeeding support at Deanwood or structured parenting courses at Riverside. Families', and especially those who may be more vulnerable, usage of those services is closely monitored to ensure their specific needs are met effectively.
- Outreach work at the local health clinic has been successful in increasing the number of families

who access the centre, as has the delivery of midwifery, health visitor services and the opportunity to self-weigh babies from the centre itself. An effective joint approach to supporting disadvantaged two-year-olds, undertaken with the adjacent private pre-school and including '2s in Training' sessions for parents, has led to 100% take up of places there.

- Work with Parkwood Primary School to narrow the attainment gap for children about to start school, through running the Learning about Learning group, has been effective in engaging this group of parents identified as needing support.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The quality, range and relevance of services provided for families is good, especially because of working closely with neighbouring centres and other partners to avoid duplication and give the widest choice of activities. Families thoroughly enjoy, and feel they benefit from, the high quality sessions, such as Wriggle and Roll and baby massage, led by experienced staff.
- The centre has been especially effective in ensuring target children are ready for school. Close links with the co-located school and private pre-school have been key to this. The sessions for parents of two-year-olds eligible for free early education meant that those children settled quickly and made good progress. Children who entered the Reception class at Miers Court School, who had accessed the children's centre, did so with higher on-entry scores than other children.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage profile results for the reach area show a significant improvement over the past two years and the attainment gap between the lowest 20% is well below the national figure. Where children's progress is reviewed, the children are shown to do well as a result of contact with the centre; but tracking is not done across all the local schools or pre-school settings.
- Immunisation rates, at 93.3%, are high. Breastfeeding rates, although relatively low, are improving significantly. The centre has been very responsive to childhood obesity levels which remain at slightly above national levels by increasing activities that have an active, healthy eating element such as Sticky Fingers. This proportion has increased from 53% of total services in 2011 to 82.3% in 2013; parents feel they are very well supported in this regard.
- 'They helped me to see things in a positive light and get the best for me and my daughter.' This comment sums up how parents have complete trust and confidence in staff. High levels of care, guidance and support, especially where there are complex needs such as mental health concerns or the family is vulnerable, are provided. An on-site counselling service delivers very valuable one-to-one support, reinforced by group work undertaken by centre staff. Parents' own testimonies and well-recorded case files reflect this good work.
- Parents play an active and important role in the centre through volunteering, by giving their views at parents' forum meetings and representing families on the advisory board and governing body. They not only are instrumental in shaping services but the impact on their own confidence and self-esteem is significant.
- A large majority of adults have accessed adult learning or skills based courses. Of the families, 72% from BME groups and 67% from the relatively most disadvantaged area have participated. A rolling programme of paediatric first aid and structured parenting programmes have meant that a large majority of families, including those from target groups, have improved their parenting skills and understanding of how to keep children safe. Several parents have improved their lives considerably by gaining employment through training facilitated by the centre, although the long-term benefits are not followed up consistently.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- There is a tangible sense of team work at all levels within the centre. The small staff team is experienced and they support each other very well; the day-to-day management by the centre coordinator is highly effective. The local authority has provided excellent hands-on support for the new headteacher in her role as centre manager, as well as to the advisory board and governing body.

- Challenging targets are set, monitored and reviewed by the local authority, governors and the advisory board, all of whom have an excellent understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. This is because the information provided for the centre is highly pertinent to its work, especially in monitoring the effectiveness and access in relation to target groups.
- Information sharing and partnerships with other agencies are negotiated at a strategic level by the local authority and at local level by the centre. They are very effective in providing a raft of multi-agency support for the most vulnerable families through, for example, the centre's full involvement in the Common Assessment Framework process. Safeguarding families is at the heart of all the centre's work, as shown by the robust, comprehensive policies and procedures, including e-safety advice for parents. As a result, children who are subject to child protection plans, those who are deemed to be children in need and looked after children are very well supported.
- The new sensory garden has added to the high quality resources and is proving effective in encouraging children to be active and learn outdoors. Staff are the centre's most valuable resource because they are well trained, well managed and supported very effectively to enable them to engage and support the families who need help the most.
- Parents and children are consulted on a regular basis. For example, at the end of the Wriggle and Roll activity, every child was asked what they enjoyed doing best (through their parent if too young) and noted so it could be incorporated into planning for future sessions. Parents were asked what they thought could be improved and what they could continue doing with their children at home.
- Families are unanimous in their support for the centre and for what they and their children gain from coming. This is reflected in comments such as, 'I really recommend this centre, they are quick off the mark and they help you with everything,' and in parents' desire to support the centre and give something back by volunteering or serving on the various management boards.

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.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	22006
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	421478
Managed by	The governing body of Miers Court Primary School

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	617
Centre leader	Lisa Evans
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01634 388943
Email address	childrenscentre @mierscourt.medway.sch.uk

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