

# Spencer Children's Centre

Spencer Road, Mitcham Junction, Surrey, CR4 4JP

<b>Inspection date</b>		16–17 July 2013	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	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.

- Leaders have been proactive in identifying which families need support the most, in ensuring its services meet their needs and so increasing the numbers who register and benefit from the centre. Over 90% of children under five years old living in the local area are registered and a large majority regularly access services. Of families using the centre, 68% are from priority groups.
- There is a strong focus on children's early development and preparing them for school. Story and Rhyme Time sessions, that are open to all, are located at various community venues. Groups such as Chatterbox are very well planned and led, with a strong and effective focus on developing children's communication and language skills.
- There are excellent levels of care, guidance and support. Where vulnerable families have complex needs, the centre provides high levels of one-to-one help, enlisting a wide range of other services and early help very successfully. As a result, parents have 100% satisfaction with the centre and many say, 'Life is so much better now.'
- A good variety of support for adults to improve their parenting skills, English language skills and employability means that the large majority of those from priority groups are helped to improve the quality of their lives. Parents are eager to volunteer and to serve on the advisory board and are encouraged to aspire to extend and make the most of their skills.
- The day-to-day management of the centre is very efficient, with the limited space and staff resources being used to very good effect. The advisory board, the governing body and the local authority provide good levels of support and monitoring, measuring the centre's performance against the challenging targets set. As a result, the centre is improving strongly.

### It is not outstanding because:

- Links with the two local schools are developing well, but there are no systems in place to measure the progress of children when they move on there. This means the centre is unable to have a precise picture of where its support is needed most to help narrow the gap between the lowest achieving children and the rest.
- There is very little recent, accurate information available in relation to health outcomes in the local area. This makes it difficult for the centre to know where best to focus its work and to measure its impact in some aspects, such as childhood obesity.

### **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 head of centre, centre manager and other staff, officers from the local authority, representatives from the health services, local 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 centre manager. The head of centre and centre manager attended all inspection 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
Anthony Mundy	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The centre opened in May 2005, as a phase one 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 8.00am until 6.00pm, with a monthly Saturday session for fathers and male carers. Services are also delivered in four other venues in the community. The centre is located in the grounds of Spencer Nursery School (URN 102955) whose governing body manages it on behalf of the local authority; the headteacher is the head of centre. The school and its extended daycare provision are subject to separate inspections.

There are 613 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area. Children enter early years provision generally at levels expected for their age. The centre serves seven super output areas (SOAs) of varying need, with two ranked in the 30% most deprived. The centre is located in a residential estate where there is 19% social housing. Some areas have undergone major redevelopment leading to a transient population. Approximately 32.7% of children live in households dependent on workless benefits; 18% of families are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Families are predominantly of White British heritage, with the next largest group being Other White families, including Eastern European followed by Black African and Asian families. The centre has identified its priority groups as teenage parents, workless families with young children, lone parents and disabled children.

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

- In conjunction with the two schools located in the reach area, develop a method to track children's progress in the longer term to enable the fine-tuning of services to support schools in narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest.
- Work with the local authority and health services to ensure the centre has accurate and recent information, particularly in relation to health outcomes in the reach area, to enable a more concise measurement of the centre's impact and to ensure services are focused appropriately.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families Good

- Staff have a very clear understanding of the needs of families in the local area, especially the most vulnerable. Story and Rhyme Time sessions held in Wandle Community Centre, schools and the function room of a local pub have increased the number of families who benefit from services, especially teenage parents and lone parents.
- The Well Baby Clinic and the integral nature of the nursery school and daycare ensure that most young children and expectant mothers are known. There is 100% take up of free early education by three- and four-year-olds, and the places offered to disadvantaged two-year-olds in the daycare are full.
- The centre monitors the attendance of priority groups at all activities and they are the large majority of those who attend groups open to all families. There has been particular success in engaging the expanding range of different ethnic groups with 68% of Black and minority ethnic families using centre services, a higher proportion than is found in the local community.
- The majority of disabled children and parents in the local area access a range of services at this centre, or are signposted to neighbouring centres where they benefit from resources and groups specific to their needs.
- The number of contacts from workless families is increasing and is well on the way to meet the centre's target of 52%. However, this is the least represented of the centre's identified groups. High levels of unemployment locally and a transient population make this a particularly hard to reach group; the centre is adapting its services successfully and encouraging more to attend.

