

Around Poplar Children's Centre

115 Three Colt Street, London, E14 8AP

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| Inspection dates | 23–25 June 2015 |
| 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:

- Although most children are registered with the centre, just over half of the children aged under three access children's centre services overall. The proportion of children sustaining contact is not yet high enough.
- Although plans are in place to improve information sharing with health services, currently the centre does not have access to information about families who are expecting children or those with babies. Information about breastfeeding and obesity rates is not sufficiently localised.
- The proportion of two-year-old taking up their free entitlement to early education is low.
- The range of opportunities to help parents improve their education and skills is too narrow.
- The local authority's monitoring processes are not sufficiently focused on using information to drive improvement. As a result, improvement planning does not always include specific and measurable targets which leaders and the advisory board can then use to improve.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The centre's family support work is strong and makes a discernible difference to the lives of vulnerable families. As one parent said, 'The centre did everything it could to keep my family together.'
- Families who are experiencing domestic abuse are very well supported by the centre and its partners to access help, advice and safe housing.
- The quality of sessions and activities, such as 'Little Caterpillars', is good and sometimes very good.
- Leaders and managers regularly observe the quality of activities and services.
- The parents' forum is very effective and parents say that they make a real contribution to the running of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the large majority of targeted children, particularly those living in the most deprived areas where there are considerably higher levels of poverty, sustain contact with the centre.
- Work with the local authority to ensure that the centre receives information on live births and the number of children living in the reach area from health visitors and GPs, so that almost all children are known. At the same time, obtain data on breastfeeding and obesity at a local level so that services can be even tightly focused on improving health outcomes.
- Work with the local authority to improve the uptake of free early education so that most are engaged or accessing children's centre services.
- Ensure services are even more closely focused on narrowing education and health inequalities. Track the progress of target children through to the end of Reception to clearly demonstrate the progress that target children make as a result of accessing children's centre services.
- Work in partnership with the other centres across the collaboration to extend opportunities to help parents improve their education and skills.
- Strengthen monitoring processes and ensure they are sufficiently focused on using information to drive improvement. Make sure that improvement planning includes specific and measurable targets which the local authority, leaders and the advisory board can then use to monitor performance and drive improvements at a faster pace.

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 at the same time as the inspections of the Isle of Dogs Children's Centre (URN 20329) and Chrisp Street Children's Centre (URN 20721).

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, representatives from the local authority and members of the locality stakeholders' board. They met with a wide range of partners including those from health, local schools and charities. They took into account the views of parents through face-to-face discussions and also thorough surveys and evaluations.

The inspectors visited activities taking place at the centre. Two joint observations were undertaken with the deputy children's centre manager.

A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including the locality action plan and local authority reviews. Safeguarding policies, procedures and practices, as well as examples of case files for families receiving individual support, were also reviewed.

The centre manager and representatives from the local authority attended all inspection team meetings which were held jointly for all three centres.

Inspection team

Michael Blakey, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Libby Dickson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Around Poplar Children's Centre is a standalone centre located in the south east locality of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It works collaboratively with Isle of Dogs and Chrisp Street Children's Centres, and all are managed by separate community leaders (centre managers) who are employed by the local authority. They are managed by a locality lead. Isle of Dogs and Chrisp Street were inspected at the same time as Around Poplar; their reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

The centre's services are delivered from the main site and also in community venues and schools in the local area. The centre provides early years experiences, family support, adult learning and health services through partnership work. The centre is managed directly by the local authority. There is a locality stakeholders' board in place to assist governance covering all three centres.

There are 1,821 children aged under five living in the area served by the centre. About three quarters of the under fives live in areas that are considered to be among the 30% least advantaged in the country.

Families are from a very wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Children generally enter early education at levels below those typical for their age.

The centre has identified the following priority groups as needing most support: children who are being supervised by social care; children with a special need or disability; young parents aged under 24; two-year-olds eligible for free early education, and children referred into the children's centre family support team. Children living in the most deprived areas, towards the east of the centre's reach area are also a key group with which the centre is working.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Information sharing arrangements with health services are not fully effective. As a result, leaders do not have access to information about new births or the number of children registered with health services. This means that the centre is not able to accurately establish how many children live in the area, which limits their ability to contact and register a higher proportion of families, including those expecting children. Despite this, data suggest that a good proportion of children are registered overall, when compared to the estimated population in 2013.
- The local authority has made some recent progress in improving the information which it provides to give centres a more accurate view about how well families engage. However, although this suggests that the large majority of under-threes are registered and have accessed the centre at least once, it does not show a good picture of sustained contact, particularly for those children living in the most deprived areas.
- Less than half of the eligible two-year-olds currently access their free early years place.
- One-to-one play work, which often takes place in the homes of families, is well received by those who otherwise may not attend the centre. Staff also deliver some services in community venues across the area, such as St Mathias Community Hall and Mayflower School. In the most deprived areas the range of services on offer is more limited.
- Sessions which are open to all children under the age of five, such as 'Little Caterpillars', are often oversubscribed. The centre works hard to ensure that families who need additional support get the opportunity to attend. Parents told inspectors that activities like these are invaluable in helping them to get to know other families and in supporting their children's learning and development.
- Families who receive one-to-one support, including those experiencing domestic abuse, are very well engaged and remain in contact with the centre until their needs are met. Children with additional needs or who are more vulnerable are also well engaged with the Tower Hamlets

