

Blenheim Children's Centre

Blenheim Primary School, School Way, Leigh on Sea, SS9 4HX

Inspection date 21–22 January 2014

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.

- Local families, especially those most in need of the centre's support, have good access to services at Blenheim Children's Centre. This is because a wide range of activities take place at the centre each week and during the school holidays. It runs a community cafe which encourages families to come into the centre whenever they wish or whenever they want to ask for assistance.
- The quality of services provided by the staff and the partnerships with a wide range of specialists, including health, are good. As a result, children, parents and carers gain from taking part in many sessions, such as asthma and allergy, antenatal and baby clinics.
- Families who come to the centre receive outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. This is because all staff are extremely dedicated and ensure children, parents and carers always receive a warm welcome and are offered the best services which help to improve the lives of their families.
- Families really value the centre and many say it has made a big difference in their lives. They enjoy the 'Come and Play' sessions where adults and children develop new skills and make new friends.
- Children who regularly attend sessions at the centre, including those eligible for free school meals, make better progress when they start school, than those who do not use the centre. An above-average proportion of children who use the centre reach a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year.
- Leadership, management and governance are good. Leaders have worked enthusiastically to improve the quality and practice of services. Three quarters of those most in need of the centre's support work with the centre effectively, which is an improving trend.

It is not outstanding because:

- A few parents say they do not receive effective information about how they could support their children at home, especially in developing an understanding of language .
- The centre does not do enough to encourage those without qualifications to attend literacy and numeracy courses to improve their chances of employment.
- The centre's data does not indicate clearly how effectively the centre is improving.
- Targets for improvement do not always contain specific goals to work towards so it is not easy to measure how effective the centre is in meeting families' needs.

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, four governors, many parents and carers, centre staff, health specialists, children and one representative from the local authority.

The inspectors visited Blenheim Primary School and Blenheim Nursery.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Jackie Cousins, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Robert Miller	Additional inspector
David Baber	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Blenheim Children's Centre is situated in a mixed neighbourhood which includes some areas with very significant levels of disadvantage. It attracts a diverse range of families. The majority of the families who live in the surrounding area are from White British backgrounds, but a few are from minority ethnic groups. Small numbers of families are from Asian and African or from Western and Eastern European groups. A few families are at the early stages of learning to speak English. Some areas around the centre have considerable levels of unemployment, and above-average proportions of families in receipt of benefits and workless households. A significant percentage of adults have low or no formal qualifications. The group targeted for extra support is families living in the most disadvantaged part of the area where many people are in receipt of benefit or are workless.

The centre opened in January 2009 and operates from purpose-built premises which contain one large room which can be split into two and three smaller delivery rooms. In partnership with other providers, the centre provides early education, childcare and health services, family support and adult learning courses. The onsite nursery school is subject to separate inspection arrangements. Children start school with levels of skill which are slightly lower than those expected. There are four children's centres in the area.

The centre is managed by the governing body of Blenheim Primary School on behalf of Southend-On-Sea Borough Council. The advisory board or steering group includes health specialists, a headteacher, a deputy headteacher, parents and staff from the centre and other partners. The centre is not part of the payment by results trial and is not receiving extra funding from the government.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Develop the quality and impact of services by making sure that:
 - parents receive more effective guidance about how to develop their children's understanding of language at home
 - staff encourage more parents and carers to gain qualifications in literacy and numeracy.

