

Bligh Sure Start Children's Centre

Bligh Way, Strood, Rochester, ME2 2XJ

Inspection date 25–26 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Outstanding	1
The quality of practice and services		Outstanding	1
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is an outstanding centre.

- Firmly established at the heart of the community, the centre offers a superb range of high quality services across its reach area. All activities are carefully planned and tailored to meet the diverse needs of children and families in Strood, Cuxton and Halling. As a result, the vast majority of families in the reach area are involved with one or more of the services provided.
- The high participation rates result from exceptional partnership working with a wide range of professionals from health, social care, adult education and work-related agencies, together with first-rate work out in the community. The centre works closely with the five schools in its reach, from which it offers outreach services, and supports seven pre-schools very effectively through its well-trained link community workers.
- Outstanding leadership, management and governance have driven improvement at a rapid pace over the last three years. Centre leaders are constantly finding different ways to reach families who are most in need of support. Leaders, managers, governors and all who work at the centre are passionate about doing the very best they can for both children and adults and are relentless in their pursuit of excellence.
- Excellent systems for tracking families' continued involvement with the centre and for evaluating the impact of services over time show the huge benefits that children and adults enjoy from all the activities. Children make exceptionally good progress and are extremely well prepared for moving on to school, while adults make significant gains in their personal, social and academic development.
- The centre is particularly successful in engaging with a very large proportion of its targeted groups, especially families from the most deprived areas. For example, it has made big improvements in the number of lone parents, workless families and fathers who access services.
- Parents are full of praise for the centre and speak very highly of the quality of support and encouragement they receive. Many have become volunteers and the three parents' forums do an enormous amount to help plan and run 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 three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the head of centre, the daycare centre manager and a nursery officer, community and outreach workers, and representatives from the local authority. They also met with, or spoke to by telephone, health, education and early years partners, parents, volunteers and representatives of the governing body and advisory group.

The inspectors visited the main hub in Strood, a local primary school and venues in Cuxton and Halling.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including analysis of data, the centre's self-evaluation document and development plan, individual case studies, comments and feedback from families and partners, planning folders, the centre's monitoring information and the minutes of governing body, advisory board and parents' forum meetings.

Inspection team

Carole Skinner	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Additional Inspector
Libby Dickson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Bligh is a stand-alone, phase one centre which opened in 2005, initially serving Strood South in Medway. The centre is situated in the densely populated urban community of Strood South, which is one of the most economically disadvantaged wards in Medway with areas of significant deprivation. In 2009, the centre's geographical reach was extended to incorporate the semi-rural areas of Cuxton and Halling. The centre is governed by the Bligh Federation Governing Body on behalf of the local authority. The advisory board comprises representatives of the centre's partners, governors, staff and parents. Strood South is predominantly a White British community, although the number of parents who do not speak English as their first language is growing. Approximately 15% of children live in workless households. Children's skills and abilities on entry to early years education are broadly similar to those expected for their age.

The centre has approximately 1,360 children under five in its reach area. It is open for 50 weeks a year, 11 hours a day from Monday to Friday, with some activities on Saturday. The centre leader is the executive headteacher of the Bligh Federation, which comprises the children's centre and the federated infant and junior schools. The centre manager has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the centre. The centre has an integrated day care nursery, which was inspected separately. The centre offers health and family support services, early years provision, advice and guidance, adult training and volunteering opportunities. The community team works across a number of outreach locations, both urban and rural, where services are provided in a range of different venues. The centre has a particular focus on increasing the proportion of fathers, lone parents and families from workless households who currently participate in its services. An ongoing focus is ensuring maximum participation from families in the most disadvantaged areas.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work closely with the local authority and social care services to implement fully the innovative work already begun to identify and support families with looked-after children under the age of two at the earliest possible stage.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Outstanding

- The centre's innovative approaches to involving families have led to rapid improvement in the number who are benefiting from its services. Very thorough use of new birth data, personal invitations and highly effective partnerships with a range of professionals have all played a key part in the centre's success. Attendances have soared from 6,085 in 2010 to around 23,000 in the past year, and the centre has been very successful in engaging greater numbers of fathers, lone parents and workless families.
- Highly effective joint working with midwives and health visitors has greatly improved families' access to a range of health services that help them and their children to lead healthy lifestyles. In addition to ante-natal and post-natal support, groups such as 'Bumps to Ones' and 'Fun to Ones' offer support and guidance on routines, sleep and breastfeeding. The very popular baby massage groups help parents to form a close attachment to their baby and often lead to parents attending more groups and staying with the centre for longer.
- Local information identified a need to reduce the number of overweight children. In response, the centre has devised many enjoyable activities to help families learn how to cook healthy meals and to understand the benefits of exercise. Activities such as 'Outdoor Explorers' and 'Walkers Talkers' combine this with developing speech and language skills as well as helping them to learn more about the world around them.
- Community workers go out of their way to get to know parents and children, quickly gaining their

trust and identifying their needs. This personal contact is invaluable in helping the centre to provide services that families really need.

