

Clare Gardens Children's Centre

349 Westbourne Park Road, London W11 1EG

Inspection dates 26–28 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that is inadequate.

- Leadership is ineffective. There has been a great deal of change over the last two years, which has disrupted centre development and establishment of consistent practice and services. The local authority has not provided sufficient support or debate with the centre leader to evaluate current effectiveness or monitor its plans for the future.
- The advisory board involves a number of enthusiastic parents but does not prioritise governance issues. Self-evaluation is unrealistic and over-optimistic. Therefore, improvement planning does not address key weaknesses and this inhibits the centre's ability to improve and develop.
- Leaders have limited knowledge of the families served by the centre. Only a minority of those living in the area have registered with the centre. Leaders do not know enough about the needs of local families to know whether they use its services or find them helpful. Of those families identified by the centre as target families during the inspection, less than one-fifth use centre services.
- The impact of services is not evaluated well enough. Leaders cannot demonstrate accurately whether many services, particularly those of external providers, make a positive difference to the lives of families from priority groups.
- Leaders do not have an accurate overview of how well children are prepared for school. Too many eligible two-year-old children (40%) do not access funded nursery education in the centre's catchment area. There are plans in place to address this shortfall but these are yet to take effect and over a third of vulnerable children do not access places that would be of benefit to them.

It has the following strengths:

- The manager and staff at Clare Gardens put their early years expertise to good use. They offer a nurturing and cheerful environment which parents greatly appreciate.
- There is a wide range of courses and workshops provided by the centre, and those parents who do attend generally enjoy their time at the centre, and learn new skills.

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. It was carried out simultaneously with two other centres in the North Locality, Holmfield House and St Quinitin's Children's Centres.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with leaders, parents and representatives from partner organisations. They observed sessions at the centre, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. The inspectors held joint meetings with the centre managers, officers from the local authority, commissioned service providers, health, early years, adult learning and skills partners, volunteers and parents.

The inspectors worked in partnership, visiting all three centres. They held team meetings twice daily, attended by the centre managers and local authority senior leaders and managers. One commissioned 'Cook and Taste' session was observed jointly with the manager of Clare Gardens Children's Centre.

Inspectors looked at the centres' self-evaluation, improvement plans, locality improvement plan, Early Help review, a sample of case studies, safeguarding policies and procedures and a very wide range of other documentation.

Susan Mann
Co-ordinating lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Clare Gardens Children's Centre is one of five centres in the North Locality of Kensington and Chelsea that work collaboratively. The two centres not involved in this simultaneous inspection, Golborne and Maxilla Children's Centres, were both inspected in 2012 and 2011 respectively and both were judged 'Good'. As a result of recent re-organisation of children's centres in the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Clare Gardens Children's Centre is now positioned in the Family Services team as part of the Early Help Service. The North Locality centres are planning to form as a group in the near future. The centre is managed by the local authority, and one manager oversees the running of all centres in the locality. It is a phase two centre. The centres in the locality offer childcare, adult education opportunities and health services. The centre has onsite childcare which was inspected in 2012 and judged to be outstanding.

The area is ethnically and culturally mixed, with high levels of transience. The borough has a smaller proportion of residents from White British, Black and Asian ethnic groups in comparison to the rest of London, but there are more of Other/Mixed heritage and three times more from White Other backgrounds. This group is made up of people from Europe, Ireland, the Americas and Australasia. Data suggest that three quarters of children are from families other than White British. The centre's reach area contains some of the most affluent in the country, as well as significant pockets of deprivation. A high proportion of families live in private rented accommodation. About a fifth of children in the North Locality live in income-deprived households, and unemployment is 7.3%. When they start in early years provision, children's skills and knowledge vary but are typically at the level expected for their age.

There are 911 children under the age of five years living in the area served by Clare Gardens Children's Centre. Target groups identified by the centre include children and parents with disabilities, lone parents, fathers, women with post-natal depression, teenage parents, workless and ethnic minority families.

