

CAP5 Little Handprints Children's Centre

Thundersley Primary School, Dark Lane, Thundersley, SS7 3PT

Inspection dates	15–16 April 2015
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
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:

- Not enough children and families are regularly engaging in the centre's services, particularly those the centre has identified as in most need of support.
- Too few two-year-old children are accessing their free entitlement to good quality free early education and the centre has yet to put robust systems in place to track their progress.
- The centre has not succeeded in improving the proportion of mothers who sustain breastfeeding.
- Too few adults access parenting courses, adult learning programmes or volunteering.
- Information provided by the local authority and used by the centre and its partners is not always sufficiently accurate or analysed in enough depth, particularly about families living in the area. As a result, leaders do not have the necessary information to set precise targets for improvement and to show the full impact of the centre's work. This hinders sharper evaluation and monitoring by leaders and the advisory board to drive the centre forward.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Parents appreciate the warm welcome offered by the centre and the access to good quality resources in activity sessions. Staff are approachable, well-informed and persistent in their aim to engage with families and to help those identified as most in need of support.
- Children enjoy the good quality activities such as, 'Stay and Learn', 'Messy Play' and 'Tools for School' that help them to move on in their learning and personal development.
- Families who attend are well supported to make good use of the services and activities offered in the centre and in other community venues, to ensure that their needs are met.
- Centre staff work closely with a range of partners, including health and social care professionals to provide a good level of individual care, guidance and support to families through outreach work.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families who use the centre's services regularly, including those the centre has identified as most in need of its support.
- Ensure that most children access their entitlement to free good quality early years education at age two and improve the tracking of their progress.
- Improve the impact of centre practice and services for children and families by:
 - working with health partners to increase the number of mothers who sustain breastfeeding for at least six-to-eight weeks
 - increasing the promotion, participation and tracking of adults, particularly the unemployed, in parenting programmes, adult-learning courses and volunteering to aid progression into further education and employment.
- The local authority, Barnardo's and Castle Point Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS) should work more effectively with centre leaders, partners and the advisory board to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the centre's work by:
 - ensuring that all data provided to the centre, particularly about families and children living in the area, are accurate and analysed in enough depth so that they give centre leaders a clear picture of the impact of services on families' lives
 - establishing clear and measurable performance targets for all aspects of the centre's work.

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 two children's centre team leaders, a senior team leader, and officers from the local authority, Barnardo's and Castle Point Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS). They also held meetings with centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners, including health, education and children's social care professionals.

The inspectors visited activity sessions including two 'Stay and Learn' sessions and a 'Baby Group'. An inspector jointly observed a session with one of the team leaders.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, such as the centre's self-evaluation, service delivery plan, a sample of case files, parent evaluations, key policies and the centre's equality and safeguarding procedures. Throughout the inspection they also took the opportunity to talk with adults and children.

Inspection team

Lead inspector Tara Street

Additional inspector

Anthony Mundy

Additional inspector

Ann Taylor

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

CAP5 Little Handprints Children's Centre is a standalone centre situated within the grounds of Thundersley Primary School in the Benfleet area of Essex. It offers a range of services and activities including: health, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult education and family support.

There are approximately 2,260 children under five years old in the area, of which 205 live in the top 30% most deprived areas in the country. The families that the centre has identified in most need of its support are: pregnant teenagers and teenage parents, families experiencing domestic violence and those families as identified as in greatest need, including those on a child protection plan, children in need and those in care.

Most families are from White British backgrounds. Levels of unemployment are low, with 14% of children living in households dependent upon workless benefits. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills that are in line those typical for their age.

