

Isle of Dogs Children's Centre

Stebondale Street, London, E14 3BX

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| Inspection dates | 23–25 June 2015 |
| Previous inspection date | Not previously inspected |

| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | Previous inspection: | 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 centre requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Although most young children are registered with the centre, just over half use services. Not enough children and families identified as needing support the most, or those who live in areas where poverty levels are highest, use the centre on a regular basis.
- Plans are in place to improve information sharing with health services. However, at present the centre is not consistently informed about local families who are expecting babies or of new births. Information about breastfeeding and obesity rates is not sufficiently localised.
- The proportion of two-year-olds taking up their entitlement to free early education is low compared to the national picture.
- Opportunities for adults to improve their learning, skills and employability are limited. Some partnerships are still developing in relation to exchanging information to enable the centre to follow up outcomes in the longer term.
- The local authority's monitoring is not sufficiently focused on driving improvement for families who need support the most. Data and other information provided are not consistently accurate or sufficiently relevant to enable leaders, managers and stakeholders to set targets that are measurable and specific. This limits the centre's capacity to improve.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The one-to-one family support work undertaken by the centre is very effective. Families' lives have been changed for the better, even where they have had complex problems such as domestic abuse or housing issues to deal with.
- Families have very positive views of the centre. They rightly praise the high quality resources indoors and outside at the main building.
- Children are prepared well for school. There is a strong focus on their early development in all the centre's good quality sessions such as the 'Island Treasures' group. Staff are good role models and also support parents well through one-to-one 'Play in the Home' sessions.
- Leaders and managers ensure staff have good levels of support through regular performance management and supervision meetings. Staff are very well trained, especially in how to keep children and families safe.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the large majority of young children and families who need support the most, including those in areas with the highest poverty levels, make regular use of centre services.
- Work with the local authority to ensure that the centre is aware of all new births in the local area and that families who are expecting babies or who are recent arrivals to the area are registering with the centre. In addition, obtain more localised information about breastfeeding and childhood obesity so that services can be more specifically focused. This is especially in relation to reducing the number of young children who are very overweight.
- Work with the local authority, schools and early years settings so that most two-olds take up their free early education place or make regular use of the children's centre services.
- Work in partnership with other local children's centres and adult learning and employment agencies to increase the opportunities for adults to extend their learning and skills. Improve the levels of information exchanged so that the longer-term benefits can be tracked.
- Work with the local authority to ensure that its monitoring processes are strengthened so they focus on the centre's impact on children and families who need support the most. Ensure that data and other information provided for the centre are timely, accurate and relevant so that measurable targets can be set to enable leaders, managers and stakeholders to drive improvement.

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 Around Poplar Children's Centre (URN 20114) 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 and an 'Island Treasures' session held at the Samuda Community venue. A joint observation of a music and singing session was undertaken with the 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

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Libby Dickson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Isle of Dogs is a standalone centre located in the South East Locality of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It works collaboratively with Around Poplar 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. Around Poplar and Chrisp Street were inspected at the same time as the Isle of Dogs Centre; 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. These include Alpha Grove Community Centre, Arnhem Wharf School, Samuda Community Venue and City Gateway. 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 1,961 children aged under five living in the area served by the centre. The area includes three wards of Island Gardens, Canary Wharf, and Blackwall and Cubitt Town. Almost half of the under fives live in areas that are considered to be amongst the 30% least advantaged in the country. The population is very mobile because of the proximity to Canary Wharf where many foreign nationals are working on fixed-term contracts. Two out of three young children are considered to be living in poverty in the Blackwall and Cubitt Town wards, which is three times higher than the national average. The population is very ethnically diverse. Approximately 30% of children are from White British backgrounds. The next largest groups are from Bangladeshi or from white backgrounds other than British. 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.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre has registered over 80% of young children in the local area. However, the proportion who then go on to use services regularly is not high enough overall or for some of the groups identified as needing support the most. For example, 60% of children with a special need are registered and around half have regular contact. Most children who are supervised by social care are registered but the large majority are not yet having significant levels of contact.
- The centre has been successful in ensuring that young parents who are known to them make regular use of services. The large majority are engaged with the centre through the sessions held jointly at Chrisp Street Children's Centre.
- The system for health services to inform the centre of new births or families moving into the area is not always fully effective. As a result, only about half of new-born babies are registered. Other links with health services are improving so that families can have developmental checks carried out by health visitors at the centre. This is increasing the numbers who access early health services.
- Only about half of two-year-olds who could be benefiting from free early education do so. The take-up by three- and four-year-olds is also lower than that seen nationally. However, the local authority is not able to provide a full picture because the number of children who are in early years settings rather than schools or who go out of the borough is not known.
- The centre takes services out into the community which is improving the numbers who access services overall. For example, the 'Island Treasures' session held at the Samuda hall is well attended. However, the centre has not fully assessed the needs of families with children living in the highest levels of poverty to ensure services are tailor-made to support them as effectively as possible.

