

Claygate & Oxshott & The Dittons Children's Centre Group

Claygate Community Centre, Elm Road, Claygate, Surrey, KT10 0EH

Inspection dates	16–17 July 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

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 children's centre group is inadequate.

- Too few families are registered with either of the two centres. Those who are do not make regular enough use of the services. Too few of the priority families who need support the most are using the centres and engaging with the group's services.
- The group provides too few opportunities for adults to extend their education and employability. Systems are not in place to follow up any support or advice that is given by the centres or their partners.
- Links with local schools and early years settings are not well established; there is very little tracking of children who attend the centres. As a result, the group has no means to measure the impact of its work with children other than anecdotal evidence.
- There has been a lack of strategic leadership within the group and too few challenging targets have been set. Staffing issues have not been resolved quickly enough. This has affected the quality and impact of the services and has reduced the capacity of staff to meet the needs of priority groups. As a result, the capacity to improve is limited.
- The advisory board membership is too narrow. Members have not had a clear enough understanding of the centres' work. They have not challenged the centres effectively enough to ensure priority groups' needs are met.
- The centres are not well advertised or visible in the local community. Signage is poor and the location in multi-use buildings means that the surroundings are not always attractive to families with young children.

It has the following strengths:

- Families who receive one-to-one support are given good levels of care, guidance and support by well-trained, dedicated staff. This has made a demonstrable difference to some families' lives.
- Staff who work in the centres are all part-time. They have willingly adapted their roles to enable services to keep running during a prolonged period of reorganisation and staff shortage.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of children across the group who register, access and engage with services and ensure that the identified priority families use the centres' services by:
 - ensuring the centres are more visible in the local community by improving signage
 - working with other partners using the building to improve the environment so that it is more attractive to families with young children
 - assessing the specific needs of priority groups, such as children from workless households, and providing services or signposting to other agencies to meet their needs
 - ensuring there is an appropriate balance of services that are open to all and services for families who need most support
 - using information more effectively to monitor the access and engagement of priority families with centre services.
- Enable more families from priority groups, especially in the Lower Green area, to improve their education and employability, and monitor outcomes by:
 - developing links with partners to provide more opportunities for families to progress in their education and employability
 - developing a system to monitor the benefits of the centres' support and signposting.
- Ensure children's needs are met in relation to getting them ready to start school by:
 - working with the local authority, schools and early years settings to improve information sharing and the analysis of outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - implementing a system to track children, especially from priority families, during their time at the centre and when they move on to other early years settings.
- Improve the strategic and day-to-day leadership of the group by:
 - widening the membership of the advisory board, ensuring members have a clear understanding of their role and the work and aims of the group, especially in relation to work with priority families
 - ensuring all those who lead and manage the group monitor and evaluate its work and set clear, measurable targets
 - ensuring staffing issues are resolved as soon as possible so that centre coordinators' time is used more effectively.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group 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 inspection covered the following centres: Claygate & Oxshott and The Dittons Children's Centres.

The inspectors held meetings with the two centre coordinators and representatives from Elmbridge Borough Council, the local authority and the advisory board. They met with a range of partners including those from health services, Surrey police and local community groups. Parents and volunteers also spoke to inspectors.

Inspectors visited several activities taking place during the inspection, including 'Bumps and Babes' sessions at both centres and a 'Play and Learn' session at Claygate & Oxshott Centre. A joint observation of 'Bumps and Babes' was undertaken with one of the centre coordinators.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation including the group's self-evaluation and action plan, a sample of case studies and safeguarding policies and procedures. The centre coordinators, local authority and borough council representatives attended all the inspection team meetings.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Aileen King

Additional Inspector

Lesley Talbot-Strettle

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The group consists of two centres: The Dittons and Claygate & Oxshott Children's Centres. The Dittons covers Thames and Long Ditton with the main centre based in The Thames Ditton Centre for the Community. There is a linked site based at St Mary's Community Hall in Long Ditton. Claygate & Oxshott Children's Centre is also based in a multi-use centre for the community. Both centres operate on a part-time basis. Claygate & Oxshott was designated in January 2008 and The Dittons in March 2010. The centres are managed by Community Support Services, Elmbridge Borough Council, on behalf of the local authority. There are two centre coordinators who are line managed by the business development manager. Services are delivered from the centre buildings as well as other community venues and a Traveller site.

In 2012 the Thames Ditton and Long Ditton Children's Centres merged to become The Dittons, resulting in several staff changes in the group. Some vacancies are still not filled; some staff are relatively new to post.

