

Mile End Children's Centre

9 Bede Square, Joseph Street, Off Bow Common Lane, London, E3 4GY

Inspection dates	30 31 July 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected.

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Most families in the local area are registered with the centre, but only just over half of families are accessing services. This is because information is not sufficiently detailed or used well enough to accurately identify which families would most benefit from the help the centre has to offer.
- The centre offers a range of play and learning opportunities for children and their families. While centre staff observe children's learning and development in sessions, they are not using this information to build a picture of the progress children are making over time. Staff are also not consistently checking whether adult education opportunities provided by the centre and partners are making a difference for those who access them.
- The centre works well with health and social care partners. However, a lack of clear agreements results in some confusion over roles and responsibilities. For example, health visitors do not always take an active role in the Common Assessment Framework, and family support workers are not always clear about what they should be doing to support the most vulnerable families.
- Not enough eligible two-year-old children are accessing free funded early education. In the main, this is because there has been a lack of suitable places across the local authority. A clear focus by the local authority on increasing provision means that it is on track to ensure there are sufficient places by 2015.
- There is a good range of key professionals and local parents on the stakeholder group, although attendance by professionals at meetings is sporadic. Although the group provides support, it is not monitoring the work of the centre closely enough or providing robust and effective challenge.

It has the following strengths:

- Highly skilled family support workers provide very effective one-to-one support that enables many families to bring about very positive changes in their lives.
- Parents have a strong say in how the centre is run. They play a very active role in evaluating provision and developing services.
- Working closely with local schools, centre staff effectively help families prepare for starting school. This is helping children to quickly settle into school life.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve governance of the children's centre and partnerships with health and social care by ensuring that:
 - all key professionals represented on the stakeholder group attend most meetings
 - the stakeholder group gives robust challenge, as well as support, to the children's centre manager
 - the centre collects, analyses and uses information about the area it serves effectively to identify which groups of families most need help and support and to monitor the difference services are making
 - there is a robust service level agreement with health services
 - health visitors take a full part in the use of the Common Assessment Framework
 - there are agreed written protocols between the children's centre and social care so that family support workers are clear about precisely what their role is when working with vulnerable families.
- Check more closely the difference that children's centre services are having by:
 - implementing the proposed systems to track the progress made by children who access centre services. Use this information to plan next steps in children's learning so that children make good progress and are well prepared for school
 - ensuring that the centre measures and monitors how well all adults who access courses do.
- Increase the uptake of funded early education by eligible families with two-year-olds.

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, managers from the local authority and centre staff. They also met health, education and social care partners, parents, early years providers, volunteers and representatives from the stakeholder group. They observed some of the centre's activities and did an observation of the Help@Hand group jointly with the Play and Learning Lead. They looked at a range of relevant documentation and carried out a scrutiny of case files.

Inspection team

Jane Burchall, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Julie Winyard

Her Majesty's Inspector

Phillida Schellekens

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Mile End Children's Centre serves the Mile End East ward of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. In 2011 the local authority reorganised its children's centres into four localities. Mile End Children's Centre is in the North East Locality. It works closely alongside two other centres, Marner Children's Centre and Overland Children's Centre. These centres are subject to separate inspections and their reports can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre is managed directly by the local authority. It has its own parents' forum, but shares an advisory board, known as the stakeholder group, with the other two centres in the locality.

Tower Hamlets has the highest rate of child poverty in London and unemployment in the country. It is the second most disadvantaged borough in London and is the third most disadvantaged borough nationally. The Mile End East ward is ranked within the top 2% of most deprived wards nationally and has 67.4% of its children living in poverty. Many families live in poor quality, overcrowded homes. The area has a rapidly growing population with high investment in new housing.

The children's centre opened in 2006 and moved to its present purpose-built building in July 2014. The centre offers a range of services which includes health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes, family support and some adult learning. It focuses its services on families subject to a child protection plan, children with special educational needs and/or a disability, children looked after by the local authority and those children subject to the Common Assessment Framework. The centre serves a culturally diverse population. This includes 48% of families from the Bangladeshi community and 33% who are White British. Many families speak English as an additional language.