Governance of the centre is provided by Barnardo's, who sub contract the delivery of children's services to Castle Point Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS). The centre has an advisory board that includes providers, delivery partners and members of the local community.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Centre leaders have accurately identified the families most in need of its support and have registered most of the children living in the area. However, the centre is not managing to engage and maintain contact with the large majority of these children and their families.
- The large majority of children and families, including those living in workless households, pregnant teenagers and teenage parents, families experiencing domestic violence and those families as identified as in greatest need, including those on a child protection plan, children in need and those in care, are not making the most of the services offered by the centre.
- Family support workers provide effective support in the home, at outreach venues and in the centre to engage some families that are hard to reach, including those living in the most deprived areas and who are expecting children. However, not enough families are currently benefiting from the services provided by the centre.
- Family support workers work hard to build trusting relationships with families. They have a good knowledge of the varied issues surrounding some families, including those experiencing financial difficulties, isolation or mental health issues. For instance, a parent told inspectors that: 'the centre has been a lifeline. I don't know if I would have survived without them.'
- Staff work appropriately to make sure that parents are aware of all the help that may be available to them including their children's entitlement to free early education. As a result most three- and four-year-olds take up their places. However, not enough two-year-olds are taking up their places and as a result some children who would benefit from access to high quality early years provision are not doing so.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Families who access the centre's services benefit from an appropriate range of activities, including those that are open to all and those which are specifically designed for those identified as most in need of support.
- The centre provides a broad range of activities which are enjoyed by those who attend, both in the

centre and at outreach venues in the community. However, the low numbers of some groups who have been identified as in need of support engaging with these services reduce the centre's overall impact on improving outcomes for children. These low numbers also impede the centre's impact on reducing inequalities and improving life chances.

- The number of children who are obese in Reception Year and those mothers smoking in pregnancy is low and reducing, but not all of the centre's health-related targets are met. In particular, the proportion of mothers who keep breastfeeding for at least six-to-eight weeks is below both the local and national average and is reducing.
- Not enough adults access parenting courses, adult education, training and volunteering opportunities to help them to improve their parenting skills, English, mathematics and computer skills. This limits their progress towards paid work and their ability to support their children's learning. The systems to track adults' progress towards learning and employment do not provide clear evidence of the centre's impact on improving economic well-being.
- The centre is in the early stages of putting tracking systems in place to monitor the progress that funded two-year-old children make from their starting points. However, partnerships with schools, early years providers and childminders in the area are positive. Together, they share 'good' practice, access training and have aspirations for improving the lives of children and their families. As a result, outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good and improving for the large majority of children.
- Family support workers are knowledgeable and demonstrate good levels of professional expertise. They carefully identify, plan and provide support for those families identified as most in need. As a result, parents enjoy a range of opportunities through one-to-one support in the home to extend their parenting skills and knowledge. They also learn how to deal with issues such as domestic violence, mental health and managing their child's behaviour, which has a positive impact on children's safety and well-being.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership, governance and management are not ensuring that the centre's services are making a difference to enough priority families.
- Information provided by the local authority about the engagement of some families identified as in most need of support is not always accurate or analysed sufficiently well with partner agencies. As a result, leaders do not hold a sufficiently clear picture of the full impact of the centre's work regarding the take-up of services and the improvements being made for the families who access them. This weakens the ability of the advisory board and the local authority to offer challenge regarding the centre's ongoing performance.
- Centre leaders have an appropriate knowledge of most of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre, and the priorities for development. The local authority, Barnardo's and Castle Point Association of Voluntary Services checks on the centre's performance appropriately through an annual review and ongoing monitoring of services throughout the year. However, precise, measurable performance targets are not set by the local authority or by the centre in the service delivery plan. This hampers leaders and advisory board members from monitoring the impact of the centre's services on reducing inequalities for children and families effectively and in securing further improvements.
- The centre leaders and their team are hard-working and keen to improve. For instance, parents' opinions are sought and are used appropriately to monitor and make changes. For example 'Messy Play' sessions have been re-established and a new 'Multiple Birth Group' has been set up.
- Resources are of good quality and are used well to meet the needs of those who access centre services. Well-qualified family support workers receive good levels of training and support. This ensures that they understand how best to assess and meet the needs of the families identified as most in need of its support.
- Staff receive close supervision and monitoring of their performance alongside regular case file management. As a result assessment of need, case files and records are maintained to a good

standard and demonstrate effective cooperation and information-sharing between professionals to safeguard children. 'I wouldn't think twice about going to leaders to ask for support' and 'If things need changing, managers listen to us and if appropriate changes are made' are typical comments from centre staff.

- Robust safeguarding policies, procedures and practices are in place and adhered to. The centre's effective use of the Early Help Assessment process ensures that children who may be more vulnerable receive coordinated early help. Those subject to a child protection plan, looked after children or who are identified as being in need are well supported by the centre. This has a positive impact on their well-being.

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	20563
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	455044
Managed by	Barnardos on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2060
Centre leader	Dawn Delgaty and Nicola Proudfoot
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
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