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

- Establish more effective leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring that the local authority and centre leaders have a clear, accurate and shared understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre
 - improving leaders' understanding of information and data about the area served by the centre
 - devising an improvement plan that focuses on a manageable number of priorities, clear timelines, precise actions and measurable targets
 - moving swiftly to establish an effective advisory board that provides both support and challenge to the centre
 - ensuring that parents play an active role in strategic decision-making
 - strengthening the supervision and appraisal arrangements for all managers so that their performance links to the centre's priorities, is reviewed regularly and ties into professional development
 - making sure that the robust approach to assessing risks seen in the centre is central to all commissioned services.

- Increase the number of priority group families using services and activities, so that these form at least the large majority, by:
 - ensuring that data is sufficiently reliable and accurate to identify the number of children and/or families in priority groups in the reach area
 - identifying the most appropriate priority groups for the centre and focusing activities and services to attract families from these groups
 - making good use of this information to seek out and engage families targeted for support.

- Establish a rigorous and effective system for tracking the quality and impact of services, particularly those that are commissioned, by:
 - carrying out an accurate assessment of the centre's families' needs, especially those from priority groups
 - making sure all services have clearly defined objectives that will make a positive difference to the lives of priority groups and families
 - measuring the impact of services and activities to ensure these meet priority group and families' needs and lead to improvement in clearly defined outcomes
 - taking appropriate and swift action if services are not effective.

- Work effectively with early years partners to close the gap in achievement for the most vulnerable children and increase the percentage reaching a good level of development by the time they are five years old by:
 - significantly increasing the proportion of eligible two-year-old children who take up their free early education places
 - setting out clear objectives for how commissioned services, such as 'Stay and Plays', improve children's early learning and development and monitor these rigorously
 - embedding the school readiness programme and measuring how well this improves outcomes for children, especially those from priority families and groups
 - establishing a system for tracking the longer-term impact that the centre's services have on children's achievement during their school years.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The centre does not know enough about families who live in the area to know or meet their needs. Information obtained at the request of inspectors during the inspection shows only a minority of families (42%) are registered with the centre. Information about those families who would benefit most from services is sparse, and gives little indication of the numbers, location or potential need. Therefore, the centre leader plans services that are either not matched well enough to needs of families, or are not marketed to those families who would benefit most from attending.
- Leaders and the local authority were able to produce some information about target groups during the inspection and at the inspectors' request. This information highlighted numbers of priority families and groups living in the centre's catchment area. However, these data showed that less than one fifth of these families had attended the centre, showing that most priority families living in the area do not benefit from the wide range of services on offer at the centre.
- Partnership working is not yet sufficiently developed to improve the proportion of registrations or regular use of the centres. Health professionals value the links with centres and families appreciate the safe and pleasing surroundings of linked centres for healthy baby sessions and other appointments. The recently introduced 'contact card' aims to enable quick and easy assessment of who would benefit from centre services. However, this is in its early stages and to date, only a very small number (15) have been completed.
- Most three- and four-year-olds take funding to attend an early years setting. However, not enough eligible two-year-old children are allocated a funded place at an early years setting (40%). This lack of access to early years provision limits opportunities for some young children to catch up with their peers in their learning and development.
- Frontline outreach work is carried out by partners, including the Early Help Team and the onsite nursery team to identify families who need support. Whilst help for known priority families is effective through these avenues, the lack of centre workers in commissioned services such as 'Stay and Play' sessions limits outreach opportunities, and processes to make contact with priority families visiting the centre are not reliable.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Poor knowledge of local families' needs prevents accurate planning of services. Therefore, the centre cannot reliably show how it improves child and family life chances for those in greatest need, which is central to the purpose of children's centres. Attendance of some sessions is very low, indicating the centre is not fully meeting the requirements of its priority families.
- Despite the wide selection of courses delivered through the locality's 'Enjoy and Achieve' programme, leaders do not monitor these well enough to know whether those attending are those who would benefit the most. Parents who do attend appreciate the variety, ranging from cake decorating to French classes and report that their levels of self-esteem and social opportunities improve as a result. Leaders make some basic evaluation of its provision but this is not rigorous enough to show what difference it makes to those who use it.
- In the centre's area, children generally do well with their learning and development. The proportion of children gaining a good level of development is slightly below national levels. The gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is narrower than that found nationally. Children who attend the onsite nursery make excellent progress because they receive high quality teaching and care. Even though not enough priority two-year-olds have a place in the area, the local authority helps children and families soundly prepare for starting school. Outside of the nursery provision, there are no systems to establish the impact of broader children centre services on children's learning and development, such as parenting and 'Stay and Play' sessions, to check if these have been worthwhile.
- Good provision from the health team, including physiotherapists, occupational and music therapists, results in targeted services such as 'Shake, Natter and Roll' as well as the more usual health clinics