There are 2,000 children under five years of age living in the area served by the centre. Many children in the area start early years provision with skills which are below those typical for their age. Communication and language and personal, social and emotional skills are the weakest areas. There is no linked onsite childcare provision, and most children access maintained nursery education once they reach the age of three years.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Working closely with health visitors, the centre has been successful in registering most families who live in the area the centre serves. However, not enough families are benefiting from centre services. Whilst attendance by families from the groups the centre has identified as needing to be specifically targeted is good, this only represents a very small proportion of the total number of families who live locally. The centre is not monitoring the attendance of other, equally relevant groups, such as workless families and those living in poverty. This is because the information they have about other groups of families is not detailed or secure enough to allow this to happen.
- Those adults who take part in courses arranged by the children's centre do well and many move on to further or higher education or get jobs. However, the number of adults who enrol on courses is low given the size of the population in the area.
- Staff work well with a range of professionals to identify individual families who may benefit from early help, including those expecting children. Service requests to the family support team for one-to-one support are processed swiftly so that families receive the help they need as quickly as possible.
- Most three- and four-year-old children take up funded early education in the local authority maintained nursery provision. However, the take up by eligible two-year-olds is low. A lack of provision for this age group, coupled with a resistance by some families to utilise care for their

younger children, means that only 34% of eligible children are currently benefiting from good quality early education.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Sessions are of good quality and are popular with families. A variety of appropriate activities fosters children's learning and development and is well focused on aspects of children's learning that require attention, such as their language and communication skills. Guided by the children's centre teacher, staff are beginning to implement systems to check the progress children who access services are making. However, these are at a very early stage and are not sufficiently embedded so that the centre can be clear about the difference services are making.
- A high-quality environment and resources are available to families in the centre's new, purpose-built building. The outdoor area is particularly well thought out to provide interest and challenge to children.
- Family support workers provide high quality support, advice and guidance to those families who are most in need. They make very good use of the Common Assessment Framework to develop a clear and accurate picture of what it is families need to do to bring about positive change to their lives and to ensure they receive effective early help.
- Good quality advice and guidance by the locality social worker effectively guide the work of the family support team. They are successfully helping more families to stay together and to be safe, including those subject to a child protection plan.
- Targeted groups help parents understand the benefits of playing with their children as staff act as positive role models. Professionals, such as an educational psychologist, are on hand to give parents who are concerned about their child's development valuable advice and guidance, for example in the Help@Hand group.
- Play and learning staff are building strong links with local schools. Together they implement a successful transition programme which has meant that children are better prepared emotionally for starting school, settle into school life more easily and are ready to learn. This is contributing to an increase in the number of children who reach a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and to gaps in achievement narrowing.
- The centre has established good links with local training providers and provision is in place for parents to engage in adult learning and parenting courses. Families appreciate the useful skills they gain, such as first aid and money management. Opportunities to volunteer, both in the centre and elsewhere, are helping adults to develop skills for employment. However, the centre does not consistently check whether or not these opportunities have made a relevant difference to the lives of those families who take part.
- Parents feel valued and listened to. They are empowered to make a difference to their community and are beginning to develop their own networks of support, for example by arranging to meet up during school holidays. Parents state that their involvement in the centre has significantly increased their confidence and self-esteem. Comments, such as, 'The centre gave me a voice,' and 'Someone respected me as me,' as well as 'All the skills I previously had came back,' demonstrate the impact that the centre has had on those parents who do access services.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The centre has good information about the children who live in the local area as registration rates are high. However, leaders are not making best use of this information to help them to sufficiently prioritise the needs of families in the area the centre serves or to increase the number of families who engage in services.
- There are some systems in place to evaluate the effectiveness of services which leaders, staff, parents and key stakeholders contribute to. However, self-evaluation is overly optimistic. This is because it is based on the engagement of a very small proportion of the families who live locally.

Although the centre has identified some relevant priorities to guide the work of the centre, such as reducing child poverty and working with families experiencing domestic violence, leaders are not yet monitoring sufficiently the effectiveness of this work.

- The centre works well to safeguard the welfare of children and families known to them, including those subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework and those looked after by the local authority. Staff are well trained and have a good understanding of safeguarding arrangements and what to do if they have concerns about a child.
- A clear line management structure is in place which provides staff with frequent opportunities for supervision. This includes professional guidance for staff working directly with families by a qualified social worker. Staff are well trained. They have regular opportunities to improve their practice, linked to the centre's priorities, through access to continuous professional development opportunities which include modelling and coaching by experienced practitioners.
- The local authority gives a good level of challenge to the centre. It knows the strengths of the centre and where improvements should be made. It has introduced strategies that are having a very positive impact on the work of the centre, such as having a locality teacher and social worker. Both roles are bringing about improvements to how the centre supports the learning of children in its area and how it contributes to keeping families safe.
- The stakeholder group has clear terms of reference to guide its work and meets regularly. However, the lack of regular attendance by professionals means that it is not able to sufficiently challenge leaders about how resources are targeted or provide in-depth questioning of self-evaluation or development planning.
- Parents are fully involved in the shaping of centre services. There is a strong parents' forum which is regularly consulted about key priorities. Parents are represented on the stakeholder group, where their views are heard and taken account of.
- The centre has good relationships with health and social care professionals. However, because there is no formal agreement with health services and no written protocol with social care, the partnership working on the ground is not always as effective as it could be.

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.

Centre details

Unique reference number	20499
Local authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	451554
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,000
Centre manager	Sarah Hall-Craggs
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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