There are 729 children aged under five in the area served by Claygate & Oxshott Centre and 1,796 in The Dittons region. The area served by the group includes 29 separate defined localities. Lower Green is the least advantaged, being in the top 31% most disadvantaged localities in the country. There is a perceived level of affluence in the area served by the group. Several of the localities are in the top 10% most advantaged compared to the rest of the country. The large majority of families come from a White British heritage. There are two Traveller sites located within the area served by the group. The percentage of children under five living in workless households is very low at 4% overall, although two areas have increased levels of around 18% which is slightly below national averages. Children generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at levels above those expected for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: families identified and referred by partner services as needing most support; young children in workless households in the Lower Green area; and Traveller families.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The number of children in the area served by the group who are known to the centres is too low. Although registration figures have increased substantially over the last six months, fewer than half the children in The Dittons area are registered. The average across the group for children who have accessed any centre once in the last 12 months is only 36%.
- Although the group has identified its priority families, it has not yet identified specifically enough what services would best meet their needs. For example, they do not know how best they could support children in workless households in the Lower Green area.
- Only a minority of the priority groups are using the centres' services regularly. Numbers are particularly low for families in the Lower Green area where just over half are registered but only 15% attend regularly.
- Registration figures are better for Travellers, as a result of monthly visits to one of their sites, and for families referred because of specific needs. However, the number who go on to engage regularly from both these groups is too low.
- Child health clinics held at both centres have improved the access to early childhood services by families with young children, including those expecting children. However, the centres are not monitoring priority families' take-up of those services closely enough.
- The large majority of children who are eligible for free early education for two-year-olds take it up.

All the provision is good or better, assuring them of a good start. All three- and four-year-olds take up their free entitlement.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The range and relevance of services are inadequate to meet the needs of families in priority groups. For example, fewer than half of the services at the Claygate & Oxshott Centre are aimed at specific groups. The quality of services is generally sound, although there is not always a specific-enough focus on developing some aspects of young children's learning.
- Both centres are only open part-time and so the range of services is limited by this, as well as long-term staff shortages. At present, there are not enough services that meet the needs of workless families, especially in the Lower Green area, or to help support adults in the wider area to develop their education and other skills. Any support or advice that is given is not followed up consistently.
- Outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are significantly higher than those seen nationally. However, the part played by the centres' services in improving children's readiness for school is hard to measure. This is because priority children's progress is not tracked either when they are attending the centres or when they move on. Links with local schools and early years settings are not developed well enough to enable this to be done.
- Local health outcomes are good with high immunisation and breastfeeding rates. However, because a relatively low number of families regularly use the centre, it is not possible to measure the centres' impact on those outcomes.
- The group has recently provided good-quality parenting courses that participants state have had a positive, in some cases 'miraculous', impact. Specific courses, such as the baby massage group to which families are referred, have also had a positive impact although the number of families who have attended is still relatively small.
- The one-to-one support that families receive from the centres is of a very high standard. Centre staff work well with other agencies to ensure families get the most appropriate help, for example through close links with the police for domestic violence support. Parents are very grateful for this care and guidance and the impact on their families' lives, stating, 'The weight gets lifted off me' and 'It's been a little bit of a lifesaver'.
- Families do feel very warmly welcomed at both centres and believe their views are heard. Several adults volunteer to support centre services such as by supporting one of the weekly play sessions. However, there is no formal parents' forum and only one parent representative on the advisory board.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Over the last two years the group has undergone significant changes of staffing and organisation. Some posts have not been filled quickly enough, leading to staff having to take on additional roles to enable services to keep running. This has been to the detriment of some of the management and administrative functions.
- The annual conversation undertaken by the local authority in October 2013 was a detailed review that recognised the weaknesses in the provision and set some targets for improvement. These have been monitored regularly. There have been improvements to the registration figures but Elmbridge Borough Council, which manages the group, has not met all targets set.
- The group's self-evaluation is over optimistic and consequently the capacity to improve is limited.
- The advisory board membership is too narrow with too many places filled by borough council members or centre staff. There is not a wide-enough representation from target families or from partners. As a result, the board has not been effective in using data and other information to challenge the group. Changes to the chair and arrangements for members to be trained are already in hand.
- Resources are adequate but the shared use of the building means rooms are not always attractive

or enticing for young families. Staff resources are fully stretched due to unfilled posts. This has had an impact on the effectiveness of the group in reducing inequalities among families in the local area by meeting the needs of priority groups.

- Safeguarding of families and children who are looked after or who are subject to a child protection plan, an early help assessment or the Common Assessment Framework is effective. The staff are very alert to any concerns and act swiftly to ensure that children are protected, for example if they feel they are being affected by domestic abuse.

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 well-being 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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80363
Local authority	Surrey County Council
Inspection number	442823
Managed by	Elmbridge Borough Council on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,529
Centre Services Manager	Kim Chadwick
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01372 471222
Email address	commservices@elmbridge.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- Claygate & Oxshott
- The Dittons

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