- Improve the effectiveness of the centre's leadership by ensuring that:
 - the centre's record sheets make it clear what the increase in performance is for all aspects of the centre's work with families
 - development planning sets more specific targets so that it is easier for leaders to measure how effective the centre is in meeting families' needs.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Families have good access to services, and the large majority of those most in need of the centre's support attend the centre regularly. Parents and carers like the 'Play and Learn' sessions where children learn to sing as well as enjoying story times which are a regular feature of these sessions. The community cafe has proved particularly effective in encouraging families to use the centre and seek advice, make friends, share a drink or eat a healthy meal whenever they want. For instance, 90% of families in the area take advantage of many of the centre's services.
- The centre has used local knowledge and feedback from parents to tailor services. This means that, for example, parents and carers regularly participate in parenting courses at times which suit them because the centre adapts the weekly programme in the light of their comments. Antenatal appointments take place at the centre every week which means that mothers-to-be do not have to travel far from their homes. This is because of good partnerships with health specialists and efficient use of resources.
- Last year, all families who were eligible for additional funding took up early education for their two-year-olds and 96% of three-year-old children used their funded places. This is because the centre promotes early education successfully and has good links with local pre-schools and nurseries, including the nursery on the children's centre site.
- All children who have profound disabilities and special educational needs are supported productively either through the centre or other agencies. Children with hearing impairments are supported well through pre-school music sessions because staff expertise is used thoughtfully.
- Parents can access literacy, numeracy and information, communication and technology (ICT) courses at the centre. Some have gained qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ICT at entry level as well as level 1 or level 2, but the number doing so is small. The centre has not done enough to encourage the large numbers of parents without qualifications to improve their life chances or seek employment by gaining qualifications.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Families' needs, including those most in need of help, are supported well through a good range of good-quality services because partnerships with other professionals are used creatively. For example, 96% of children have been immunised because the centre offers extra mop-up clinics where parents can bring their children to receive any inoculations they may have missed. Asthma and allergy clinics take place at the centre and so parents can gain expert advice on how to help their children stay fit and healthy. Rates of obesity for five-year-olds are average.
- Children in their Reception Year, including those who are eligible for free school meals, who attended the centre regularly, made better progress in learning basic skills than those children who did not. This means that inequalities are reducing between different groups. In 2013, results for Reception children who attended the children's centre were considerably better than those who had not. For example, 65% of children who had used the children's centre reached a good level of development which was above that found nationally.
- Local families, including those from minority ethnic groups, benefit from outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. This is because centre staff are extremely welcoming and listen to families very carefully before they suggest any assistance. The centre staff ensure that families are referred to the best expert. For instance, families learn to keep their children safe in a car and when

handling equipment because of good partnerships with other agencies. Families learn to cook effectively and wean babies because of excellent support from the centre and health specialists. Breastfeeding rates are slightly lower than average but they are improving because the centre supports mothers to initiate and continue to breastfeed for six to eight weeks.

- Children, parents and carers enjoy a variety of sessions at the centre including 'Come and Play' and 'Let's Talk'. A few parents said they would like to receive even more information about how they could help promote their children's language skills at home.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The manager is very ambitious for the centre and so her leadership drives improvement dynamically. The centre manager is ably supported by her dedicated team of staff. Together with governors, they work productively to make things better for local families.
- The centre has analysed the needs of the local area and uses its resources well to meet these needs. For instance, a group for lone parents meets every week. A significant strength is that many local people have started to volunteer or take on apprenticeships because the centre encourages this as a way back into the world of work.
- Keeping families safe is given a high priority, and all procedures, policies and practices are carefully followed. Staff work diligently to support children subject to a child protection plan, those assessed under the Common Assessment Framework, looked after children and children identified in need. Families from all backgrounds get on well together and there have been no racial, bullying, gender or homophobic incidents at the centre in recent years.
- Parents and carers who use the centre are really satisfied with everything that it provides. All the parents who spoke to inspectors gave examples of how the centre has helped their families. One parent from another country said, 'The centre has helped my family in so many ways. I really like having everything near my home including the time slots for "Come and Play" sessions which have great practical activities and helpful staff.'
- Staff are encouraged to go on training and develop their expertise by taking extra qualifications. All staff who work with children have a suitable early years qualification. Their performance is monitored by leaders including governors effectively and under-performance is tackled rigorously. Extra responsibility or pay rises are given to staff who show they have improved their skills. Finances are managed well and they are audited regularly by the local authority.
- Governance arrangements are good. The steering group watches over the centre thoughtfully and has helped to gather sufficient evidence to prove that it offers good-quality services. It is involved successfully in comparing its performance with others using data. Governors know how effectively the centre is in closing the gap between children who are eligible for free school meals and the rest. Therefore, it is clear that it is reducing inequalities.
- Occasionally, development planning does not contain specific targets and so it is not easy to measure its successes.
- The centre leader produces a sheet which records the data collected to show how well families and children are engaging with the centre and outcomes. However, the data is not analysed carefully enough for the centre to know how successfully it is meeting the needs of families. The data is not presented in a way which makes it easy for governors to hold leaders to account for the centre's

performance.

- The local authority monitors the centre well and it understands how appropriately the centre meets the needs of local families. It has set a target for the centre to increase its engagement with families in the most challenging parts of the local area and is clear that the centre has met the target which is successfully helping to reduce inequalities.

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	20338
Local authority	Southend-On-Sea
Inspection number	430213
Managed by	The Blenheim Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1040
Centre leader	Caroline Reynolds
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01702 474684
Email address	carolinereynolds@blenheim.southend.sch.uk

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