Opportunity Group which shares the same building as the children's centre.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The impact of the centre's services requires improvement because not enough families, particularly those from priority groups, benefit from what the centre has to offer.
- The quality of the services provided by the centre is good but the range and relevance require improvement. The specific needs of some children and families have not been fully met as not enough of them use the centre on a regular basis. This is particularly so for children who are aged two and not taking up their entitlement to free early education.
- Opportunities for adults to extend their skills, learning and employment chances are limited. There are some links with Jobcentre Plus across the locality and adult learning partners deliver useful sessions, such as English language classes and short plumbing courses. Those who attend feel well supported and benefit from doing so. However, the numbers who have accessed these sessions, as well as structured parenting courses, are relatively low. Retention rates, however, are good.
- The centre has a recently developed system to track outcomes for adults. However, the information exchange with some partners is not well embedded to ensure there is a full picture of the progress adults make.
- Information on health outcomes is not available at a local level. Consequently, it is difficult for the centre to measure the impact of its work.
- Children receive good support to help them develop and learn successfully during activities at the centre. Although still below national levels, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is improving. Children who are eligible for free schools meals are achieving in line with their peers nationally. The centre's processes for tracking children are very new and so do not yet show the progress that children make.
- Families are rightly highly appreciative of the personalised and very effective care, guidance and support they receive. Well-trained family support workers develop strong levels of trust and work effectively with other partners such as the adult psychologist. This ensures that families with often complex and sensitive issues are empowered to get their lives back on track. Statements, such as 'they did everything they could to keep our family together', and, 'they helped us to move into a new home which was safe and secure', reflect the centre's impact.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Senior local authority officers hold an accurate view of the centre's current performance. However, regular monitoring of the centre's performance by children's centre improvement partners is not sufficiently focused on the effective use of data. As a result, leaders are not always clear how many families from key target groups live in the area, and targets are not always sufficiently clear to drive improvements in access to services for the most disadvantaged families. Despite this, data suggest that registrations rates are above 80%, based on the 2013 population estimate, and increasing.
- The centre leader, who has been in post for less than 12 months, demonstrates good capacity for sustained improvement and her staff team are energetic and hardworking. However, they are held back from making more rapid improvements because data about children's achievement and health outcomes are not always available in a timely manner or sufficiently localised. A new data framework system has recently been developed and introduced to help leaders. However, this is overly complicated and hinders capacity for improvement.
- The locality stakeholders' board, which acts as an advisory board for the three south east locality centres, is generally well attended and the chair and key members are committed to improving the life chances of children and families living in the reach area. However, because the targets set by the local authority are not specific it is difficult for the group to hold leaders to account and provide supportive challenge.
- Safeguarding arrangements are adequate. Case files are maintained to a high standard and the children's centre social worker and family support workers contribute well to safeguarding children

who are looked after, subject to child protection plans or in need. However, information about some of these children is not shared frequently enough with the centre.

- Safeguarding policies are updated annually, so do not reflect important recent changes to statutory guidance. Leaders and staff have, however, received electronic copies of this new guidance. Staff are safely recruited and trained to undertake their roles.
- Good partnerships with organisations such as Tower Hamlets Opportunity Group bring added value to the resources available to the centre to meet the very challenging and complex needs of its diverse multi-ethnic community. However, these are not being used to maximum effect in ensuring that all needs are met well and that outcomes for families are good.
- The parents' forum is very effective at engaging parents in shaping services offered and parents speak very highly about how welcome they are made to feel at this group. Those parents that attend the locality stakeholders' board say that meetings are designed well to enable them to participate.

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

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| Unique reference number | 20114 |
| Local authority | London Borough of Tower Hamlets |
| Inspection number | 453973 |
| Managed by | The local authority |
| | |
| Approximate number of children under five in the reach area | 1,821 |
| Centre leader | Harumi Welford |
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