**The quality of practice and services**

Good

- The quality, range and relevance of services are good and improve families' well-being. Regular weekly groups held at the centre and in the community are interspersed with workshops led by the family support worker, such as on temper tantrums and weaning. Monthly Men Behaving Dadly Saturday sessions provide opportunities for an increasing number of fathers and male carers to benefit from centre services.
- The centre's main focus is to ensure children's early learning and school readiness are well supported; 77% of the centre's universal and targeted services link to this, coupled with meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families. The high quality of Let's Play and Chatterbox sessions with well-planned activities develop the full range of children's skills and seek to reduce any inequalities. They are much enjoyed by all.
- Children's progress is monitored at the centre through Learning Stories, which they take with them when they move on to the nursery school. The small number whose progress is tracked at the school show they make good progress; parents are fulsome in their praise for how well children are prepared for school with comments such as, 'Her development has been amazing thanks to this place.'
- The local Early Years Foundation Stage profile results show a significant improvement over two years. In 2012, at 70.6%, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development was well above that seen nationally. However, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest widened and is now above the national figure. The centre is working hard to develop even stronger ties with local schools to measure children's progress over time and to identify where specific support is required to enable this gap to narrow.
- Breastfeeding rates are improving significantly but this is the only recent, local health information available. Nevertheless, the centre is successful in helping families understand how to lead healthy and safe lives. Parents feel that the Carrot Club (healthy eating), first aid and Safe and Sound sessions all contribute very effectively to helping them achieve this.
- Parents have complete trust and confidence in staff; the most vulnerable families, including young, lone and workless parents, have been supported very successfully, sometimes over a number of years. Partnership work with the family support worker, health services and the early intervention and prevention service ensures that tailored and wide-ranging support has led to some families' lives being turned around hugely. Detailed case notes and parents' testimonies all verify this excellent work; as one parent commented, 'Over the years, I would have been lost without it.'
- A large majority of adults have accessed adult learning or skills-based courses. The local authority's employability adviser's input and regular curriculum vitae and debt workshops have led to several families improving their circumstances by returning to work, improving their English or setting up their own business. The centre's Adults' Achievement board is an attractive and effective way to celebrate some of those milestones.
- Parents are very eager to volunteer. They not only make a valuable contribution to the centre but also greatly enhance their own self-esteem. Parents' forum meetings and wide parental representation on the advisory board ensure parents from all key groups are instrumental in shaping services.

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

Good

- Day-to-day management by the head of centre and centre manager is very effective; the small staff team is experienced, well motivated and mutually supportive. Members of the governing body and advisory board are clear about their different roles and are knowledgeable about the centre. They hold the centre to account through their effective governance.
- Challenging targets are set in the development plan and are reviewed quarterly to ensure the centre is on track to meet them. The local authority provides regular and effective support, although it is aware that there is a need to provide a full set of information so the centre can measure the impact of its work, especially in relation to health outcomes.

- Where vulnerable families are identified and subsequently supported by the centre, there is full involvement by staff from other professional organisations, such as through the Common Assessment Framework processes or attending panel reviews for children subject to child protection plans. There are currently very low numbers of families in any category of social care support as the centre's one-to-one assistance has been instrumental in them being moved to less intensive support.
- Safeguarding families is paramount to the centre's entire work. The premises are safe and secure. Staff are well trained to deal with a variety of problems, such as domestic violence or any child protection concerns. Detailed policies, procedures and systems, such as not allowing mobile phone usage on the premises, ensure everyone using the centre is aware of the need to keep children safe.
- There is an excellent range of resources, including the experienced staff, used very effectively to meet local needs and improve families' lives. The very attractive garden area and covered patio provide imaginative well-used additional space to make up for the limited room available in this very small centre. Everything is geared and planned to ensure adults and children are fully engaged and that children's early learning skills are developed well.
- Parents and children are regularly asked for their views. For example, at the end of Let's Play, children choose from pictures of the activities they would like next time. This is incorporated into the very detailed session plans.
- Families are 100% satisfied with the centre, as reflected in the annual satisfaction survey and very frequent post-activity evaluations carried out by the centre and its partners. Adults are very keen to recommend the centre to others, especially those from minority ethnic groups, because it is so friendly and welcoming. One parent summed it up by saying 'It's just like one big family.'

**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>	22809
<b>Local authority</b>	London Borough of Sutton
<b>Inspection number</b>	427484
<b>Managed by</b>	The governing body of Spencer Nursery school on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	613
<b>Head of Centre</b>	Fiona Downing
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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