- The centre works closely with its many partners to create a package of support which often results in parents making exceptional progress in their own development as well as becoming more confident and skilled at supporting their children's learning.
- Exemplary systems for tracking families' engagement and identifying any who stop attending services enable centre staff to sustain very high levels of engagement, often from families who were at first reluctant to get involved.
- The centre has been very successful in meeting the needs of families in Cuxton and Halling, especially those families in rural isolation. It provides excellent support for parent-run groups such as 'Bo-Peeps' and Toy Box', providing training for parent leaders and helping to plan activities.

The quality of practice and services

Outstanding

- Services are planned meticulously to meet families' specific needs. For example, the centre manager devised a very successful five-week programme to help fathers prepare for the birth of their first baby and then to keep them involved with the centre after the baby's birth. The Saturday 'Who let the dads out?' group is also proving very popular.
- Outstanding provision at the day care nursery and in the activities run by centre staff at a variety of locations ensures that children are prepared for school really well. Records show that children have been reaching higher and higher standards at age five and age seven over the last four years, especially in speaking and using language, becoming confident and independent and developing good social skills. The gap between the lowest 20% of children and the rest has narrowed considerably.
- Children who are part of the funded pilot project for two-year-olds enter the centre with skills significantly below those expected for their age. The most recent information shows they have made exceptional progress, including those with a range of high-level needs and those subject to social care intervention.
- The centre is particularly successful at identifying specific needs at an early stage and putting a range of services in place to support children and parents. Working closely with health and social care partners, the centre takes prompt action to support families where there may be concerns about children's safety or domestic violence. As a result of this highly effective work to deal with concerns at a very early stage, the hub school currently has no children who are in need of social care intervention.
- A high proportion of parents benefit from an exceptional range of activities as part of the centre's carefully planned 'employability pathway'. This begins with confidence-building courses and leads on to accredited training and volunteering opportunities, as well as courses that prepare parents for returning to work. The result has been a marked rise in the number of parents who move on to employment.
- Centre staff are particularly skilled at recognising and nurturing parents' skills and expertise. They are highly successful in developing parents' confidence so that they use these skills to the full. Many parents testify to the centre's excellent impact on their lives and those of their children.
- Courses provided by adult education partners in the centre's training rooms are very well attended. Parents feel confident to leave their children in the crèche, where they too learn and grow in confidence. Parents enjoy a wide range of opportunities to extend their skills and knowledge, including English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) courses, with progression on to GCSE opportunities, and a Jobcentre Plus introduction to completing application forms and writing a curriculum vitae.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Outstanding

- Centre leaders, managers and governors are highly skilled and extremely knowledgeable. They are exceptionally ambitious for the centre and its families and are currently going all-out to achieve 100% contact and involvement with children and families. They set highly challenging targets for engaging with target groups and have achieved significant improvements across the board.
- The local authority provides leaders with a wide variety of very useful information about target groups, which they analyse rigorously to find out how well the centre is doing and to decide priorities for the next year. The centre is very successful at making sure all families benefit equally from its services because of the staff's dogged determination to do even better.
- In addition, the centre monitors the quality of its services very thoroughly. This often involves joint observations by senior leaders and governors or advisory board members which feed into the centre's development plan. Rigorous reviews of all services ensure that the centre's resources are used exceptionally well.
- The development plan sets very challenging targets to reduce the number of parents from all groups in the reach area who are not yet involved. Leaders, governors and the advisory board review these targets four times a year to make sure the centre is on track.
- The governing body and advisory board provide high levels of challenge while being equally supportive of the centre's drive for improvement. The centre's three parent forums are highly effective, independent organisations which make a valued contribution to reviewing services and identifying families' needs.
- All those involved with the centre take the safety of children and families very seriously. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary and ensure the safety of all centre users wherever they take part in activities. The centre provides a wide range of opportunities for parents and children to learn about safety in the home and on the roads.
- Staff are exceptionally well trained in the procedures for implementing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and excellent partnership working ensures the best possible outcomes for children. A number of case studies and case tracking of children subject to child protection plans or CAF and children identified as in need demonstrate the centre's very positive impact on families' lives. Many families 'step down' from intensive support and become able to cope on their own.
- The centre manager has initiated work with the local authority and social care services to improve the systems for notifying the centre of looked-after children under the age of two, as these systems have not been working well enough.
- There are excellent arrangements for supervising and supporting staff and checking on the impact of their work with families. Observations of activities identify strengths and areas for development and subsequently check for signs of improvement. Staff feel exceptionally well supported and benefit from a wide range of high quality training opportunities.

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	147239
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	421437
Managed by	Bligh Federation Governing Body on behalf of Medway Local Authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1360
Centre leader	Tina Gobell
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01634 336220
Email address	office@blighfed.medway.sch.uk

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