and weaning advice. Speech and language therapists work closely with families and early years settings to improve children's communication skills. Rates of breastfeeding in the locality are better than average, supported well by breastfeeding support groups held at a neighbouring centre, and by peer support volunteers.

- There is a suitable range of adult learning courses, including English, mathematics and language, parenting and first aid, supported by free crèche provision. Parenting programmes such as the 'Nurturing Parenting' programme improve family life for some, as does specific provision to enhance job prospects. One parent, for example, accessed a range of services including professional qualifications that led to employment. These opportunities led one parent to describe the centre as 'the stepping stone to getting my life back together'. However, stories of similar success are rare because the centre is unable to demonstrate the impact of its services fully. Provision for parents to receive employment and benefit advice is at too early a stage to show any measurable improvement.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Leaders have failed to identify or tackle the fundamental weaknesses of the centre. Governance arrangements are ineffective. Those in charge do not know the composition or needs of the centre's area. They have been distracted by strategic re-organisation and this lack of focus has adversely affected centre's effectiveness. The local authority has not scrutinised how well the centre meets its core purpose to improve life and opportunities for families in need: the last formal evaluation of effectiveness was over two years ago.
- The advisory board involves a number of enthusiastic parents and successfully organises fund-raising and events, but does not prioritise governance. Self-evaluation is wholly inaccurate and indicates poor assessment. Improvement planning lacks ambition and does not address the main weaknesses of the centre, leading to inadequate capacity for improvement.
- Performance management is inadequate to promote staff and centre development. Meetings take place between staff and managers, but records show conversations do not link well enough with centre priorities for improvement, nor do they give good support to centre staff in their professional development.
- Senior leaders do not monitor the quality or impact of commissioned services successfully. A wide range of inviting courses cost the centre a significant amount of money to run, but these business agreements do not provide good value for money. There is not enough understanding about how well families improve their situations, knowledge and skills as a result of attendance. Whilst some sessions events are popular, such as the 'cake decorating course', others are less well attended and so have limited benefit. Risk assessments for some services is not fully effective, leading to potential dangers to both those using the service and the centre's own liability.
- Partnership working with key agencies promotes health and safety for families. Strategic and frontline links with health and social care work well to provide families with the provision they need. However, the role of the centre is not fully embedded for some, who view it as a 'family friendly' venue rather than an integrated and collaborative partner. Although information about priority families is shared when required, agencies do not routinely share evaluations with centre leaders, nor do they make a significant contribution to centre improvement planning to share priorities.
- Procedures to keep children and vulnerable adults safe are effective. Recruitment procedures for staff, partners and volunteers ensure all are suitable to work at the centre. Strong partnership working with the Early Help and social care teams enables good collaboration and swift action to protect children and vulnerable families. Families in receipt of individual support make good improvement over time as a result of good assessment through the locality's own systems and enabling support, as do children with child protection plans. The nursery manager, as designated person, has an effective overview of safe practice and what to do when concerns are raised.

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	20742
Local authority	Kensington and Chelsea
Inspection number	427549
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	911
Centre leader	Busola Kehinde
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	020 7727 2725
Email address	busola.kehinde@rbkc.gov.uk

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