The quality of practice and services**Requires improvement**

- The quality of the services provided by the centre is good but the range and relevance require improvement. This is because 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 their free early education place.
- 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 are, however, good.
- The centre has a recently developed system to track outcomes for adults. As yet, 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. Breastfeeding rates for the locality are high, with over 70% of mothers still breastfeeding their babies at around two months. However, the percentage of young children who are very overweight is much higher than national. The centre is working hard to counteract this with an emphasis on healthy lifestyles, for example by providing nutritious snacks for children at all the sessions.
- There are good links in place with local schools and early years settings. A strong focus on developing children's skills threads through all the centre's sessions. 'Getting Ready for Nursery' workshops and 'Little Talkers' sessions also help to ensure children are prepared well for school, especially in relation to their independence and confidence. Although still below national levels, outcomes at the end of the early years are improving rapidly. Children who are entitled to free school meals achieve in line with national outcomes.
- Detailed observations of children who are receiving targeted support and good levels of exchange of information with early years settings and schools show that those children make good progress. Children's files, or 'Learning Journeys', capture this progress well. Parents are also well supported in the home through visits by play workers. Staff are good role models in sessions, for example developing children's vocabulary and keeping them focused when they are playing with sand.
- 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, 'The one place that hasn't let me down is the children's centre', and, 'I was on the floor when I came here, now I am a different person', reflect the centre's impact.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Requires improvement**

- The centre manager provides good day-to-day leadership. However, she has been hampered in her ability to drive improvements because of a lack of timely, relevant and accurate data from the local authority. This has led to an overly positive view of the centre's impact on priority children and families and especially of how regularly they use the services. This requires improvement.
- The local authority conducts regular reviews. These are not robust enough, however, to ensure sufficient emphasis is placed on improving the lives of priority children and families, and of those living in areas with the highest poverty levels. This hinders the centre's capacity to improve and to reduce inequalities in the local area.
- The locality stakeholders' board is well attended by key partners who have a good grasp of the local area's needs. However, without reliable data and information about the families who use the centre, especially priority groups, the members are restricted in the amount of effective challenge they can provide. Targets set at all levels are not always specific or measurable enough to accurately assess the centre's impact on the families who need support the most.

- Keeping children and families safe is given high status in all the centre's work. Staff are well trained, especially in relation to child protection and supporting families who have experienced domestic abuse. 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. The children's centre social worker provides a good link with social care. Children who are subject to child protection plans, who are children in need or who are looked after are supported well by staff.
- Staff performance management and supervision is regular and effective. Sessions, including those delivered by commissioned providers, are observed regularly to ensure a consistently high quality, with a focus on developing children's early learning.
- The centre is very spacious indoors and outdoors. Resources are high quality and plentiful. The outdoor area is a particularly exciting environment for children to develop their physical skills and enquiring minds.
- The parents' forum meets fortnightly and parents are well represented on the locality stakeholders' board. This ensures they have a strong voice in the centre and in developing services. Volunteers, although small in number at present, also make a valuable contribution to the centre supporting the busy sessions such as 'Stay and Play'. Parents have very positive views of the centre summed up by comments such as, 'I feel like I have a family of friends here; I couldn't be happier', and, 'I've always felt like I'm a part of this centre'.

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

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| Unique reference number | 20329 |
| Local authority | London Borough of Tower Hamlets |
| Inspection number | 453975 |
| Managed by | The local authority |
| Approximate number of children under five in the reach area | 1,961 |
| Centre manager | Anita Gardiner |
| Telephone number | 020 7364 1179 |
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